



## What's The Deal With Optimism?

© 2005 David Granirer

According to a study done by researchers at Yale and Miami Universities, people over 50 who viewed aging as a positive experience lived an average of 7.5 years longer than those who didn't. In other words, being able to see something we normally perceive as negative in a positive light seems to not only increase our ability to cope (the optimists in this study had more energy, fewer limitations, and less pain as they aged) but also to increase our life span.

Why is this? Though researchers have been unable to conclusively prove that optimism has a positive impact on the immune system, they suggest that optimists tend to have more motivation when

it comes to exercising, eating healthy, seeking and following medical advice, and taking good care of themselves.

The question then becomes, how do you take something negative and see it in a positive light? That's where humor comes in. In comedy, the more misfortune you have, the funnier you can be. Happy, well-adjusted, successful people have very little potential for developing good material.

And it's the same with life in general. The more dysfunctional you are, the better your possibilities of being funny! Your hairline receding, your waistline expanding, or your vision diminishing are all great opportunities for self-deprecating humor, something that makes you a winner in any

social situation.

But adopting this rosy perspective is easier said than done. If you lose your job or get dumped in a relationship, it's hard to see these developments as great opportunities for humor. At the time, they probably don't seem funny at all.

My guess is that part of what sets optimists and pessimists apart is optimists' desire to see the humor in a bad situation as quickly as possible. Despite feeling angry, betrayed, or hurt, the optimist decides she needs to have a good laugh and soon! And by joking with her friends about the dreaded event, she works through some of her negative feelings surrounding it.

However, pessimists

sometimes view their pain as sacred. They can see humor as somehow demeaning their suffering, and thus deny themselves access to this helpful tool for resolving negative emotions. Consequently, they can stay stuck in their pain for longer than the optimist with her "nothing is sacred" approach.

When misfortune occurs, how soon do you want to have a laugh about it? Understandably, you may need some time. But the sooner you choose to start laughing (even if the humor is really black), the sooner you are likely to work through your negative emotions. And the sooner you do that, the sooner you'll be able to access the motivation you need to take good care of yourself.

*Counsellor and stand up comic David Granirer leads Stand Up For Mental Health, a program teaching stand up comedy to people*

*with mental illness as a way of building confidence and fighting stigma. For more information call (604) 205-9242 or go to <http://www.standupformentalhealth.com>*

*For information on his humor in the workplace presentations go to [www.psychocomic.com](http://www.psychocomic.com)*