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The Importance of Positive Messages: A Thesis in Positivity

Introduction

Positivity is the foundation of my human experience. When I was a child, I noticed I always wore a smile upon my face. When I was happy, I would smile. When I was sad, I would smile. When I was upset, I would smile. Smiling was my biological reaction to society, no matter what the circumstances of the situation might have been. Family, friends, and community members, even strangers, noticed this about me from an early start, calling me “the smiley-faced kid.” I was given the nickname “Smiley” from a group of older adults.

I was taught to be grateful for every moment and opportunity in life. I was taught to say “please” and “thank you” and “sorry” as much as I could, so I took this advice to heart, making these words and phrases the priority of my vocabulary. These became so prevalent that I began to be scolded by my loved ones and peers for saying them too much. There was even a time in secondary school where I thought I was being “too mean,” so I made the conscious decision one day after school, looking into the mirror, telling myself, “You will be the nicest, happiest kid on Earth!” Thus, I set out to do just that. Soon afterward, I became known just as that, the nicest and happiest kid on Earth. It was a huge compliment to me, but these meaningful comments were not because of something I had chosen to do; rather, they were simply part of a quality that made me who I am.

I am blessed to say I have always been a positive person. Optimism is part of my blood, my nature, and my soul. In all I do, in all I say, and in all I believe, optimism and positivity are structured at the foundation. As I was growing up, I thought everyone was the same way. I

thought the world was a positive place where we collectively believed in the good of one another and in the possibility of mutual love, peace, and respect toward one another across the globe.

However, as my experiences in society expanded with age and wisdom, I began to see a different viewpoint held by the larger, dominant culture: Optimism is neglected and negated; in fact, it is typically rejected. We dismiss positivity and positive messages on a daily routine basis, opting to allow the stresses of work life, family life, social life, making ends meet, and negative news and media portrayals to take hold over us and weigh us down. It is in these moments that we tend to forget the positivity in the world, but it is in these moments that the need for positivity and the positive impact of positivity is at its highest.

Throughout this social observation of our culture, I began wondering: Why is it that we do not find optimism and positivity to be important? What is the reason behind our neglect of positivity? How important is positivity, truly? Asking these questions opened my curiosity for the subject and, aligned with my spirit, I have made it my purpose to breed positivity into our society.

Optimism and positivity are influencers that lift, motivate, inspire, and empower each of us for further greatness, to achieve social coherency in love and peace, and encourage us to become the best versions of ourselves we can be. By understanding the importance of positivity, we can uncover new hope and strength as we work together to solve social issues and build a world that fosters the good in all people.

The Benefits of Positivity and Positive Messages

Positivity and positive messages have a vital place within our lives. Do you ever realize how much better you feel when you smile? Do you ever notice a brightness in your day when you laugh? Do you ever feel the healing power a simple compliment can have on your day?

These acts of positive message-sharing, founded in principles of positivity, have an ability to provide each of us with increased happiness, joy, and feelings of love and peace.

Martin Bolt writes in *Pursuing Human Strengths: A Positive Psychology Guide*, “...optimism is linked with a positive mood and higher morale. Indeed, numerous studies find that optimism is associated with diverse measures of psychological health. For example, LOT [Life Orientation Test] scores are positively related to both a sense of self-mastery and self-esteem and negatively linked to depression and anxiety,” (qtd. 160). Optimism, a direct reflection of positivity and positive messages, has a directly beneficial impact upon one’s mental health, improving upon its previous state. The psychological attributions related to optimism lead to increased happiness, joyfulness, inspiration, and an overall grateful thrill for life, all of which further develop into positive life experiences and mindsets.

The understanding presented above relates to field of positive psychology. The definition of positivity psychology, as stated by M.E. Seligman and M. Csikszentmihalyi in their article “Positive Psychology: An Introduction,” is “A science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions [promising] to improve quality of life and prevent the pathologies that arise when life is barren and meaningless,” (5). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi expand upon Bolt’s above statement, noting the foundation of positive psychology to be a facet of the field of psychology itself which uniquely and specifically studies the importance of positivity upon our wellbeing as humans.

Positive psychology is becoming an increasingly important field of study as research is uncovering the vitality of positivity within our societies. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi continue in their essay:

Entering a new millennium, Americans face a historical choice. Left alone on the

pinnacle of economic and political leadership, the United States can continue to increase its material wealth while ignoring the human needs of its people and those of the rest of the planet. Such a course is likely to lead to increasing selfishness, to alienation between the more and the less fortunate, and eventually to chaos and despair. At this juncture, the social and behavioral sciences can play an enormously important role. They can articulate a vision of the good life that is empirically sound while being understandable and attractive. They can show what actions lead to well-being, to positive individuals, and to thriving communities. Pg. 5

With this gathering, science is beginning to embrace the importance of positivity and the needs for its increased visibility, finding the wealth it holds for the greater good. The possible harms that could result from a society lacking positivity is noted, lending credibility to positivity's importance to modern culture and the advancement of our societies. With positivity and positive messaging, the "vision of the good life" can become a reality, paving the way for "positive individuals" within "thriving communities" (Seligman 5).

To reiterate this point further, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi expand by commenting on positive psychology, the academic merit behind positive messages and their related importance:

The field of positive psychology at the subjective level is about valued subjective experiences: well-being, contentment, and satisfaction (in the past); hope and optimism (for the future); and flow and happiness (in the present). At the individual level, it is about positive individual traits: the capacity for love and vocation, courage, interpersonal skill, aesthetic sensibility, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future mindedness, spirituality, high talent, and wisdom. At the group level, it is about the civic virtues and

the institutions that move individuals toward better citizenship: responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, and work ethic. Pg. 5

Scientists and researchers in the social disciplines are beginning to see that the above characteristics, including those found in individual experiences and group experiences, combine to provide a basis for increased meaning of life, all of which are rooted in the concept of positivity. As noted, “the capacity for love and vocation, courage, interpersonal skill,” and the continued qualities are attributes that help to render a positive experience for an individual. With those same characteristics expanding from one person to the next and onto the global scale through the sharing of positivity and positive messages, we can be well on our way to a happy, loving, peaceful world.

As it is defined, positivity is “the quality or state of being positive” or the state of “thinking about the good qualities of someone or something, thinking that a good result will happen, hopeful or optimistic” (“Positivity.”). Scientists and researchers in positive psychology are uncovering just how important positivity is, but are we as humans in society making the same discovery?

Research on The Importance of Positivity

To gain a better understanding to the beginning of a possible answer to this question, I decided to develop three research studies evaluating positivity within my community. I did this through three different methods on two different occasions.

