

**The Importance of Energy and the Power of Positive Thinking**

by

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## Abstract

**Background:** With all the stress and burden that many experiences daily, many people do not realize a more straightforward way to destress and improve wellness besides taking pills or distracting themselves from their problems/stress. Positive thinking has found its' way into health care and school buildings/institutions, proving its ability to be beneficial to those experiencing an overwhelming amount of stress and negativity.

**Objective:** This study aims to conclude whether positive thinking has the ability to improve one's physical, mental, and emotional health.

**Design and Method:** The research method is mainly based on current literature that includes various experiments associated with the quest to determine whether positive thinking impacts one's health and well-being. The individuals selected to be part of these experiments range from elementary school kids in Australia to college kids in Taiwan and undergraduate students in the United States. In addition to the inclusion of those who care for kids/family members with mental and health concerns, some conversations address how positive thinking might have helped some caregivers cope with their fears/feelings about their loved one's condition and how positive thinking is fitting its way into the world of health care. Information regarding the impact positive thinking can have is reported in the Results section. The research question is: *How can positive thinking improve one's health and quality of life? – specifically regarding the physical, mental, and emotional aspects of health*

**Results:** The significance of this study is that positive thinking has the ability to affect one's mood and quality of life when used during a time of negativity and stress.

**Conclusions:** Positive thinking is a proven stress reducer and can help give a new perspective to a potentially bleak situation. Positive thinking can improve your physical, mental, and emotional health when practiced and put into habit.

**Keywords:** law of attraction, stress, health care, positive, thinking, manifestation

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Believe it or not, absolutely everything in this world is connected somehow, shape, or form, bonded together by the universe and the only currency it seems to recognize, energy. Depending on your science teacher, you might have heard about the “butterfly effect” – ‘a concept from chaos theory that suggests that something as subtle as the flap of a butterfly's wings in Brazil could trigger a tornado in Texas’, coined by meteorologist Edward Lorenz (Chodos, 2004). Many people, including myself, consider this concept to mean that the smallest moments of the past, including those that do not have anything to do with us, affect our future and our future selves (Heasley, n.d.). In regards to the way the universe works, I firmly believe this to be true.

Absolutely everything in the cosmos carries energy and a frequency with it, including us (Byrne, 2018), and just as how we cannot get a product without buying it with our man-made currency of money, nothing in this plane of existence can be created or produced without the currency of the universe, energy. Human beings nowadays are not educated on the importance of their energy, how it interacts with the universe, and how it can be used to their benefit to help improve their health, well-being, and overall quality of life. However, for us to understand how to do this, we first need to understand how the universe works, the importance of your thoughts, and why positive thinking is so important.

As we learn about the law of attraction (Byrne, 2018) and how the power of a negative mind can affect your body during tough times (Dispenza, 2017), we will begin to understand the extent of the power one yields in their own life. We will also explore the ethics of positive thinking in the healthcare field, primarily with regards to cancer patients (Andrade, G), in addition to several experiments created to record the impacts that positive thinking can have on children (Morrison, Hassan, Rooney, Kane, Roberts, & Mancini, 2013), college students (Wang, Chen, Lin, & Hong, 2016), and caregivers (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2013).

Being that the global pharmaceutical market was worth \$934.8 billion in 2017 and is estimated to reach a whopping \$1170 billion in 2021 (Business Research Company), it is safe to say that nowadays, we live in a society that it is more or less dependent on the medication that pharmaceutical companies produce, to help alleviate the burden of having to tend to our ailments; whether they be mental, physical, or emotional. On the other hand, many people I

know, including myself, are less likely to go to the hospital or a doctor to seek treatment for an ailment for a plethora of reasons, one mainly being the amount of money it costs to receive the care that you require, in addition to not having healthcare coverage that can handle those expenses for you.

This research is important to the field of health and wellness because I believe this knowledge would help place power back into the hands of suffering healthcare patients that feel powerless to their ailments – not to mention it is a free and holistic alternative to numbing your pain with drugs, medication, or alcohol. Additionally, this knowledge can be used to boost your mood and allow you to vibrate on a higher plane of existence, increasing your overall quality of life, all with the simple, free act of positive thinking. However, my argument is not to encourage the substitution of positive thinking for man-made medicine or medical assistance because medicine is and can be very helpful. Still, I argue that this concept should be incorporated into every person’s way of living. I firmly believe that we can create a more peaceful, compassionate world if we are all vibrating on a higher frequency as a collective human race.

This research can also be relative to the uplifting of minority groups in this country that have been purposefully mistreated for centuries by people of political power, allowing a power shift to occur in the ongoing cycle of the “%1” controlling most of the wealth and opportunities in this country. Being that the law of attraction has been around for millenniums (Byrne, 2018), and we know everything in this world is connected, there are a plethora of reasons why specific families and ethnicities have been able to hold on to their financial security and power for all this time, the main ones being secrecy and selfishness. According to Dr. Denis Waitley, a psychologist and trainer in the field of mind potential, “the leaders in the past who had the secret (law of attraction) wanted to keep the power and not share the power. They kept people ignorant of the secret. People went to work; they did their job, they came home. They were on a treadmill with no power because The Secret was kept in the few” (Byrne, 2018, p.2). This scenario is still true today as 19% of American adults were in the upper class, 52% of American adults were in the middle class, and 29% of American adults were in the lower class, as of September 2018 (Frankenfield, 2020).

