

## The UP-side of Bipolar Disorder

Posted On Jul 25, Posted by [Valeria Kilaberia](#) Category [Bipolar Trek](#)



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Even though the majority of research highlights the negative aspects of bipolar disorder, it is not uncommon to listen to patients who talk warmly about their experiences.

A new study conducted by Lobban, Taylor, Murray & Jones (2012) at the University of Lancaster, UK investigated the positive experiences of people who suffer from bipolar disorder. The participants reported that they experience many positive feelings, including intensified abilities, such as higher academic abilities; acute senses, perceptual sensitivity, focus and clarity of thought. They also reported feeling more creative and productive. The research indicated that a sub-group of people with bipolar disorder prefers to be with the condition as they experience invaluable feelings. Some of the participants work or worked in high professional positions and provided information concerning the times when it was incredibly easy for them to work hard. They felt that they could achieve high levels of productivity and were very ambitious.

Some of the participants stated that they felt “lucky” or “blessed” to have this disorder. They reported being grateful for having a bipolar disorder as it provided special opportunities for them in their life.

Dr. Fiona Lobban, who led the study, said: *"Bipolar Disorder is generally seen as a severe and enduring mental illness with serious negative consequences for the people with this diagnosis and their friends and family. For some people this is very much the case. Research shows that long-term unemployment rates are high, relationships are marred by high levels of burden on family and friends and quality of life is often poor. High rates of drug and alcohol misuse are reported for people with this diagnosis and suicide rates are twenty times that of the general population. However, despite all these factors researchers and clinicians are aware that some aspects of bipolar experiences are also highly valued by some people. We wanted to find out what these positive experiences were."*

She also indicated, *"It is really important that we learn more about the positives of bipolar as focusing only on negative aspects paints a very biased picture that perpetuates the view of bipolar as a wholly negative experience. If we fail to explore the positives of bipolar we also fail to understand the ambivalence of some people towards treatment."*

There are definitely many bad times to be had by people with bipolar disorder, but there are also good and creative moments. Acknowledging the positive aspects of bipolar disorder without romanticizing it can only help our clinical work.

***What are your positive experiences of bipolar disorder?*** We are looking forward to your comments.

## Reference

Lobban, F., Taylor, K., Murray, C. & Jones, S. (2012). [Bipolar Disorder is a two-edged sword: a qualitative study to understand the positive edge.](#) Journal of Affective Disorders.

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