On January 29, 2016, I took to my Twitter account to share a poll with 2,100+ followers, followers from various backgrounds and viewpoints all across the world. My professional Twitter account, which can be found here at <https://twitter.com/kevinmartinblog>, reflects my personal artistic writing career where I am a freelance inspirational writer, blogger, and poet,

showcasing my published work through my account. Therefore, followers of my account are already under the impression of the positive and uplifting nature of my work.

The questions that were asked were designed and developed to understand people's reactions to positive messaging. Seeing as how researchers are learning the importance of positivity in our lives, I wanted to see how we, in general, respond to positivity when presented with it.

As noted by the numbers in each individual poll, there were varying quantities of respondents since each poll could be answered independently of one another. This facet could lead to mistakes in results, but seeing as how these polls were survey-based, published on social media, and open to any user, the difference in numbers can be understood.

Even with a possibly-biased group undertaking in the polls (biased in the sense that poll participants were active participants from a group who already value positivity), the results of the collective polls show that positivity is not necessarily held to be important to the general public.

Fig. 1 shows that the positive messages they come across are not impactful upon them, as 40% stated positive messages have no impact on

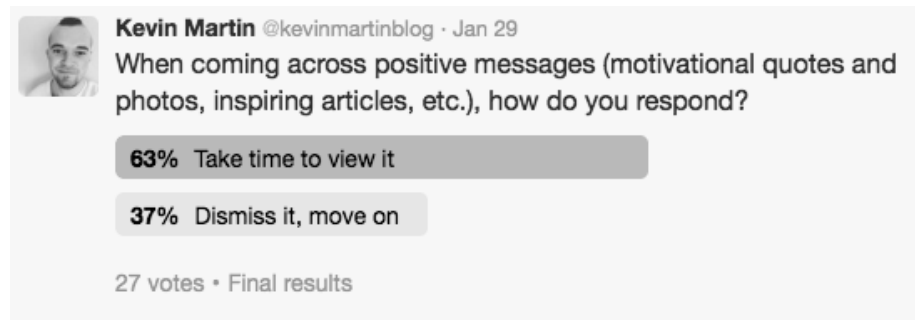


Fig. 1. Poll from Martin, Kevin (kevinmartinblog). "How much of an impact do positive messages (motivational quotes and photos, inspiring articles, etc.) have on you?" 29 Jan. 2016, 10:31 a.m. Tweet.

them at all. However, this question also gathered 34% of respondents stating positive messages have a strong impact on them and 26% of respondents stated positive messages have some impact on them. The comparison between the 40% and the 34%, both of which relate to answers

on the opposing ends of the positivity spectrum, gives the impression that responses to positivity is polarizing: Many either value it or they do not.

The question in Fig. 2 implies that positivity and positive messaging hold some weight in the lives of individuals, seeing as 63% of respondents took time to view positive messages, including motivational quotes and images, inspiring articles, etc., when coming across them.



Relating to Figs.

Fig. 2. Poll from Martin, Kevin (kevinmartinblog). "When coming across positive messages (motivational quotes and photos, inspiring articles, etc.), how do you respond?" 29 Jan. 2016, 11:04 a.m. Tweet.

3 through 5, I wanted to

ask how individuals responded specifically to poetry, seeing as how poetry is based as a direct form of positive communication. Poetry is defined as "the writings of a poet" and "something that is very beautiful or graceful," both of which have traditionally held positive connotations in meaning ("Poetry.").

The questions asked on poetry continue to infer the lack of emphasis we place on positivity seeing as 41% stated poetry has somewhat of an importance upon them, 30% stated poetry has a great deal of importance upon them, and 29% stated poetry has no impact upon them (see fig. 3). Even though 52% of respondents take time to read poetry when coming across it (see fig. 4), an overwhelming 72% do not go out of their way to view or read poetry (see fig. 5).

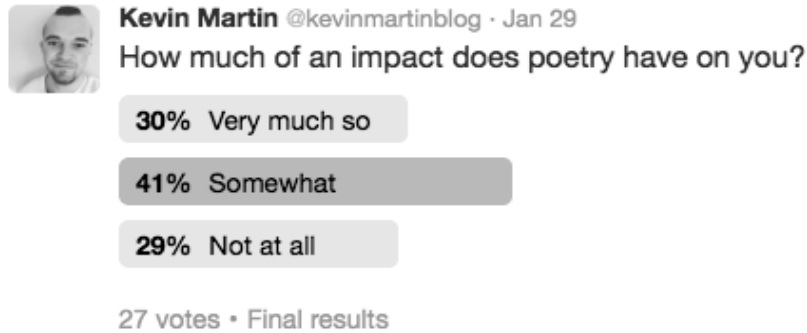


Fig. 4. Poll from Martin, Kevin (kevinmartinblog). "How much of an impact does poetry have on you?" 29 Jan. 2016, 11:03 a.m. Tweet.

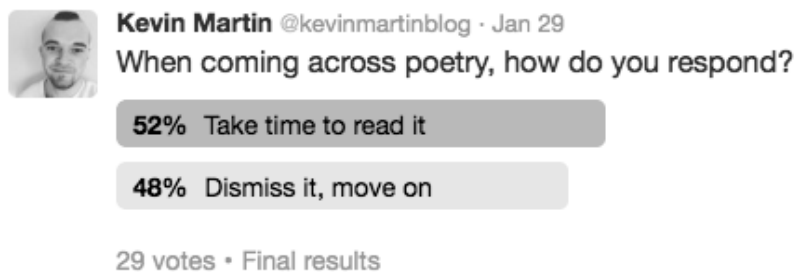


Fig. 3. Poll from Martin, Kevin (kevinmartinblog). "When coming across poetry, how do you respond?" 29 Jan. 2016, 11:04 a.m.



Fig. 5. Poll from Martin, Kevin (kevinmartinblog). "Do you go out of your way to view/read poetry?" 29 Jan. 2016, 11:04 a.m. Tweet.

Analyzing these results, it can be gathered that we, as a collective culture in this current moment in time, are ambiguous in our perception of positivity and in the energy we lend to it. It would be interesting of note to conduct a similar study, longitudinal in nature, to study the results as they change alongside the progression of society.

In addition to my Twitter survey, I conducted a survey via Facebook through the "Polls for Pages"

application. Promoted and open to 541 friends, all of whom have an understanding and comprehension of my positive nature, I received 12 responses over a period of two weeks beginning on March 2, 2016. The survey asked 10 questions similar to the questions asked in my Twitter polls. These 10 questions are the exact same questions that were asked in my largest survey, conducted via SurveyMonkey, which I will explain shortly.

Respectively, two questions in the Facebook survey asked for the self-identified gender and self-identified age of the participants in a fill-in-the-blank style. Of the 12 respondents, 6 identified as female and 6 identified as male (1 of the 6 identifying as male identified himself as cis-male). Therefore, gender was split 50% at an even 1:1 ratio between female and male with no self-identification of transgendered individuals. The ages of the respondents ranged from 19 to 68 with the average age being 29.42 and the median age being 23.5.