This research is also relevant for empowering those that feel powerless in a world where your reality is not only created by you but by external influences that are sometimes out of your control. By gaining and distributing this knowledge, I think that people will continue to spread

the message of empowerment which emphasizes the belief that you are always the creator of your thoughts and actions (Gottberg, 2017) and the quality of those thoughts and actions, whether they be good or bad have an impact on the life you choose to live. As a result, I plan to study how genuinely liberating this idea can be while using positive thoughts and affirmations to uplift one's state of existence, begging the question, how can positive thinking impact your health, physically, mentally, and emotionally?

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Though there are a plethora of important concepts that are not regularly taught about our universe in today's world, one important thing that many people are not educated about is the universal law that we all unconsciously live by, that being the law of attraction. In Rhonda Byrne's book *The Secret*, Byrne, Proctor, Vitale, Assaraf, Demartini, Waitley, Beckwith, and Canfield (2018) all contribute their expertise in explaining what the secret is, how powerful it can be, and how you can apply your knowledge of the secret to improve your quality of life. After addressing the credibility of each contributing to the validity of the book, Bob Proctor reveals the secret saying:

The secret is the law of attraction! Everything that's coming into your life you are attracting into your life. And it's attracted to you by virtue of the images you're holding in your mind. It's what you're thinking. Whatever is going on in your mind, you are attracting to you. (Proctor, 2018, p. 4)

Being as the law of attraction says like attracts like, it is the thoughts you are thinking that attract similar thoughts to continue to enter your headspace, similarly to a magnet (Byrne, 2018). However, one important thing to note about the law of attraction is that it is a law of nature, meaning it is impersonal and does not see good things or bad things (Byrne, 2018). As a result, the law of attraction does not compute words of negation such as "don't," "not," or "no"; it is simply giving you whatever it is that you are focused on.

According to John Assaraf:

What most people don't understand is that a thought has a frequency. We can measure a thought. And so, if you're thinking that thought over and over again...building that company, finding your soulmate...if you're imagining what that looks like, you're emitting that frequency on a consistent basis. (Byrne, 2018, p. 9)

Since your thoughts are magnetic and carry a frequency, your thoughts are sent out into the universe, magnetically attracting all like things on that same frequency, and all that is sent out returns to the source, that source being you (Byrne, 2018). Byrne introduces a simple way to understand this concept, comparing our ability to conduct frequencies to a television station's transmission tower, pointing out that though we do not know how it works, we know that each channel has a frequency. It is when we tune into that frequency that we see the pictures on our television. By selecting the channel, we choose the frequency, and if we want to see different

pictures on our TV, we change the channel and tune in to a new frequency (Byrne, 2018). As a result, Byrne argues that you are a human transmission tower more powerful than any television tower created on earth. Your transmissions create your life and the world, with the frequencies you transmit reaching beyond cities and countries, as you transmit these frequencies with your thoughts, and whether we realize it or not, we spend most of our time thinking. As Michael Bernard Beckwith points out:

“Creation is always happening. Every time an individual has a thought, or a prolonged chronic way of thinking, they’re in the creation process. Something is going to manifest out of those thoughts.” (Byrne, 2018, p. 16).

So, as we continue with the human transmission analogy and our understanding of this powerful universal law, we understand that you create your life with your thoughts. As we are constantly thinking, we are continually creating. So, if general thoughts are that powerful, imagine the impact that positive or negative thoughts can have on your life.

The best – likely the most extreme – example of how effective your thoughts truly can be, comes from the true story of Anna Willems, detailed in the book *Becoming Supernatural* by Joe Dispenza (2017). The story begins in June 2007 on a Sunday afternoon, when Anna, a psychotherapist, and mother of two, had received news from two police officers that earlier that morning, her husband had died jumping off one of the tallest buildings in the city.

