Does Suffering Create Great Art?

An Event Study

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Basic Question:

Does the death of a close relative or friend increase or decrease creativity?

Art History and Historical Incidence

- Picasso's good friend, Carlos Casagemas, committed suicide in 1901.
- His suicide launched Picasso into his Blue Period of painting.
- Picasso's Blue Period was characterized by somber works in monochromatic colors.
- In 2000, Woman with Crossed Arms broke a record for Picasso paintings by selling for 38 millions pounds.

Psychologists and Flow State

Rollo May

- Rollo May (1959)
  - Rollo May was one of the first researchers to describe the experience of being in a creative state.
  - Individuals in a creative state experience:
    - intensity of awareness
    - heightened consciousness
    - obliviousness to the environment.

Psychologists and Flow State

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

- Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi
  - The psychologist who coined the term "flow state."
  - He showed that in all professions people feel at their peak when they are most creative.

Galenson and Weinberg
Productivity over the Lifecycle

David W. Galenson and Bruce A. Weinberg
Age and the quality of work: The case of modern American painters.
The Journal of Political Economy, 108(4):761-777,2000 2000.

David W. Galenson and Bruce A. Weinberg
Creating modern art: The changing careers of painter in France from Impressionism to Cubism.
American Economic Review 91(4):1063-1071, 2001

Artists

- Sample of Artists:
  - Started with 33 French Impressionists used in Galenson and Weinberg (AER, 2001).
  - Added 15 Modern American painters used in Galenson and Weinberg (JPE, 2000).

Prices

- Collected auction prices on over 10,000 paintings produced by the French Impressionists.
- Collected auction prices on over 2,000 paintings produced by the Modern American painters.
- All prices and painting data collected from Blouin's Art Sales Index.
- Auction sale dates range from 1972 to 2014.

Deaths

- Death dates for friends and relatives of French artists were gathered from Oxford Art Online, reading both Grove Art Online and the Benezit Dictionary of Artists.
- Death dates for friends and relatives of American artists were gathered from printed biographies and some artist websites.

	French	American	All
Year of birth	1872	1908	1878
	(19)	(5)	(22)
Painting date	1924	1962	1930
	(28)	(12)	(30)
Age of artist	53	54	53
	(18)	(12)	(17)
Year of sale	2002	2001	2002
	(9)	(10)	(9)
Price	1463567	1517807	1472652
	(4376458)	(5586213)	(4601108)
Observations	11885	2292	14177
Number of artists	33	15	48
Paintings per artist	542	223	491

Variables

- Each sale is an observation on painting i at time at sale date j
- Dependent Variable: $ln(Price)_{ij}$
- Variables of interest:
  - $Prior_i$= Execution of Work took place 1 or 2 years prior to death.
  - $Current_i$ = Execution of Work took place in year of death.
  - $After(1,2)_i$= Execution of work took place 1 or 2 years after death.
  - $After(3,4)_i$ = Execution of work took place 3 or 4 years after death.

Control Variables

- Galenson's 4 cohorts of French Artists plus 1 cohort of Modern American artists interacted with age, age^2, age^3, age^4
- Artist Fixed Effects
- Year of Sale Fixed Effects
- Year of Execution Fixed Effects

Estimating Equation

$$ln(Price)_{ij} = \alpha_1 Prior_i + \alpha_2 Current_i + \alpha_3 After(1,2)_i + \alpha_4 After(3,4)_i + \sum_{c=1}^{4}[\beta_1^c Age_i + \beta_2^c Age_i^2 + \beta_3^c Age_i^3 + \beta_4^c Age_i^4] I(cohort_i = C) + \sum_{k=1}^{48} \psi_k I(i = k) + \sum_{y=1972}^{2014} \theta_y I(SaleYear_j = y) + \sum_{y=1840}^{y=1972} \omega_y I(ExecutionYear_i) + \epsilon_{ij}$$

Determinants of Price

	A	B
Prior	-0.00368	-0.00955
	(0.145)	(0.158)
Current	-0.0866	-0.125
	(0.117)	(0.149)
After(1, 2)	-0.380***	-0.451***
	(0.0613)	(0.0747)
After(3, 4)	-0.0468	-0.0889
	(0.139)	(0.148)
Observations	12705	12705
Artist fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Year of sale fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Interacted Cohort Effects	Yes	Yes
Year of execution of work fixed effects	No	Yes

Parents vs. Siblings or Friends

	C	D
$Prior_{parent}$	0.245	0.0910
	(0.335)	(0.333)
$Current_{parent}$	-0.0126	-0.261
	(0.350)	(0.320)
$After(1,2)_{parent}$	-0.512*	-0.619**
	(0.238)	(0.184)
$After(3,4)_{parent}$	-0.183	-0.331
	(0.307)	(0.367)
$Prior_{SiblingorFriend}$	-0.135	-0.0919
	(0.0872)	(0.105)
$Current_{SiblingorFriend}$	-0.119	-0.0918
	(0.121)	(0.159)
$After(1,2)_{SiblingorFriend}$	-0.368***	-0.416***
	(0.0666)	(0.0812)
$After(3,4)_{SiblingorFriend}$	-0.0465	-0.0626
	(0.137)	(0.149)
Observations	12705	12705
Artist fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Year of sale fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Interacted Cohort fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Year of execution of work fixed effects	No	Yes

French Impressionists vs. Modern Americans

	E	F
$Prior_{French}$	-0.131	-0.144
	(0.125)	(0.151)
$Current_{French}$	-0.174	-0.212
	(0.108)	(0.148)
$After(1,2)_{French}$	-0.441***	-0.494***
	(0.0633)	(0.0710)
$After(3,4)_{French}$	-0.0719	-0.0861
	(0.140)	(0.152)
$Prior_{American}$	0.903**	0.792***
	(0.315)	(0.207)
$Current_{American}$	1.137**	0.869**
	(0.357)	(0.277)
$After(1,2)_{American}$	0.202	-0.0198
	(0.291)	(0.299)
$After(3,4)_{American}$	0.278	0.0418
	(0.351)	(0.434)
Observations	12705	12705
Artist fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Year of sale fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Interacted cohort fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Year of execution of work fixed effects	No	Yes

Size of Work

- This dataset did not contain information on size of work.
- If size of work is correlated with mood,size could impact results.
- Collected average size at each age for Impressionist artists from dataset used in Ashenfelter and Graddy (2003) and Beggs and Graddy (2003).
- If information on size was missing for the artist overall, the artist was dropped.
- The inclusion of size of work changed very little in the regressions.

Interpreting reported deaths

- Stories are built around famous artists' lives, and these stories can affect which deaths are reported by biographers.
- Only deaths that had a well-known and public impact on an artist's life may be the ones that are reported.
- Difficult to know size and direction of possible bias.
- Important to note that sample selection in death reporting is an important consideration.

Conclusion

- The research has used prices of paintings years after the works have been executed to determine the "creativity" of the artist at the time he worked on the painting.
- Using this measure of creativity, artists are on average less creative during the two years following the death of a relative or friend than at other times of their lives.
- This finding coincides with the psychology literature on the effects of mood on creativity.

Possible Policy Implication

- Art was used to document a decrease in creativity, primarily because the data was available.
- Could extend these results to different industries.
- Employers should provide bereavement counseling.
- Bereavement counseling could be good both for psychological health and for business.