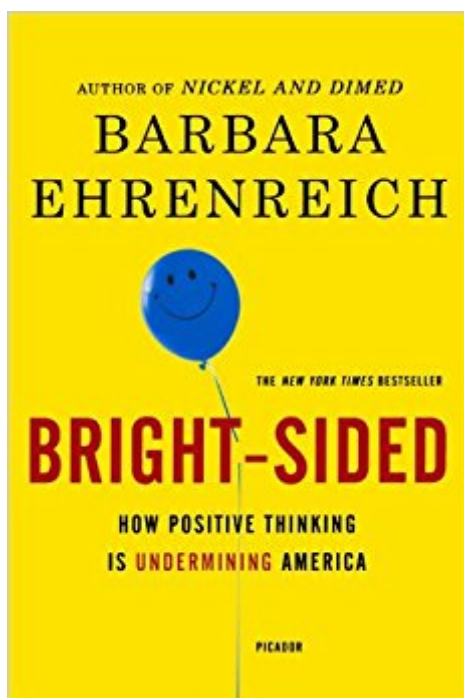


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Bright-sided: How Positive Thinking Is Undermining America



Synopsis

A NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER Americans are a "positive" people -- cheerful, optimistic, and upbeat: This is our reputation as well as our self-image. But more than a temperament, being positive is the key to getting success and prosperity. Or so we are told. In this utterly original debunking, Barbara Ehrenreich confronts the false promises of positive thinking and shows its reach into every corner of American life, from Evangelical megachurches to the medical establishment, and, worst of all, to the business community, where the refusal to consider negative outcomes--like mortgage defaults--contributed directly to the current economic disaster. With the myth-busting powers for which she is acclaimed, Ehrenreich exposes the downside of positive thinking: personal self-blame and national denial. This is Ehrenreich at her provocative best--poking holes in conventional wisdom and faux science and ending with a call for existential clarity and courage.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. This audio is a perfect antidote for anyone fed up with the power of positive thinking and all its attendant pink ribbons, smiley faces, and injunctions to have a nice day! Ehrenreich explores how medical, academic, and business gurus persuade the public that wishing, done in the right way, can make things happen. The section on the history of positive thinking that probes Calvinism and Max Weber is less original. Kate Reading hits all the right notes in conveying the author's humor, sarcasm, scientifically backed conclusions, and curmudgeonly insights. Her pace is brisk, and she captures the witty wonder of this book. A Metropolitan hardcover (Reviews, Aug. 10). (Oct.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

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No critic completely dismissed Ehrenreich's critique of America's "happiness" culture. But reviewers' enthusiasm for her critique seemed to depend on their assessment of the book's moral urgency. Several critics felt that the message of *Bright-Sided* was essential to readers in the aftermath of last year's economic meltdown. But others felt that Ehrenreich's ideas, while relevant, had been better expressed by others. They also criticized the author for "cheap shots" and outdated research. For example, she criticizes the book *Who Moved My Cheese?*, which has long been superseded by other, even sillier titles. But many readers may react like Hanna Rosin, who wrote in the *New York Times Book Review* that even when she did not agree with Ehrenreich's arguments, she felt less guilty about not sharing in our smiley :-) culture. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Fascinating topic. This is not your everyday subject or everyday take, precisely what I love about Barbara Ehrenreich's works. Tackling the cult of positive thinking might seem like a mighty negative thing to do, but to the contrary Ehrenreich shows the way in which a dose of realism can in fact be a form of self (and other) acceptance. The book covers a surprising amount of ground, linking seemingly disparate subject matter to form a series of compelling arguments. I found particularly fascinating the role of religion in forming what has today been passed off as various forms of science. In a self-help driven culture rarely so self-reflective, Ehrenreich's work shines like a candle in an otherwise dark room.

I'm not sure I'd call this book "important" because like so many bits of inconvenient truth it will be read mostly by those who know all too well that wishing won't make it so. That said, it's rather interesting to see how something perfectly innocent and well intentioned, like feeling good about yourself and your prospects became a tool of jackals like Tony Robbins. What I don't like about this book is that through faint praise it appears to discount the benefits of a positive outlook. But I wholeheartedly agree that separating "positiveness" that's genuine and ideally, reality-based, from manipulation, coercion or layoff justification (which I view as similar to holocaust denial) is a tough thing to do. In the end, maybe *Bright-Sided* goes a little overboard in its attempt to counter so much nonsense and hold those responsible accountable. But that doesn't make it any less accurate or the anger less justified. For something a bit lighter and laugh out loud funny (for those who get it) may I recommend E. L. Kersten's, *The Art Of Demotivation*.

I bought this book after I read a discussion about it on an online forum. As someone who had very recently experienced a traumatic experience and dealt with it by being positive (when my only other option was anger) I was fully prepared to disagree with Dr Ehrenreich and the theories in her book. I bought the book here on Amazon and after receiving it, read it in a three day period! I am not much of a recreational book reader to be honest (I get to read enough as a doctoral candidate) but her easy writing style and light prose was engrossing. I do agree with some of the critics that she could have taken a deeper look, but at the same time, this isn't an academic research paper and she was writing it at a level to suit the "average" reader - and to get her point across. On this latter subject, she showed me the fallacies of some of what I believed, and the danger of being too optimistic and losing sight of the real dangers that can, and often will, happen to people and organizations - whether they like it or not. Once I finished it, I brought it home and told my wife - you HAVE to read this book! It's not perfect, but it was a joy to read and it made me question some of what I believed...and in that manner, Dr Ehrenreich was successful in her aim. I would highly recommend this book to ANYONE!

Have your eyes opened to the pressure to be: "Glad you have a job" "We don't want negative people around here" "You create your own reality." Honestly, I had a problem with this s***. Does the rape victim create the rape? Does the child in a poor and destitute country create the suffering? It's a bunch of bulls*** the comfortable people use to make more money off of comfortable people. Read this book if you have had anyone in your life tell you about the Law of Attraction, or any such other thing. This author gives you good arguments as to why this doesn't work.

I've read some of Barbara's other books and find her blunt realistic expression refreshing. I purchased this book to go with a MOOC called "The Science of Happiness." What a wise move. I am skeptical of the positive psychology movement, see it as trendy, and based on poor evidence. At this point in time, it is difficult to find good research studies on many of the important issues (I suspect this is due to funding problems). Well written.

Renowned observer of social trends, Barbara Ehrenreich in her latest book relates how her battle with breast cancer made her aware of the relentless emphasis on positivity in American culture. Taking this experience as a point of departure, she traces the history of "positive thinking" back to Mary Baker Eddy (founder of Christian Science) and Norman Vincent Peale up through today's

landscape of inspirational megachurches and corporate motivational speakers. In Ehrenreich's view, positive thinking has become a weapon against the common man, used by the powers that be to neutralize the increasing economic insecurity of the American worker which otherwise might drive them to revolt. Ehrenreich works mightily to demonstrate how this organized optimism is not a harmless diversion but a force that has had decidedly negative effects on American society. The book is uneven, researched chapters of solid interest (mostly dealing with historical aspects, though the look at the rise of megachurches is also good) alternating with polemical screeds that won't convince anyone not already inclined to agree. I also wish she had examined the deleterious effects of enforced optimism and self-esteem on American public education, a subject wholly untouched in "Bright Sided." Still, there is a great deal of food for thought in this book as in all of her work.

I love Barbara Ehrenreich. I haven't read it all but I am going through cancer as well and this book has helped me immensely.

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