

Why Do Older Adults Display More Positive Emotion? It Might Have to Do with What They're Looking At

August 07, 2012

Research has shown that older adults display more positive emotions and are quicker to regulate out of negative emotional states than younger adults. Given the declines in cognitive functioning and physical health that tend to come with age, we might expect that age would be associated with worse moods, not better ones.

So what explains older adults' positive mood regulation?

In a new article in the August issue of [Current Directions in Psychological Science](#), a journal of the [Association for Psychological Science](#), researcher Derek Isaacowitz of Northeastern University explores positive looking as one possible explanation: older adults may be better at regulating emotion because they tend to direct their eyes away from negative material or toward positive material.

Isaacowitz presents evidence indicating that, compared to younger adults, older adults prefer positive looking patterns and they show the most positive looking when they are in bad moods, even though this is when younger adults show the most negative looking.

Research conducted by Isaacowitz and colleagues indicates that there is actually a causal relationship between positive looking and mood: for adults with good attentional abilities, positive looking patterns can help to regulate their mood.

Although older adults prefer to focus on positive stimuli, the research shows that they aren't necessarily missing any salient or important information.