Anna’s breath momentarily stopped, and as she then gasped for air, she started to shake uncontrollably. The moment seemed frozen in time. While her children sat paralyzed in shock, Anna tried to hide her pain and stress for their sakes. An intense pain suddenly shot through her head, and she simultaneously felt a deep, hollow ache in her gut. Her neck and shoulders instantly stiffened as her mind frenetically raced from thought to thought. The hormones of stress had overtaken her. Anna was now in survival mode. (Dispenza, 2017, p. 2)

According to Dr. Dispenza, from a scientific standpoint, living under stress is living in survival mode. Scientifically, when we encounter a stressful circumstance that threatens us in some way (one that has prediction/outcome is out of our control), a primitive nervous system called the sympathetic nervous system turns. The body mobilizes an enormous amount of energy in response to the stressor. All organisms are able to deal with short-term bursts of stress by fighting, hiding, or fleeing from an impending stressor. When the event is over, the body normally returns to balance within hours, increasing its energy levels and restoring its vital

resources. However, when the stress does not end within hours, the body never returns to balance, so in truth, no organism in nature can endure living in emergency mode for extended periods of time. Being that we have large brains, human beings are capable of thinking about their problems and reliving past events, in addition to forecasting future best/worst-case situations, consequently allowing us to distribute stress chemicals from our thoughts alone. If we do this often enough, we can knock our brains and bodies out of normal physiology just by thinking about a past that is all too familiar.

Unfortunately, in Anna's case, the stressful news of her husband's death threw her brain and body into such a state of survival that for a period, every day, Anna relived that event over and over in her mind, producing the same chemistry in her brain and body as if the event were repeatedly happening. As time went on, Anna was stuck in her past.

As you can imagine, Anna was feeling a rush of negative emotions: tremendous sadness, pain, victimization, grief, guilt, shame, despair, anger, hatred, frustration, resentment, shock, fear, anxiety, worry, overwhelm, anguish, hopelessness, powerlessness, isolation, loneliness, disbelief, and betrayal. And none of those emotions dissipated quickly. As Anna analyzed her life within the emotions of the past, she kept suffering more and more. Because she couldn't think greater than how she constantly felt, and since emotions are a record of the past, she was thinking in the past-and every day she felt worse. (Dispenza, 2017, p. 4)

Things progressively worsened, and Anna could no longer work, forcing her to take a leave of absence. Nine months later, Anna woke up paralyzed from the waist down and was diagnosed with neuritis – inflammation of the peripheral nervous system. After several tests, doctors could not find anything structural as the cause of the problem; he told Anna that she must have an autoimmune condition. As her immune system was attacking the nervous system in her lower spine, breaking down the protective layer that coats the nerves, causing paralysis in both her legs, she had difficulty controlling her bowels, could not hold her urine, and had no feelings or motor control in her legs and feet. According to Dr. Dispenza, when the fight or flight nervous system *stays* on due to chronic stress, the body utilizes all its energy reserves to deal with the constant threat it proceeds from the outer environment. Therefore, the immune system is compromised as the body has no energy left and its inner environment for growth and repair.

So essentially, because of her repeated inner conflict, Anna's immune system was attacking her body, and she had finally physically manifested the pain and suffering she had



emotionally experienced in her mind. As time went on, Anna's health continued to decline, and her attitude was growing increasingly negative and irritable. However, after attending one of Dr. Dispenza's seminars in 2012, Anna had experienced this new life of meditation, feeling a burst of joy and light come into her body, and she felt relief on a deep, visceral level. As Anna moved out of her past, she felt new energy opening her heart further and further. Meditations became a habit, and her energy and vitality returned when her thought patterns completely changed and her feelings were different. As she felt like she was in a new state of being, her actions changed drastically, and Anna's health and life improved tremendously that year. One year and nine months after her cancer diagnosis and six years after her husband's suicide, Anna's cancer had completely healed, and the tumor in her esophagus had vanished. Her blood tests showed no cancer markers, and the mucous membranes in her esophagus, vagina, and anus were completely healed. Though it was not positive thinking alone that healed Anna, the intensity of all those negative thoughts did quite a number on Anna's mind and body, proving the fact that our thoughts and emotions harness more power and have the ability to affect us far more than we think. If Anna had known this earlier, one could assume that she would have tried to spend less time focusing on the negative thoughts, as we have more power than we think when it comes to the universe.

It comes as no surprise that many people are skeptical of believing in both the power of the universe and their capability of changing their quality of life. In Ian Harris's witty article, he writes about the idea of bad luck and superstitions. Though he acknowledges that many seem to laugh at the idea of bad luck, he poses a question toward those who take the concept seriously, wondering what they think the mechanism behind "the universal bad luck program" is, indicating the existence of cause and effect in "some sort of cosmic program responsible for the purveyance of bad luck." He brings up how this concept reminds him of what he calls "the positive thinking nonsense" and outlines the basic principle of the law of attraction, referencing *The Secret*. Using the example of "making a relationship happen with a crush," he sarcastically explains how the universe will grant you anything you want, as long as you put all your energy and focus into it. Yet, in the following sentence, he says that concentrating and focusing all your energy on "making a relationship happen" is called stalking, resulting in a restraining order being the only thing granted by the universe. After outlining the LOA, he reflects on how he had always heard the opposite about manifesting and the idea of superstition like the jinx—implying that if the

rules of jinx are true and it is possible to get the opposite outcome when speaking positively on the future, then he does not know what to believe about the universe. As his confusion, inquiries, and opinions all shed light on the naïve ways, people choose to see the inherently powerful energy of the universe that we live in, many of his points come from a place of skepticism and bias, being that there were few facts or references to credible sources being made. As we know, Ian Harris is not the only one who shares these inquiries and reservations about the law of attraction and the power of positive thinking. However, if individuals like him took the time to explore the research that legitimizes the effects of this kind of mindset, they would see how helpful it truly is.

