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Cynicism Sells: Why Negativity Is so Popular and Why You Should Care **by Teaghan Duff, 16**

Scroll down through the comments on any social media platform, and you'll find scathing remarks. Meet up with a group of people and the conversation inevitably turns to something wrong with the activity, their work, or their day. Even the news focuses almost solely on the negative. We've become numb to just how obsessed our society has become with venting about, well, anything.

Why do we love pessimism? The answer actually comes from our ancient ancestors; according to psychologist Timothy Bono, Ph.D., "We inherited the genes that predispose us to give special attention to those negative aspects of our environments that could be harmful for us." In other words, we are wired to fixate on the negative.

Historically, genes focused on negativity helped us survive. As Margaret Jaworski writes, "Dwelling on the 'bad stuff' is similar to the sensation of pain — it's our bodies working to keep us safe." Though this trait isn't necessary today, it persists — as do negative thoughts. They linger longer than positive thoughts, a phenomenon known as the "negativity bias."

So, why do we need to change our outlook on life? It turns out the positive thinking your local yoga teacher preaches can increase your lifespan and rewire your brain for the better. Though it sounds cliché, negativity can actually damage your health. According to Health, "A 2014 study... linked high levels of cynicism later in life... to a greater risk of dementia." Furthermore, the synapses in your brain grow closer together as your brain processes a thought to allow the chemical signal to jump from one to another faster. The more often a thought is processed, the nearer those synapses grow. As Steven Parton puts it, "Your thoughts reshape your brain."

There are several methods to break this habit. One is training your brain to be more positive; as positive thoughts become more common, those synapses grow closer together and make your brain more apt to optimism. Another comes from surrounding yourself with positive people. Our brains, instinctually empathetic, will fire synapses to mirror the emotions it sees around it. Again, the more often those synapses fire, the closer they draw, and the more instinctual that thought process becomes. Our neurons don't provide us with a quick fix, but we still have the power to fight the addictive pull of negativity.

Our lives aren't perfect, but the added negativity we project upon them is up to us to change. No matter how many times you've heard the overused adage "don't worry, be happy," taking that advice could truly help. The world would be a much better place if we spent less time degrading this cliché and more time living it. It's time to evolve our brains.

Sources

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