Confabulations without memory deficits in Behavioural Variant FrontoTemporal Dementia and other conditions: A case report and review

Sid Williams 2018
Confabulation

- “To fabricate imaginary experiences as compensation for loss of memory” OED
- “a memory error defined as the production of fabricated, distorted, or misinterpreted memories about oneself or the world, without the conscious intention to deceive”.
Wernicke-Korsakoff syndrome

- Memory impairment
- + Executive function impairment

Confabulation without memory impairment

- Confabulations without memory impairment
  - impaired executive function alone
  - FrontoTemporal Dementia
  - Case report: old anterior right hemisphere old infarct

Confabulation without memory impairment: ‘Mr Mitty’

- Large anterior right hemisphere infarct 4 yrs before
- Residential age care facility. Age 74
- Left hemiparesis, just able to walk with walking stick
Confabulation without memory impairment: ‘Mr Mitty’

- Unrestrained rambling narrative - false reports, boastful, sexual and racist themes:
  - Senior male nurse homosexual, planning to leave his wife for his lover
  - Young female nurse to leave husband and marry him
  - Fellow resident (shared room) quadriplegic deliberately snoring etc.
  - His athletic defense of a nurse, surgical restoration of enucleated eye
Confabulation without memory impairment: ‘Mr Mitty’

- Behaviour completely out of character
- Previous response to firm consistent feedback
- Admission to subacute psychogeriatric unit
- Explanations ++ to care staff
- Antipsychotic or other psychoactive not given
Non-memory mechanisms of confabulation

- Source monitoring deficits
  - Impaired ability to distinguish real memories/events from internally-generated thoughts

- Abnormal level of certainty for the false report
  - Attenuation of the ‘doubt tag’
Non-memory Mechanisms of confabulation

- Ventromedial prefrontal cortex esp. R (VMPFC) involved in both:
  - Source monitoring
  - The preconscious doubt tag

- VMPFC lesions are sufficient for confabulation
Non-memory mechanisms of confabulation

- Posterior medial orbitofrontal cortex (OFC) may contribute via:
  - Inability to suppress interference of thoughts
  - Inability to extinguish previous anticipations
Confabulation or delusion?

Common clinical approach:

- Confabulation:
  - 'organic' condition
  - probably not Rx antipsychotic

- Delusion:
  - 'non-organic' condition
  - Probably Rx antipsychotic
Confabulations and delusions in bvFTD

- Other reports:
  - Delusion of pregnancy
  - De Clarembault syndrome
  - Paranoid
  - Religiose
  - Somatic and infestation delusions
  - Visual and tactile hallucinations

- May precede clear-cut FTD
Confabulations and delusions in bvFTD

- Associations:
  - Early onset
  - Motor Neuron Disease (FTD-MND)
  - TDP-43 or FUS pathologies
  - Possibly presenilin mutations
CONFABULATIONS AND DELUSIONS: Common features

- Distinction not always clear
- Mechanisms common to both
- 'Final Common Pathway*' one phenomenon, several causes
- But still worth distinguishing between these phenomena – just not too rigidly

*Apologies to Sherrington
Pathological lying?

“What he lacked in facts, he made up for with an understated conviction; and what he lacked in conviction he made up for with facts, albeit mostly invented, and rendered all the more plausible because they were so lightly thrown up up from an unexpected angle”