In 1994, Owen Lightsey conducted an experiment that explored whether positive automatic thoughts (PATs) can be used as stress buffers and mood enhancers. After conducting a study that tested whether PATs and the PATs × Negative Events interaction predicted significant variance in future depression and happiness, the results confirmed the hypothesis that PATs predicted future happiness, detailing that higher frequency, pre-existing PATs was linked to greater future happiness. Using instruments such as the Beck Depression Inventory, Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire-Positive (consisting of statements that represent PATs), Life Experiences, Hassles Scale, and Happiness Measures, analyses were conducted on data from 152 undergraduate volunteers from introductory psychology courses. Consequently, Lightsey was able to get results from his procedure after two tests were completed to maintain the legitimacy of the collected results. While these findings suggest that PATs have an impact on both one's future and immediate well-being, it also proves that positive thinking can have a positive effect on your psychological health in addition to the way that you see yourself.

As you can imagine, positive thinking is beneficial for all ages and has even been proven to benefit young children. In 2013, Morrison, Hassan, Rooney, Kane, Roberts, & Mancini, assigned 910 students from 22 Australian primary schools located in low socio-economic areas, either an intervention or control group and assessed at a 30-month follow up, in compliance with the Aussie Optimism: Positive Thinking Skills Program (AOPTP) – a school-based prevention program aimed at addressing anxious and depressive symptoms in children aged 9-10 years. Giving the intervention group the AOPTP program while the control group continued to receive the regular health education course, both parents and students participated in the data collection of the study. As students completed self-report measures regarding their varying levels of

anxiety, depression, and attributional styles, parents reported their children's internalizing and externalizing problems outside of school. Though no significant differences between groups were found regarding anxiety, depression, or attributional styles, parents did report significantly less hyperactive behaviors from children in the intervention group. While this suggests that AOP-PTS has the capacity to treat externalizing problems at a medium-term effect, the decrease in the externalizing problems provides evidence of a partial medium-term intervention effect. In addition to this source helping to justify the fact that positive thinking is a self-help tactic we need to be teaching our children from an early age, this experiment indicated that the AOPTP universal prevention program is a potentially effective method to prevent depressive disorders in children as young as 9-10 years of age.

Not only is positive thinking beneficial to children but college students as well. Wang, Chen, Lin, & Hong (2016) conducted a quasi-experimental study examining the effects of a self-reflection intervention on college students' self-regulation, learning motivation, and positive thinking in Taiwan. The participants were selected to participate in an 18-week intervention; 102 college students formed the experimental group (EG), prioritizing role-play, self-reflection, group discussions, and group work. Another 179 college students were selected as a comparison group from two other classes. The results of the study showed that supportive, resourced discussions with peers and instructors, self-reflection assignments, and activities as a facilitative agent improved the EG students' self-regulation, learning motivation, and positive thinking. As this research is specifically regarding the college student demographic, the results of the study speak to the fact that the absence of positive thinking has the ability to affect your motivation to do basic things like self-regulate or learn things that you may or may not have an interest in, similarly to Anna Willems' story in *Becoming Supernatural* (Dispenza, 2017).

Like Lightsey's experiment, Bekhet and Zauszniewski (2013) conducted an experiment that explored a psychometric study of a convenience sample of 109 autism spectrum disorder (ASD) caregivers, examining a new eight-item Positive Thinking Skills Scale (PTSS). As the rate of ASD diagnoses increased dramatically over the last few decades, many have come to realize that raising a child with ASD can be overwhelming – with literature reviews demonstrating that family caregivers of persons with ASD have reported higher burden, anxiety, depression, and poor quality of life. Responsible for measuring the frequency with which intervention recipients use positive thinking skills, the descriptive research conducted by Bekhet,

and Zauszniewski, showed that positive thinking enhanced the caregivers' levels of resourcefulness and psychological well-being while reducing the effects of caregivers' burden in a sample of 95 caregivers of persons with ASD. While it suggests that caregivers of a person with ASD might benefit from a positive thinking training intervention, this article also makes references to the negative consequences of positive thinking that will soon be identified, primarily among persons with cancer – a relevant reference to a counterclaim source called *The Ethics of Positive Thinking* by Gabriel Andrade.