Analyzing the responses, it can be seen that positivity and positive messages have a semi-strong impact on the respondents although respondents tend to not go out of their way to obtain these messages. In fact, one of the respondents commented, “I just don't have time to search for inspiration, but I feel like God is slapping me when something shows up in my email or news feed, so I read it,” (Martin, Kevin [Kevin Martin]. “The Importance of Positivity.” 2 Mar. 2016. Facebook.). Another respondent remarked, “Your survey made me realize that I need to look for more positive/inspiring/motivational things in my life. I used to do it alot a couple of years ago,

but since have stopped,” (Martin, Kevin [Kevin Martin]. “The Importance of Positivity.” 2 Mar. 2016. Facebook.).

Fig. 6 explains 50% of respondents stated positive messages have very much of an impact on them while 50% responded with positive messaging having somewhat of an impact upon them. Fifty-eight percent

How much of an impact do positive messages (motivational quotes and photos, inspiring articles, etc.) have on you?

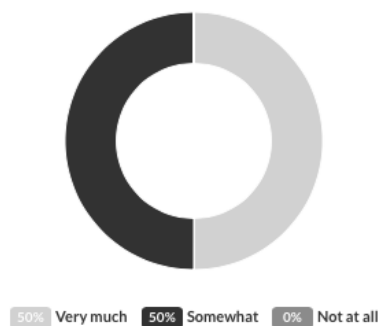


Fig. 6. Survey from Martin, Kevin (Kevin Martin). “How much of an impact do positive messages (motivational quotes and photos, inspiring articles, etc.) have on you?” 2 Mar. 2016. Facebook.

Do you go out of your way to view/read positive quotes?



Fig. 9. Survey from Martin, Kevin (Kevin Martin). "Do you go out of your way to view/read positive messages?" 2 Mar. 2016. Facebook.

Do you go out of your way to view/read poetry?



Fig. 7. Survey from Martin, Kevin (Kevin Martin). "Do you go out of your way to view/read poetry?" 2 Mar. 2016. Facebook.

How often do you search for positive messages?

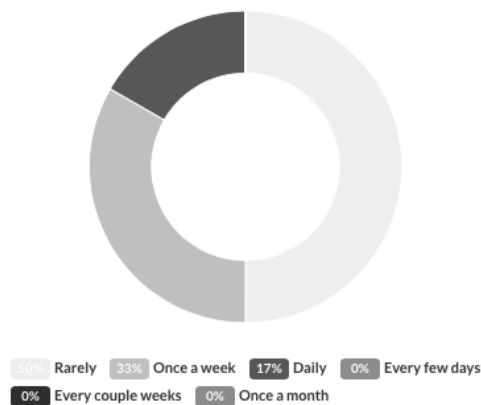


Fig. 10. Survey from Martin, Kevin (Kevin Martin). "Do you consider yourself a positive (optimistic) person?" 2 Mar. 2016. Facebook.

Do you consider yourself a positive (optimistic) person?



Fig. 8. Survey from Martin, Kevin (Kevin Martin). "How often do you search for positive messages?" 2 Mar. 2016. Facebook.

of respondents do not go out of their way to view or read positive quotes (see fig. 7) and 0% go out of their way to view or read poetry (fig. 8). Fig. 9 shows that 50% of respondents rarely search for positive messages, 33.3% search for positive messages once a week, and 16.7% search for positive messages on a daily basis. Fig. 10 shows that 75% of respondents consider themselves to be positive and optimistic individuals while 25% consider themselves not to be. These results align with the results of the Twitter polls where an overall understanding was

gathered with individuals beginning to realize the importance positive messages have upon them but neglecting to actively search for them.

Respondents obtain inspiration through various means as Fig. 11 shows music, photographs/photography, religion/faith/spirituality, and YouTube videos to be the major methods. If individuals could have positive messages delivered to them, 40% would like them via social media and 30% would like them via email according to the major responses in Fig. 12.

What forms of media do you gather inspiration from?



Fig. 11. Survey from Martin, Kevin (Kevin Martin). "What forms of media do you gather inspiration from?" 2 Mar. 2016. Facebook.

If you could have positive messages delivered to you, how would you like to receive them?

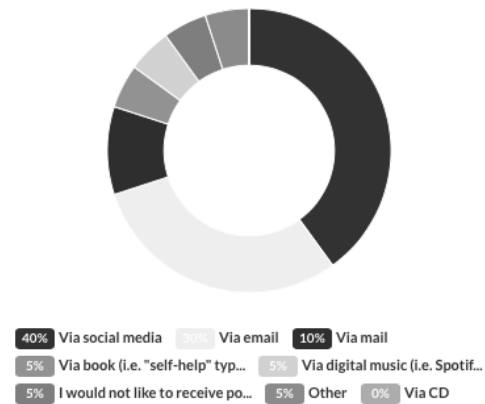


Fig. 12. Survey from Martin, Kevin (Kevin Martin). "If you could have positive messages delivered to you, how would you like to receive them?" 2 Mar. 2016. Facebook.

From the Facebook survey, the following assumption can be made: The general respondent has mixed feelings of positivity upon them and the larger group collectively continues the ambiguous feelings toward positivity and positive messages that are aligned with the Twitter polls.

The last and most popular survey was conducted via SurveyMonkey. In this survey, respondents were asked the exact same ten questions that were proposed in the Facebook poll. These questions were the same as the Facebook poll in both question wording and response wording. The SurveyMonkey survey was promoted on my personal Facebook page where it received shares from several of my friends. The survey was also promoted on my Twitter page

and my professional Facebook page. This Facebook page showcases my inspirational freelance writing and which includes 5,100+ fans who know and understand my viewpoints toward the importance of positivity that is stressed in my work. My professional Facebook page can be found here: <https://www.facebook.com/kevinmartinpoet/>. As a result, the SurveyMonkey survey

received 100 responses.

The average age of the survey

respondents was 33.74 of the 99 individuals who chose to identify their age. Thirty-two of the survey respondents identified as male and 65 survey respondents identified as female,

meaning 32.98% of survey respondents were

male and 67.01% were female. Three survey

respondents chose not to self-identify their self-

identified gender. This refers to one of the

possible downfalls of the survey, seeing as how

respondents could skip questions if they chose

not to answer. The figures related to this survey

show indicate some of the questions had

respondents who chose not to answer for

reasons unknown.

In comparison to the other two research

studies conducted, the respondents to this survey

indicated that positive messages had a generally

How much of an impact do positive messages (motivational quotes and photos, inspiring articles, etc.) have on you?

