



Chhayankan (Visual Art)

Why do our brains go wrong? - Negativity bias

Adrian Jackson, DipCHyp, HPD, MPRAC, QCHPA (REG), CNCH

Cognitive Hypnotherapist

Corresponding Author:

Adrian Jackson

Northwood, UK

email: adrian at adrianjacksontherapy dot com

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Have you ever felt that you spend more time dwelling on the bad things in life than the good? Perhaps people tell you that you're always seeing the negative in things or you should lighten up? Well, there may be a good reason for your pessimism; being aware of danger protects you!

We often find ourselves predisposed to searching for the negatives in life, at the cost of overlooking what we should be grateful for. Far from being a trait exclusive to depressives or nihilists, instead our "Negativity Bias" is a fundamental tool for survival, keeping us aware of potential dangers within our peripheral environment.[1,2]

Miscalculations in our childhood brain can create behaviors and limiting beliefs that we carry into adulthood. If we look into our past and see something negative, we build on that negativity, seeking evidence to re-enforce it as we grow. As the article by Baumeister et al (2001) suggests: "Bad emotions, bad parents and

bad feedback have more impact than good ones".[3] From an evolutionary point of view, being attuned to the bad things around you were more likely to help you survive danger - and would increase the probability of you passing along your genes.

This is probably quite obvious but what happens if your brain becomes too protective? There is the potential that it would create the unwanted behaviors and the limiting beliefs that we carry into adulthood. Behavioral therapy is known to give people some agency over their unwanted behaviours - by getting away from the fear of impending danger, people may be able to enjoy some of the nicer things in life - and, sometimes, the imminent dangers may turn out not to be so bad after all.

The following video aims to explore and explain the psychological phenomenon in a way that is expected to be encouraging and engaging to viewers, as opposed to alienating them.

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Why Do Our Brains Go Wrong?

Episode 1:

NEGATIVITY



Right click to
play video in
a new tab

Instructions:

You may change the playback speed of the video in the settings on YouTube (click the gearwheel icon on the playback bar for playback options). You may even choose to have subtitles enabled.

References

1. Corns J. Rethinking the negativity bias. *Rev Philos Psychol.* 2018;9(3):607-625. doi: 10.1007/s13164-018-0382-7.

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3. Baumeister RF, Bratslavsky E, Finkenauer C, Vohs KD. Bad is stronger than good. *Rev Gen Psychol.* 2001;5(4):323-70. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.5.4.323>