As we have learned, the absence of positive thinking has the potential to negatively impact anyone, especially those who spend a lot of their time caring for others, primarily those with cancer. Similarly focused on the wellness of the caretaker, Youll & Meekosha (2011) wrote an article based on small-scale fieldwork that used semi-structured interviews to explore the role of positive thinking on those who care for individuals with an experience of cancer. Though participants ranged from 19 to 65 years old, all seven participants (six of whom were women) had varying caring roles for a loved one, noting that four participants experienced the cancerous death of their loved one, and two participants' loved ones had 'recovered' while one remained in remission. The interviews focused on the stories of the participant's relationship with the loved ones and their cancer journey, their understanding of the concept of 'positive thinking,' and the role this played in their experience. Overall, the caretakers felt that their positive attitude helped their families, with one feeling that the apparent expression of sadness, pain and fear could weaken the patient's ability to fight cancer. However, though most participants shared a desire to protect their loved ones from the harm and stress they thought would come from sharing their true feelings on the ordeal, most participants wished that they shared more, admitting that being more emotionally engaged in the experience may have helped with their coping.

However, regarding the cancer patients themselves, many believe the self-help notion of positive thinking is not always a good thing. Stephen Wright (2010) discusses how an emphasis on positive thinking can have a negative effect on cancer patients, similar to Gabriel Andrade's point. To get his point across, he introduces the reservations of American writer Barbara Ehrenreich's on the idea of positive thinking, whose "fierce intellect has been sharpened by her experience of breast cancer." He outlines the fact that "cancer evokes our deepest fears and feels like an attack at every level—physical, psychological, social and spiritual" and though measures are taken to help the patient cope with their illness and reduce the fear they feel when getting

diagnosed, “the link between feeling better and getting better has been corrupted by an army of clinicians and therapists whose understanding of the process is shallow.” He discusses how the idea of positive thinking is reinforced in countless self-help books, preaching that you can heal yourself but only if you adopt the right mindset, and how some books even influence those with cancer to see it as a ‘gift’ or a catalyst that can help you change your life for the better. Wright argues that positive thinking cannot be taught in this way and that we cannot feel something to be true by simply telling it to ourselves because it means that if we don’t get better, it’s because we weren’t thinking positively enough, making it our fault, which is the thing a cancer patient needs to be experiencing. By outlining how this simple self-help technique can be seen as insensitive to patients who are scared of their diagnoses, this article poses the counterclaim of why the simple act of thinking positively isn’t necessarily beneficial toward the progressive health of cancer patients.

Andrade (2019) explores this further in his article, assessing the currently growing self-help industry, as it has recently extended to healthcare in the form of positive thinking. He examines the idea that happy thoughts are essential for health while additionally addressing the fact that this method of rehabilitation is not free of problems. By outlining how extreme positive thinking can be unethical – as it may promote alternative forms of medicine that can ultimately substitute effective treatment, making it somewhat detrimental to cancer patients – he argues that the emphasis on positive thinking may be too burdensome for cancer patients and that unrestricted positive thinking is not necessarily good for mental health.

As this article poses the counterclaim of why the simple act of thinking is unethical and unproductive toward the progressive health of cancer patients, he explores the ethics of positive thinking in healthcare, highlighting what is reasonable and acceptable while also pointing out how it can also be unethical. This article also makes references to *The Secret*.

### Chapter 3: Methods

My study aimed to prove the fact that something as small as positive thinking can have more of an impact on people's lives than many care to admit or believe. As important as it is to remain unbiased and at least try to find resources that speak against my argument, I have been doing research that helps me answer my research questions of how positive thinking can improve one's health; specifically focusing on the physical, mental, and emotional aspects of health.

To find sources in favor of my argument, I thought it would be a good strategy of inquiry to find both qualitative research – information about qualities that cannot be measured – and quantitative research – information about quantities that can be written in numbers and measured – mainly focusing on the former. I did this because I know that my concept is heavily tied to personal practice, feeling, and experience. Though those things can be measured to an extent, I thought that the inclusion of quantitative research would help make my argument irrefutable, as many people feel that numbers do not lie.

Another strategy I used was a systematic literature review, which helped me lay out all my research and find similarities between specific articles that favored my argument and against my argument. Thankfully, I reached my desired outcome of collecting literature that answered my research question using databases and descriptors. We were able to show me peer-reviewed articles that spoke to my topic. I mainly used the Purchase Library database to find sources that spoke to my topic because we were given the database to make it worthwhile. However, I think using the Purchase database was an appropriate strategy for me for several reasons. One, after finding a good number of relevant sources on that database, I did not find it necessary to use 'Google Scholars' or any other internet database because, in addition to the search for resources being quite tedious, I knew that the Purchase College Library database was likely to give me free access to sources. Reason two was the ease of the database being linked to my school account, so saving sources that I used or revisiting was a breeze because everything I needed was in one place.

In the early stages of finding what I needed, I began by searching for sources that spoke about the law of attraction. Since I had read *The Secret* (Byrne, 2018) and *Becoming Supernatural* (Dispenza, 2017) before starting my research, I wanted to find more evidence/conversation on that topic specifically. I felt it played an essential role in understanding

why positive thinking is more important/powerful than we think it is. Being unable to find much more information on that topic, I searched the database for articles with the words “positive thinking” and “health & wellness.” Through those descriptors, I was able to find eight peer-reviewed articles out of the 132 results I was given – six of my chosen sources spoke in favor of my argument, while two of them spoke against my argument.