Answered: 99 Skipped: 1

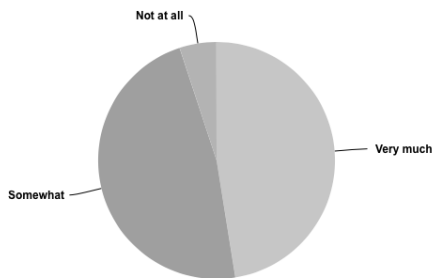


Fig. 13. Survey from Martin, Kevin. "The Importance of Positivity." SurveyMonkey. SurveyMonkey Inc., 1 Mar. 2016. Web. 11 Mar. 2016.

Do you consider yourself a positive (optimistic) person?

Answered: 99 Skipped: 1

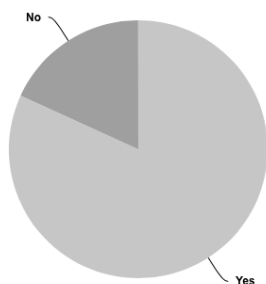


Fig. 14. Survey from Martin, Kevin. "The Importance of Positivity." SurveyMonkey. SurveyMonkey Inc., 1 Mar. 2016. Web. 11 Mar. 2016.

profound impact upon them as 47.47% of respondents stated positive messages very much impacts them and 47.47% of respondents stated positive messages somewhat impacts them. A little more than five percent of respondents stated positive messages have no impact upon them, respectively (see fig. 13). Fig. 14 concludes 81.82% of respondents consider themselves to be positive and

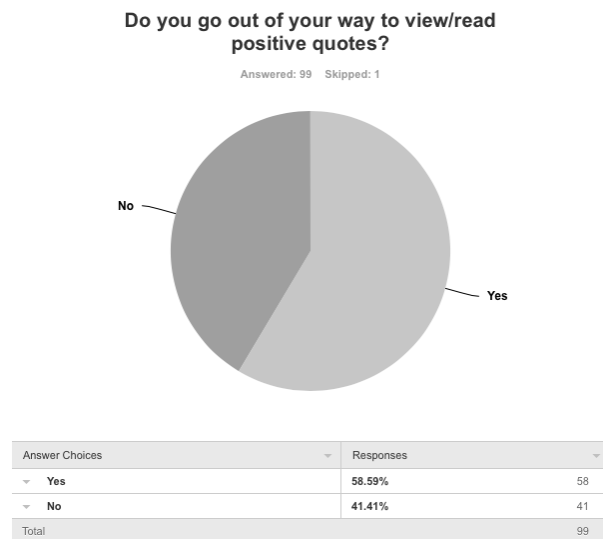


Fig. 15. Survey from Martin, Kevin. "The Importance of Positivity." SurveyMonkey. SurveyMonkey Inc., 1 Mar. 2016. Web. 11 Mar. 2016.

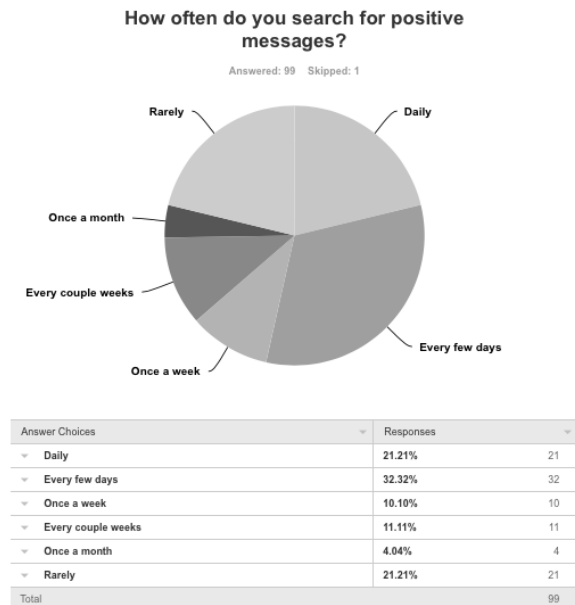


Fig. 16. Survey from Martin, Kevin. "The Importance of Positivity." SurveyMonkey. SurveyMonkey Inc., 1 Mar. 2016. Web. 11 Mar. 2016.

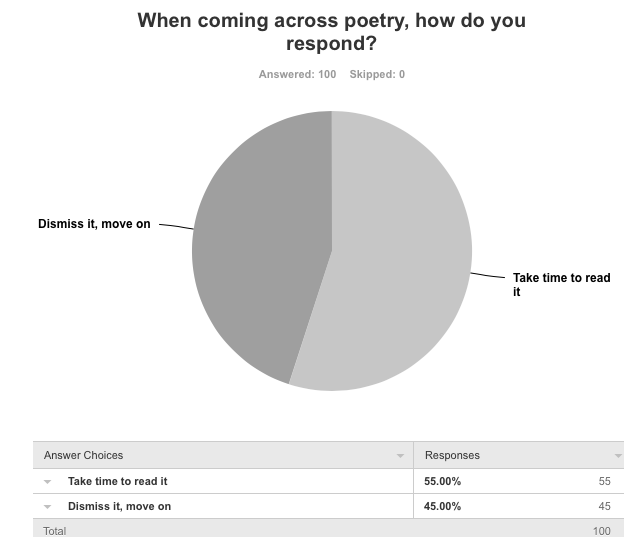


Fig. 17. Survey from Martin, Kevin. "The Importance of Positivity." SurveyMonkey. SurveyMonkey Inc., 1 Mar. 2016. Web. 11 Mar. 2016.

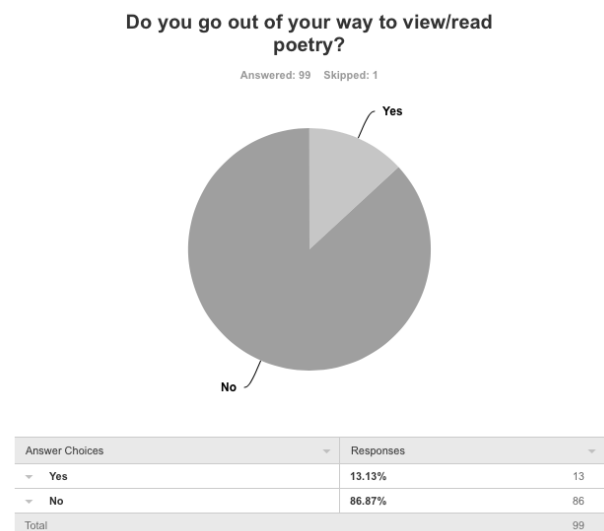


Fig. 18. Survey from Martin, Kevin. "The Importance of Positivity." SurveyMonkey. SurveyMonkey Inc., 1 Mar. 2016. Web. 11 Mar. 2016.

optimistic peoples while 18.18% do not. Nearly 59% of respondents go out of their way to view and read positive quotes (see fig. 15) and 21.21% search for these positive messages on a daily basis (see fig. 16). Figs. 17 and 18 ask about the means of poetry where 55% of respondents take time to view and read poetry when coming across it (see fig. 17) and where only 13.13% will go out of their way to view and read poetry (see fig. 18). It is these responses that indicate we, as a whole, are on the cusp of starting to realize the importance of positivity within and upon us, even though we tend to still not go out of our way to find it.

