

Researchers find silver lining playbook for performance

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If we believe a negative trait we possess is linked to a related positive characteristic, we will be more productive in that domain, New York University researchers have found. Their study, which appears in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, establishes a novel "silver lining theory": negative attributes can produce positive results.

"People know that a weakness can be also be a strength, but these results show that if we actually believe it, we can use these beliefs to our advantage," says Alexandra Wesnousky, an NYU doctoral candidate and the study's lead author.

The researchers conducted a series of experiments in order to assess the impact of these "silver lining" beliefs. In an initial study, subjects filled out a survey that assessed their personalities by asking the extent to which negative traits they believed they held could also be seen as positive (e.g., conceited vs. high self-esteem). The majority of individuals endorsed a silver lining theory: when prompted with a negative attribute, most participants readily generated a positive associated trait.

In a second experiment, with a new set of subjects, the researchers focused on the specific silver lining theory that impulsivity is related to creativity. Notably, more than half of participants in a pilot survey saw a connection between "impulsivity" (negative) and "creativity" (positive). In the experiment, subjects took a commonly used personality survey, the Barrett Impulsiveness Scale, which is used to measure impulsiveness.

However, in order to ensure the randomness of the study samples, two sets of groups were told they were "impulsive" and two other groups were told they were "not impulsive."

Next, the four groups of subjects read one of two mock newspaper articles: one that described scientific findings showing an association between impulsivity and creativity and another outlining scientific findings that refuted such a link. In this part of the experiment, one "impulsive" group read the story linking impulsivity and creativity and the other "impulsive" group read the story refuting this connection. The two "non-impulsive" groups were also split in this fashion.

In order to test the impact of their beliefs, as influenced by the news article, the subjects then engaged in a creativity task in which they were presented with an object and instructed to generate as many creative uses for it as possible in three minutes.

Their results showed that the impulsive group that read the story linking [impulsivity](#) to creativity came up with significantly more creative uses for the object than did the impulsive group that read the story disproving this relationship. Notably, in the non-impulsive groups, the results were the opposite: those who read the story refuting the connection with [creativity](#) came up with more uses for the object than did those who read the story establishing this linkage, though this was not significant.

More information: The paper may be downloaded here:
[www.sciencedirect.com/science/ ... ii/S0022103114001644](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/.../S0022103114001644)

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