After using a qualitative approach to collect my data, the literature was organized in relevance to each other. The similarities spotted between specific articles were responsible for the order in which the articles came. As a result, the two books, *The Secret* (Byrne, 2018) and *Becoming Supernatural* (Dispenza, 2017), came first as this research not only gave me the idea to create/explore my research question, but it was a brilliant introduction to understanding the power/impact that an individual’s thoughts, feelings, and energy can have on their quality of life, in addition to describing the extremes of what can physically happen to health when one is constantly dealing with stress/negativity. Following that came the counterclaiming peer-reviewed article called *The Take a Wish Foundation* (Harris & Radford, 2018), which essentially speaks about the skepticism of believing in the universe and the law of attraction. Though it was mainly based on personal opinion rather than research, the article addresses concerns that many people can relate to, making it a necessary addition. Next came “*Thinking Positive*” as a stress buffer: *The Role of Positive Automatic Cognitions in Depression and Happiness* (Lightsey, 1994). This peer-reviewed article included an experiment that provided evidence that positive thinking does make a difference, specifically regarding undergraduate students in the case of this article. That research set up the inclusion of the peer-reviewed article that followed, *Prevention of Internalizing Disorders in 9-10-year-old children: Efficacy of the AUSSIE Optimism positive thinking Skills program at 30-month follow-up* (Morrison, Hassan, Rooney, Kane, Roberts, & Mancini, 2013). This research was slightly like the previous article, as an experiment was conducted to see how positive thinking would affect students. However, this was specifically pertaining to its impact on 9-10-year-olds, proving that positive thinking is beneficial for children. Next came another experiment-based peer-reviewed article titled, *The Effects of College Students’ positive thinking, learning motivation and self-regulation through a Self-Reflection Intervention in Taiwan* (Wang, Chen, Lin, & Hong, 2016), which proved that the absence of positive thinking could affect ones’ motivation to do and learn basic things, similarly to Anna Willems’ personal experience in *Becoming Supernatural* (Dispenza, 2017). After that

came, an article called *Measuring Use of Positive Thinking Skills: Psychometric Testing of a New Scale* (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2013), which included an experiment that explored a psychometric study of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) caregivers and how they could benefit from positive thinking training intervention.

Additionally, this peer-reviewed article referenced some negative consequences of positive thinking addressed in the article that follows the one titled *Always look on the Bright Side of Life: Cancer and positive thinking* (Youll & Meekosha, 2011). Similarly focused on the mental/emotional health of the caregiver, this article conducted interviews that essentially detailed how positive thinking was able to help them cope with having to care for their cancer-riddled family members. However, the article that follows this one, titled *Who's Smiling: The emphasis on Positive Thinking can have a negative effect* (Wright, 2010), speaks entirely about how cancer patients can be negatively affected by too much positive thinking. Similar to the previously mentioned source, the last source used, titled *The Ethics of Positive Thinking in Healthcare* (Andrade, 2019), outlines how this “new way of thinking” is not free of problems for cancer patients, referencing issues that were additionally brought up in the article about ASD caregivers and making references to the first source that I used, *The Secret*.

Considering myself spiritual rather than religious, I considered the fact that I likely am biased toward my opinion as I fully believe in the power of the universe and the power that my thoughts and energy have as an individual. Though it was hard to put my thoughts about the topic aside because I feel so strongly about my stance, I knew it was imperative to collect counter-claiming information relevant and somewhat familiar to my argument. That was the main reason I included the counterclaiming articles, specifically *The Take a Wish Foundation* article, because although I knew the information given was not considered research, it was still someone's opinion that I felt could be shared by other people who may not see the significance of the concept.

Regarding limitations, I did not have any. The only real hiccup that arose for me was the pandemic taking me off-campus. The COVID-19 global pandemic made the possibility of recording conversations about my topic with people I had previously chosen harder, forcing me to let go of the idea of making a video.



## Chapter 4: Results

Using relevant books and peer-reviewed articles that included both anecdotal experiences from participants caring for family members with cancer and experiments that assessed the legitimacy of whether positive thinking made any sort of impact on participants; the purpose of the study was to see if there was any evidence that proves that positive thinking is beneficial to the participants involved. By searching for studies that spoke directly to the impact that positive thinking could have on stress and overall health, I was able to find enough evidence to write this chapter, which contains the results of my methodology study that was conducted to answer the question: *How can positive thinking improve your health and quality of life? – specifically regarding the physical, mental, and emotional aspects of health.*

Briefly, the results of the conducted experiments regarding whether positive thinking is beneficial to those participating were able to prove that it does have the ability to improve one's mood, decrease stress, and increase one's quality of life. As explained in *The Secret* (Byrne, 2006), the more energy you give to a negative/positive thought is likely the more negative/positive you will feel about the situation. So, if you continue to think negatively about a stressful situation, it is likely that you will not feel any better about it until you purposefully change your negative energy towards that stressful situation. This phenomenon was explained in-depth in *Becoming Supernatural* (Dispenza, 2017) through Anna Willems' story of essentially manifesting physical ailments into her body, after dealing with the stress of her husband's suicide, the financial trouble he got into before his passing, and raising their two kids alone. However, six years after her husband's death and a year and nine months after her cancer diagnosis, Anna's cancer had completely vanished, in addition to the tumor in her esophagus and other problem areas – and it was not due to the prescribed medicines that the doctors provided.