Understanding Positivity

As alluded to by the studies, positivity is a concept not well understood by our society. Moreover, its importance is not valued even though we in academia are in the process of uncovering its value. In *Pursuing Human Strengths*, Martin Bolt explains, "...optimism confers resistance to distress. A bright outlook fosters well-being. Optimists cope with stressful events, from dealing with unfamiliar environments to major health concerns, more effectively than pessimists," (160-161). If a happy life is a goal yearned for, which we all do, then positivity and optimism is one of the ways to achieve said goal. Through the benefits of optimism, including but not limited to the facts presented by Bolt, positivity is a protective shield against stressful, painful, and difficult life situations. Positivity gives one the armor to protect him or herself against life's stressors, thus proving positive messages are vital to the good of the human experience and to the beneficial thriving of one's life.

Bolt continues, backing up his argument: "Students who entered college with an optimistic outlook handled the new challenges more successfully.... Optimism seems to confer resistance to the development of postpartum depression.... Optimism makes the experience of major surgery less stressful.... Optimism positively affects caregivers' well-being..." (161).

When faced with extremely stressful circumstances, positivity has a tremendously beneficial impact on the situation and the individuals involved in the situation. Imagine, then, the impact positive messages can have on daily life situations. As optimism provides the tools need to protect the well-being of individuals in times of need, the same optimism, presented through positive messages, will be even more beneficial to the increased well-being of individuals when satisfied with life in its current state and when free from difficult, stressful scenarios.

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, authors of “Positive Psychology: An Introduction”, reiterate this perspective, making strong note of positivity’s connection between itself and characteristics of a desired life experience:

One dispositional trait that appears to mediate between external events and a person’s interpretation of them is optimism. This trait includes both little optimism (e.g., “I will find a convenient parking space this evening”) and big optimism (e.g., “Our nation is on the verge of something great”). Christopher Peterson (2000)... considers optimism to involve cognitive, emotional, and motivational components. People high in optimism tend to have better moods, to be more persevering and successful, and to experience better physical health. Pg. 9

Guided with this perspective, positivity’s wealth and the power of optimism can begin to be comprehended. Not only is positivity powerful in its own merit, the mindset of optimism is a determinant for prime health, both physically and mentally. Yet, there is much more that leads to their vital presence within our lives.

Positivity and optimism have a tremendous role in preventing serious injuries and traumas, especially when it comes to those that are affected deeply by emotion. In fact, positive messaging has the ability to prevent and care for mental health conditions. In *Foundations of*

Mental Health Promotion, Sharma, Atri, and Branscum write, “Several factors foster mental health, such as hardiness, sense of coherence, acculturation, social support, optimism, and self-esteem,” (49). The authors explain optimism to be “the tendency to expect the best possible outcome or to think about the most hopeful aspects of any situation,” (Sharma 59). Additionally, the authors teach, “Several studies have linked optimism to better coping and mental health.... Optimism acts by several pathways to ensure better health,” (Sharma 59). These pathways include optimism affecting “a person’s efforts to avoid illness by increasing attention to information about potential health threats”, affecting one’s coping mechanisms in a positive manner, and affecting one’s ability to maintain a “positive mood,” (Sharma 59). These pathways are indications of the power positivity has within and upon us, even if we don’t notice said power directly.

The Negatives of Positivity?

However, as many pessimists allude to, could there be a downfall to optimism? Positivity can’t always be beneficial, can it? Questions such as these reflect arguments made against positivity. Such arguments represent deeply held beliefs that have prevented our society as a whole from adapting a collective mindset of optimism and positivity. In “Positive Psychology: An Introduction,” Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi question:

How does optimism work? How can it be increased? When does it begin to distort reality? These are some of the questions Peterson addresses. As is true of the other authors in this issue, this author is aware that complex psychological issues cannot be understood in isolation from the social and cultural contexts in which they are embedded. Hence, he asks questions such as the following: How does an overly pessimistic culture

affect the well-being of its members? And conversely, does an overly optimistic culture lead to shallow materialism? Pg. 5

Much like any aspect of life, there are ups and downs, positives and negatives, pros and cons that can lead to differing opinions and varying viewpoints upon the same topic. Such relates to optimism and positivity, where one's experiences can shape the perspective held toward the subject. As prompted by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, is there a fine line that walks between the benefits of positivity and the negatives of optimism?

In *Brilliant Positive Psychology*, Charlotte Style explains, "Pessimists and depressed people see things accurately, while optimists are more deluded about their abilities and their control over events. The pessimist sees things 'as they are', but this appears from research to be a disadvantage, whereas the optimist's tinted sunglasses are a great defence in dealing with and responding positively to 'reality'. The pessimist can easily become overwhelmed and defeated but the optimist survives and thrives," (132). Even though pessimists have a vantage point of seeing the world for what it is and how it stands, in conjunction with the problems and obstacles facing them, their negative perspective keeps them held in the realm of negativity, furthering to diminish their emotions, mental health, and physical health in a harmful manner.

The influence negativity has on one's overall health is a concern not only for the individual but for the larger society as well. Negativity coupled with a pessimistic lifestyle can lead to communal issues relating to public health. Agreed to by Emily H. Lin and Christopher Peterson in "Pessimistic explanatory style and response to illness," the authors state:

Subjects who explain bad events pessimistically (with internal, stable, and global causes) reported more frequent illnesses during the past year and rated their overall health more poorly than those who habitually favor external, unstable, and specific explanations.

When ill, the pessimistic subjects were less likely than their optimistic counterparts to take active steps to combat their illness. Our results suggest that one pathway leading from pessimistic explanatory style to poor health is mundane: passivity in the face of disease. Pg. 243

It is this passivity that relates back to the negative attitudes held by pessimistic individuals with a pessimistic mindset, believing there is nothing to be done to improve the situation they are in, no matter what that situation may be. This negative belief then leads to a lack of action and a lack of active participation in solving their issues, furthering the negative experiences they find themselves to be in. As it can be seen, a spiraling, cyclical downfall then has the possibility of occurring, showing the detrimental power a pessimistic mindset can have on an individual and the greater community, advancing the identification of the power of positivity and its ever-increasing need within our lives.

