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Presentation Abstract

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Title: Understanding creativity through neuroscience: Conceptual concerns, experimental pitfalls, and social implications

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Abstract: What is creativity? Can creativity be studied using the neurosciences, and if so, how? Are we seeking to connect two domains that cannot or should not be connected? In the Eighteenth Century a new trend emerged: Art and science, once closely related, began to be increasingly separated with the role of the scientist and the role of the artist understood to be distinct, incongruous occupations. The separation deepened along with quests for optimization, efficiency, control, "normality", dissection, specialization and categorization; these are concepts that are also deeply ingrained in modern day neuroscience. Creativity, in contrast, is often elusive, abstract, autonomous, generative, diverse and closely linked to controversially viewed acts such as risk-taking, "deviance", marginality, rebellion, and defiance. That is, the very same acts and abilities that allow for creativity are behaviors and dispositions pathologized by many neuroscientists. We present a brief overview of how creativity has been studied in psychology and the social studies. We describe some of the challenges encountered in studying creativity in these fields. We inquire whether novel methods used in neuroscience research might reveal something valuable that goes beyond these social and behavioral studies, or, if these reductionist attempts at studying creativity as a biological category negate the very phenomenon. Will attempts to study creativity through neuroscience increase the divide or can new approaches be found to promote an environment that can enrich and reconnect both domains?

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