Though it was not positive thinking alone that completely healed Anna's ailments, it was the positive thought of wanting better for herself that was the catalyst for the dedication to meditate every day and be positive in her everyday life. This anecdote essentially spoke to two arguments: first, that the constant focus on stress and negativity has the power to affect your physical, mental, and emotional health, and second, when you're at a maximum stress level and experiencing physical pain (likely due to that stress), medication may not necessarily be the best course of action; because in this case – as extreme and “unique” as this situation may seem –

medication made things worse for Anna, and her positive thinking and consistent meditation did more for Anna than those doctors ever could.

The work with Anna led to the finding of research that examined the legitimacy of whether positive thinking can make a difference. In a 1994 experiment, designed to explore the effect positive automatic thoughts (PATs) had on the stress and negative moods of 152 undergrad volunteers, the results of Lightsey's experiment suggested that PATs did have an impact on one's future and immediate well-being, in addition to having an impact on mental health and the way you perceive yourself (Lightsey, 1994). Another experiment that attempted to prove the effectiveness of positive thinking on mental and emotional health was the *Aussie Optimism: Positive Thinking Skills Program* (AOPTP) – a school-based prevention program aimed at addressing depressive and anxiety symptoms in children aged 9-10 years (Morrison, Hassan, Rooney, Kane, Roberts, & Mancini, 2013). Using 910 students from 22 Australian primary schools, this experiment consisted of a control group that received the normal health education courses. In contrast, the intervention group received the AOPTP program, requiring both parents and students to participate in the data collection.

In addition to this source speaking in favor of teaching our kids positive thinking, parents reported significantly less hyperactive behaviors from children in the intervention group. This result suggests that the AOPTP universal prevention program is a potentially effective method to preventing depressive disorders in children. To find further research regarding its impact on the mental health of college students, a quasi-experimental study was conducted to examine the effects of a self-reflection intervention on college students' learning motivation, self-regulation, and positive thinking (Wang, Chen, Lin, & Hong, 2016). With the results of the study showing that the experimental groups' self-regulation, learning motivation, and positive thinking improved due to the self-reflection assignments and supportive discussions with peers and instructors; this research speaks to the argument that the absence of positive thinking and a positive environment, can affect your motivation to self-regulate or learn new things.

Regarding the effect that positive thinking has on those in the healthcare field, a psychometric study was conducted to examine the effectiveness of a new eight-item Positive Thinking Skills Scale (PTSS) from a convenience sample of 109 autism spectrum disorder (ASD) caregivers (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2013). This experiment showed that in a sample of

95 caregivers of persons with ASD, positive thinking reduced the caregivers' burden while enhancing the caregivers' resourcefulness and psychological well-being.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

Between the results of these experiments and personal opinions/conversations that were provided in these different literatures, I was able to conclude that positive thinking truly does have an impact on your physical, mental, and emotional health. While *The Secret* (Byrne, 2018) and *Becoming Supernatural* (Dispenza, 2017) were primarily anecdotal and less experimental, both texts shed light on how effective one's energy really can be, detailing how people are able to attract & manifest both good and bad things into their lives. Anna Willems' story of being able to fully cure herself a year and nine months after dealing with the physical manifestation of ailments – which essentially derived from the stress caused by the traumatic suicide of her husband – was a testament to the fact that no matter how bad things may get for you, the power to change your outlook and energy is in your hands. Sometimes, all it takes is a positive thought/idea to motivate you into living the life you want (Dispenza, 2017). In addition, the fact that Anna's ailments essentially derived from a life filled with constant stress, anxiety, and little positive thinking/reinforcement; is also a testament to the idea that a life full of continuous negativity and stress without positive thinking/reinforcement can very well affect one's motivation to do regular, everyday tasks and functions.

Similarly, the absence of positive thinking and its effect on self-regulation and learning motivation was briefly examined in *The Effects of college students' positive thinking, learning motivation, and self-regulation through self-reflection intervention in Taiwan* (Wang, Chen, Lin & Hong, 2016). With the study resulting in the improvement of the experimental groups' positive thinking, learning motivation, and self-regulation – due to self-reflection assignments and resourced, supportive discussions with peers and instructors – these findings advocate for the importance of student interventions and positively charged environments that encourage these students to be the best versions of themselves and facilitate positive thinking. These findings also speak to the idea that the absence of positive thinking and a positive environment has the ability to affect one's motivation to learn new things and self-regulate/take care of yourself, similarly to Anna Willems' story (Dispenza, 2017).