But where exactly do negative mindsets and pessimistic outlooks originate from? How does one find himself with this viewpoint? The reasons why people are pessimistic can be attributed to a variety of influential factors. Pessimism, just like optimism, can be attributed to biology, environment, cultural, and psychosocial factors that combine and interplay with one another to lead to an individual's particular mindset.

Interestingly, however, it is being hypothesized that pessimism can actually be an inspiring and empowering factor behind one's actions. As explained in "Pessimism vs Optimism" by Jeremy Dean, author psychology researcher at University College London, "We all know how difficult it is to predict what's going to happen in the future. Life is always throwing us curveballs and most of us accept that our plans often don't work out. It's not that we're doing anything wrong, just that life is unpredictable. To cope with this unpredictability

some of us choose to think optimistically because it helps motivate us to try, try again. For others a pessimistic mindset performs the same function. By thinking about what might go wrong it helps protect us against when things do go wrong,” (Dean para. 11). The protection and motivation felt by optimists through their positive and bright perspective is similar in foundation to the protection and motivation pessimists find from their perspective. Individuals who value negativity are able to utilize their emotions for matters beneficial for them, serving as their armor from pain, difficulty, and trauma.

For pessimists, pessimism is not seen as a negative force; rather, it is seen as a mode of survival, just as how optimism is a mode of survival for optimists. Dean continues, clarifying:

Being optimistic allows people to pursue their goals in a positive way: to dream a bigger and better dream, which they can work their way towards. Optimists also seem to respond better to positive feedback, and part of being optimistic may be generating this feedback for themselves, i.e. thinking positive thoughts. On the other hand being pessimistic may help people reduce their natural anxiety and to perform better. Also, pessimists seem to respond better to negative feedback. They like to hear what the problems were, so they can correct them. Again, part of why pessimists generate these sorts of negative thoughts is that it helps them perform better. Para. 21-22

Therefore, the foundation to the beliefs held true by pessimists and optimists, whether intentional or unintentional, can be both attributed to factors that empower, inspire, and encourage each to become the best versions of themselves.

Even though optimism and pessimism both have their benefits, is there reason to believe one is better than the other? Are both perspectives apt to receiving and comprehending positive messages for their own greater good? An answer to these questions of such magnitude would be

subjective, reflective of an individual's own unique experiences and mindset that shapes their functioning and the way in which they individually see the world.

From research explained throughout this essay, there is no doubt optimists are affected positively by positive messages, utilizing such messages to empower and inspire them to take action in reaching their goals, their hopes, and their dreams. The optimists and individuals who hold an optimistic viewpoint comprehend positive messages by understanding them as beneficial anthems. On the other hand, the pessimist would hear or see the exact same positive message and would interpret it in a negative manner, focusing on the downfalls of the message's implications instead of the benefits that might result.

However, even though the optimist and the pessimist would interpret the positive messages differently, with the optimist choosing to focus on the "pros" of the message and its outcomes and the pessimist choosing to focus on the "cons" of the message and its outcomes, respectively, the positive message would still be beneficial to both as it would cause both to take action in an empowering manner.

Positive messages encourage optimists to become the best versions of themselves that they possibly can be. This relates to the same experience of pessimists, even with pessimists focusing on the downfalls of the positive message. For example, in "The Positive Power of Negative Thinking," author Adam Grant refers to a recent investigative research study, explaining:

When people are anxious, we sometimes tell them to distract themselves. Once again, this doesn't pay off for defensive pessimists. In another experiment, people completed a questionnaire about their styles, and then took a mental math test that involved adding and subtracting numbers in their heads (like $15 + 47 - 73$). The strategic optimists didn't

benefit from reflecting on possible outcomes, but the defensive pessimists did. When the defensive pessimists distracted themselves with another task right before the math test, their scores were about 25% lower than when they listed the most extreme outcomes that could happen in the test, and how they might feel. Taking time to worry helped them generate the anxiety necessary to motivate themselves. Para. 10

Gathering from Grant's explanation, the understanding of the pessimist's ability to see the downfalls in situations becomes a motivating factor; when it relates back to positive messages, pessimists will interpret them in a negative mindset but will utilize said mindset as a form of guidance for them for the greater good, the exact purpose behind the positive message's conception.

Thus, positive messages need more visibility and exposure in the real world because no matter how one interprets the message, the message will still become an empowering, encouraging, and inspiring motivation for everyone. If a positive message is presented to the optimist, the optimist will find the face-value of the message and utilize the positivity in the message to empower and inspire them. Conversely, if a positive message is presented to the pessimist, the pessimist will analyze the message in a critical manner to find the downfalls and negative aspects of the message and where the message might be misleading the readers into believing the possibility unrealistic. The pessimist will then utilize this understanding as an empowering and inspiring notion for themselves to overcome the negativity of the message. From this perspective, positive messages are beneficial for everyone, no matter the lens through which the message is seen.

The above advocating statement might still be an overly optimistic look at positivity. Even with the above reasons promoting the importance of positivity and positive messages,

millions of us throughout the world remain skeptical because of the possible downfalls brought by excessive positivity. There is a fear surrounding positivity with the conversation relating to the idea that positivity neglects the reality of the world we live in. In “Can Positive Thinking Be Negative?” by Scott O. Lilienfeld and Hal Arkowitz published in *Scientific American*, researchers noted the faults of optimism and positivity:

In a study published in 2009 University of Waterloo psychologist Joanne Wood and her colleagues found that for participants with high self-esteem, repeating a positive affirmation (“I am a lovable person”) multiple times indeed resulted in slightly better moods right afterward. But among those with low self-esteem, the positive affirmations backfired, resulting in worse moods. Wood and her colleagues conjectured that statements like Smalley’s ring hollow in the minds of individuals with low self-esteem, serving only to remind them of how often they have fallen short of their life goals.

Para. 7

The ending statement where positive messages had the effect of showing some individuals “how often they have fallen short of their life goals” is extremely important and needs to be addressed, seeing as how this can deeply affect an individual in a harmful way.

Just as how everything has its ups and downs, positivity and optimism does as well. Therefore, when showcasing and spreading positivity and positive messages, we need to be intentional in the manner in which we are doing so that we can prevent the harms of optimism to distressed populations while still promoting its benefits.

A fine line between the advantages and the disadvantages of positivity has thus been established; learning to walk this balance will be vital to understand when promoting positivity in the future.