Another study's findings that advocate for the importance of student interventions and positively charged environments is *Prevention of internalizing disorders in 9–10-year-old children: Efficacy of the AUSSIE Optimism positive thinking Skills program AT 30-month follow-*

up (Morrison, Hassan, Rooney, Kane, Roberts, & Mancini, 2013). Though significant differences between groups were not found in regards to depression or anxiety, parents in the intervention group did report a drastic decrease in hyperactive behavior from their children. In addition to advocating for the fact that positive thinking is a self-help tactic that's beneficial to teach children from an early age, this study's findings also prove that these prevention programs/interventions have the potential to be an effective method to prevent depressive disorders in children as young as 9-10 years old.

These interventions were also beneficial to health care workers and those looking after persons/family members with cancer and autism spectrum disorder (ASD). In *Measuring Use of Positive Thinking Skills: Psychometric Testing of a New Scale* (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2013), the results of the study found that positive thinking reduced the effects of the caregivers' burden while enhancing their psychological well-being and levels of resourcefulness; proving once again how beneficial positive thinking is. Similarly, one of the more compelling studies that back up my argument is "*Thinking positive*" as a stress buffer: *The role of positive automatic cognitions in depression and happiness. Journal of Counseling Psychology* (Lightsey, 1994), which found that positive automatic thoughts (PATs) truly do have an impact on one's immediate and future well-being and, additionally, can positively affect your psychological health and the way one perceives themselves. Regarding the interviews with persons looking after family members with cancer, in *Always look on the bright side of life: Cancer and positive thinking* (Youll & Meekosha, 2011), the results from the answers given in the interviews found that as a majority, the caretakers felt that their positive attitude helped their families – with one feeling that the apparent expression of sadness, pain and fear could weaken the patient's ability to fight cancer.

The significance of the findings regarding intervention/program-based experiments is that these results prove how beneficial these programs and interventions can be if they were normal habits/practices in schools, workplaces, and institutions. Based on the evidence that children were able to benefit (Morrison, Hassan, Rooney, Kane, Roberts, & Mancini, 2013), in addition to college students (Wang, Chen, Lin & Hong, 2016) and health care workers (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2013), these results prove that positive thinking is a practice that needs to be taught, more frequently discussed, and further explored/researched.

However, regarding the cancer patients themselves, the two articles, *The ethics of positive thinking in healthcare* (Andrade, 2019) and *Who's smiling? The emphasis on positive thinking can have a negative effect* (Wright, 2010). It gives an opposite perspective of how/why positive thinking isn't all it's cracked up to be regarding cancer patients specifically. Exploring the ethics of positive thinking in healthcare, the argument of the former article details how extreme positive thinking can be unethical, stating that it may “promote alternative forms of medicine that can ultimately substitute effective treatment, making it somewhat detrimental to cancer patients” (Andrade, 2019). Similar to the tone of the former article, the latter article essentially states that an emphasis on positive thinking can be considered insensitive to patients who are scared of their diagnosis (Wright, 2010), as the author feels that positive thinking cannot be taught in this way and that we can't feel something to be true by simply telling it to ourselves because it means that if we don't get better, it's because we weren't thinking positively enough, making it our fault, which is the last thing a cancer patient needs to be experiencing.

The significance of the input from the last two counterargument articles was to provide a well-rounded analysis of how beneficial positive thinking can be. For a well-rounded analysis, it is imperative to understand all angles of the argument, including the angles that do not support your claims. The reason for including those opinions was to shed light on the opposing arguments and essentially see if the cons outweigh the pros. Additionally, the opposing claims introduced were valid statements that I never considered due to my own bias on the subject.

Regardless, the results of all these findings are significant not only because they mostly speak in favor of my argument that positive thinking is a beneficial life-changer, but because they provide actual evidence which proves that positive thinking makes an impact on one's life, specifically their mental, physical, and emotional health. Due to the compelling argument made by all the evidence found for why positive thinking is so important to all of us, this should give society more reason to do further research. If those positive thinking interventions/programs were able to yield positive results from 3 different experiments involving three different age groups and varying stress levels, then one could assume how beneficial this practice could be when it becomes a habit or second nature.

In an existence where the pressures of modern-day living seem to increase as the world gets a bit more complicated every day, alleviating stress, or anxiety without taking a pill or smoking drugs sounds like the ideal way to handle those problems. As society progresses, man

continues to waste his power on things like war, money, and technology rather than power for constructive productivity. Rather than learn how to control/handle our emotions, man chooses repeatedly to wage war on each other out of anger and greed. If society did more research on the power of positive thinking, we would all realize the power we have to change those negative feelings into something beneficial and constructive. By conducting more research on positive thinking interventions/programs, I think society would be able to flourish because we would be able to change our hurtful/negative perceptions of ourselves and others, bringing us a step closer to peace.

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