A potential of the crossing the line between the advantages and disadvantages of positivity can occur when optimism is taken to a maximum level. Lilienfeld and Arkowitz continue in their argument, stating:

Another potential hitch in the positive-thinking movement is that a sanguine attitude may be unhealthy when taken to an extreme, because it can become unhinged from reality. In a 2000 article University of Michigan psychologist Christopher Peterson, a founder of the positive psychology movement, distinguished realistic optimism, which hopes for the best while remaining attuned to potential threats, from unrealistic optimism, which ignores such threats. A 2007 study... found that although extremely happy people are the most successful in close interpersonal relationships and volunteer work, moderately happy people are more successful than extremely happy people financially and educationally and are also more politically active.... their findings raise the possibility that although a realistically positive attitude toward the world often helps us to achieve certain life goals, a Pollyannaish attitude may have its costs—perhaps because it fosters complacency. Para. 9

With the above studies indicating “realistic optimism” and “a realistically positive attitude toward the world” being more beneficial to and more productive for individuals than optimism and positivity of extreme levels, it could be inferred that positive messages would be beneficial and productive to the typical individuals nonetheless, as long as the message is presented in moderation and within a respectable manner of an appropriate amount.

The benefits to positivity continue to be noted, but limits to positivity certainly exist. In weighing the good against the bad, both sides to the argument can be seen, recognized, and understood. Making this comparison, it is explained:

Positive thinking surely comes with advantages: it may encourage us to take needed risks and expand our horizons. But it has downsides as well and may not be for everyone, especially those for whom worrying and kvetching come naturally as coping mechanisms. Moreover, positive thinking may be counterproductive if it leads us to blithely ignore life's dangers. Finally, as journalist Barbara Ehrenreich warns in a 2009 book, the pervasive assumption that positive attitudes permit us to "think our way out of" illnesses such as cancer has an unappreciated dark side: it may lead people who fail to recover from these illnesses to blame themselves for not being more chipper. Para. 8

Positive messages are undoubtedly beneficial, but in times of strife and pain, they hold the possibility of becoming harmful in their implementation. To prevent this from occurring, we must be intentional in the where, the when, the why, the who, and the how through which we are spreading the positive messages and the positivity that we desire to share.

Hesitations with positivity continue with a possible fear that an attitude of strong optimism leads to a feeling of immunity, thus not preparing individuals for potentially harmful, threatening, and stressful situations. In "Does Unrealistic Optimism Change Following a Negative Experience?", researchers Frank P. McKenna and Ian P. Albery write, "The widespread prevalence of unrealistically optimistic risk perceptions has prompted a concern that self-protective behavior across a wide domain of behavior may remain low as long as people perceive themselves to be relatively invulnerable to threat," (qtd. 1146). The concern presented is one possible factor leading skeptics away from adapting a mindset of positivity and optimism, subsequently neglecting the need for positive messages within their lives.

Even if individuals maintain a spirit of strong optimism, it is doubtful that they will become completely blind to the threat posed by harms and dangers that are apparent in everyday

culture. In fact, as previous research in my arguments have indicated, many people who rely on optimism, positivity, and positive messages have learned to value them as a result of a harmful experience or number of experiences that have affected them and their emotions in a negative manner. Therefore, it is likely individuals will carry with them the lessons learned of the painful experiences they once endured, thus being able to recognize possible signs that would lead to threatening and harmful situations in the future.

I agree with McKenna and Albery's continued statement where the pair explain, "The problem that remains is that for some particular behaviors, the majority of people do not generally perceive themselves to be at risk," (1146). This presents a concern we need to be aware of, in case individuals are finding themselves with such a mindset. Therefore, as stated previously, we continually need to be intentional in our presentation of positive messages to ensure they are received as beneficially for everyone as possible.

Still, the assets toward positivity and positive messages continue. Their wealth and importance to our hearts, our minds, our souls, our spirits, and our overall health and wellness cannot be overstated.

Positivity's beneficial impact importantly extends to individuals who suffer from a variety of mental health conditions and illnesses; therefore, positive messages ranging in levels of optimism will yield benefits to mental health sufferers. Positivity and subsequent messages rooted in positivity can be used as means of prevention for such illnesses and conditions as well as treating conditions that are already affecting individuals' lives and emotions. In "What (And Why) Is Positive Psychology," authors Gable and Haidt write, "As positive psychology finds its way into prevention and therapy, techniques that build positive traits will become commonplace. Psychologists have good reason to believe that techniques that build positive traits and positive

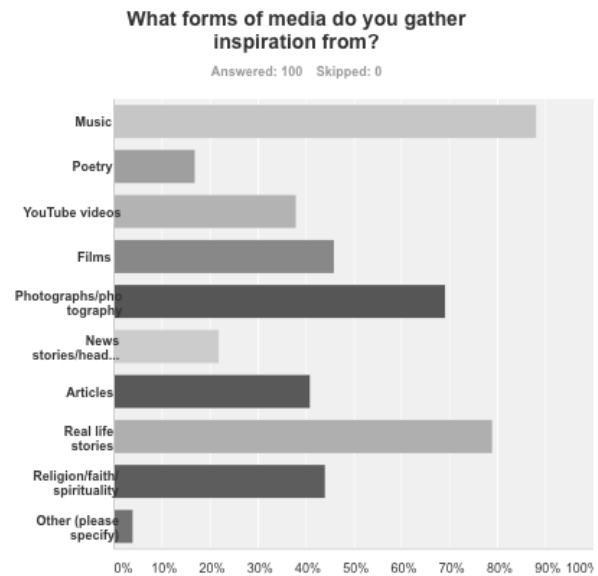
subjective experiences work, both in therapy and perhaps more importantly in prevention. Building optimism, for example, prevents depression,” (qtd. 12). The power positivity has to prevent mental illnesses and serve as a method of therapy for those currently diagnosed with them is a critical notion of its need throughout society, seeing as how mental health advocacy is more important than ever with increasing numbers of mental health diagnoses reaching heightened amounts worldwide. As methods of treatment are constantly being sought after, positivity might become one that is the best prescribed. The reframing of one’s mind to take an objective look at the good of life, the purpose of pain, and the beauty of blessings encourages self-reflection, self-coping, and self-understanding, all of which are empowering facets of positivity extracted from positive messages, therefore allowing one to adjust their mindset to an optimistic perspective.

The importance of preventing mental illness is stated in *Community Mental Health*: “Further and continued research is needed to identify public health practices that identify risk and protective factors for mental health problems that are effective preventive interventions that may block the emergence of severe illnesses and effective ways to actively promote good mental health,” (qtd. in Ritter 22). Positive messages serve as one of the very exact “effective preventive interventions” that “promote good mental health” as the above research has shown. Thus, positive messages need to increase in prevalence, visibility, and attention that we allow them to have in society because they play such an integral role to our overall health and wellbeing, even if we do not overtly realize the direct impact they have upon us.

Modes of Positive Messages

Though we know positive messages have an imperative importance to us and the world, there is little research that shows the best methods to which positive messages can be received.

However, my own individual research shows that a variety of methods are utilized by people as means to receive positive messages. Fig. 11 refers to the question in my Facebook poll in which I asked, “What forms of media do you gather inspiration from?” Survey participants responded with finding the most inspiration in music, photographs/photography, religion/faith/spirituality, YouTube videos, and real life stories. Fewer number of participants reported finding inspiration in films and poetry, respectively. Fig. 19 refers to the asking of the same question, this time in the SurveyMonkey survey which gathered a larger number of respondents. Eighty-eight



Answer Choices	Responses
Music	88.00% 88
Poetry	17.00% 17
YouTube videos	38.00% 38
Films	46.00% 46
Photographs/photography	69.00% 69
News stories/headlines	22.00% 22
Articles	41.00% 41
Real life stories	79.00% 79
Religion/faith/spirituality	44.00% 44
Other (please specify)	4.00% 4
Total Respondents: 100	

Fig. 19. Survey from Martin, Kevin. “The Importance of Positivity.” SurveyMonkey. SurveyMonkey Inc., 1 Mar. 2016. Web. 11 Mar. 2016.

percent of respondents gather inspiration from music, 79% gather inspiration from real life stories, and 69% gather inspiration from photographs/photography. Respondents also gain inspiration through films, religion/faith/spirituality, and YouTube videos with fewer utilizing news stories/headlines and poetry as inspirational means. Four “Other” responses were gathered where

individuals identified text messages and podcasts as modes of inspiration (Martin, Kevin. “The Importance of Positivity.” *SurveyMonkey*.).

In both of the surveys, I additionally asked the question, “If you could have positive messages delivered to you, how would you like to receive them?” This question was asked identically in each survey mode. In the Facebook survey (see Fig. 12), 40% of participants would like to receive positive messages through social media, 30% through email, and 10% via mail. In lower numbers, participants also identified digital music (i.e. Spotify, Apple Music, etc.), book (i.e. ‘self-help’ type publication), and “in person” as additional means. Five percent of respondents indicated they would not like to receive positive messages at all.

Through the SurveyMonkey survey, 73% of respondents selected social media as one of the main ways through which they would like to receive positive messages (see fig. 20). Forty-one percent would like to receive positive messages through email, 26% through digital music (i.e. Spotify, Apple Music, etc.), and 16% through mail. Smaller respondent numbers chose books (i.e. ‘self-help’ type publications) and CDs as positive message methods, respectively. Nine percent of respondents indicated they would not like to receive positive messages and write-in responses of “daily positive texts” and “podcasts” were identified as means through which individuals would like to obtain positive messages as well (Martin, Kevin. “The Importance of Positivity.” *SurveyMonkey*.). One respondent wrote, “I am happiest when I 'hear' [oral] positive messages,” indicating word-of-mouth as a powerful source of inspiration (Martin, Kevin. “The Importance of Positivity.” *SurveyMonkey*.).

These results show a multitude of methods through which inspiration is gained and received. Perhaps there is not one universal method for everyone; since each of us has unique interests, we tend to find inspiration, positivity, and positive messages across different outlets.

Even more so, the research indicated that we individually find inspiration through a number of outlets rather than only through one. Since the questions were open-ended and allowed for multiple responses, survey participants chose more than one response, leading to the conclusion that we utilize several means for receiving positive messages. Therefore, it is vital and necessary for each of us to discover the methods we enjoy and prefer the most in order to receive the positivity we need.

Future Research

Future research considerations would be able to advance the knowledge of this essay to provide for further understanding of the importance of positivity and positive messages upon each of us and upon our society as a whole. I would like to continue this research and similar study into my graduate career to identify the best means through which we can achieve global positivity and positive messaging to make the world a better place for all. By expanding the research surveys in question length; opening respondents to larger groups; and specifically studying groups such as but not limited to characteristics of race/ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, mental health conditions, religion, geographic location, disability, age, education level, socioeconomic status, etc., we can identify how each are affected by positivity

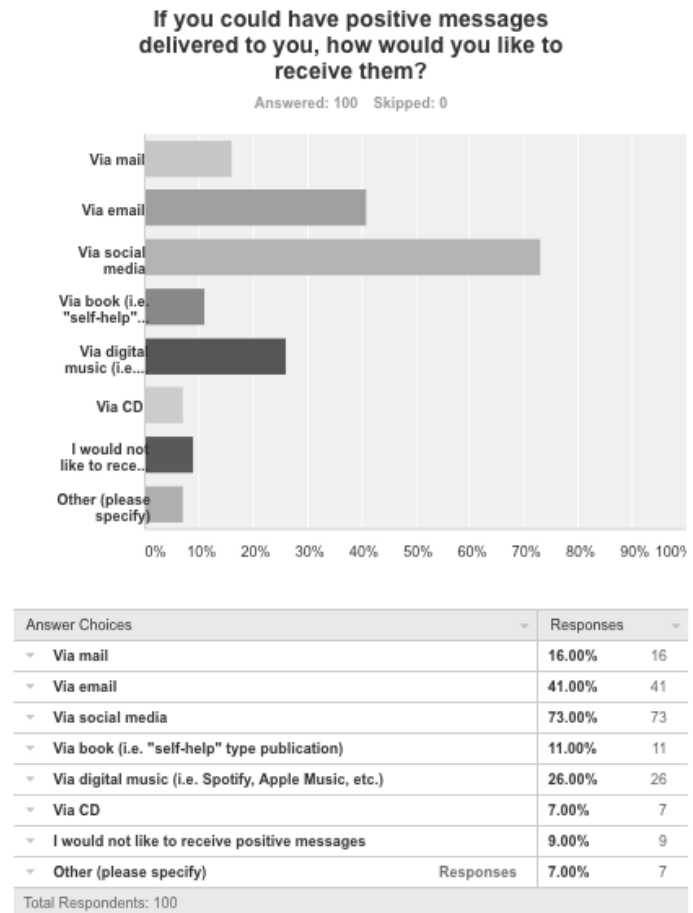


Fig. 20.. Survey from Martin, Kevin. "The Importance of Positivity." SurveyMonkey. SurveyMonkey Inc., 1 Mar. 2016. Web. 11 Mar. 2016.

and can therefore learn how to intentionally share positive messages with them in the best manners possible. As future research is collected, I would like to publish and share my findings with the academic community for a greater cultural understanding of positivity's importance.

Conclusion

Positive messages have undefinable importance to each and every one of us. Positivity is able to instantly lift our mood, reset our attitude, provide us with lasting hope, and present us with meaningful emotions of love and peace as stated, "The recent movement in positive psychology strives toward an understanding of the complete human condition, an understanding that recognizes human strengths as clearly as it does human frailties and that specifies how the two are linked. Only a balanced, empirically grounded, and theoretically rich view of human experience can fulfill the mission of our field..." (Gable 109). Positive messages have the ability to transform us and who we are, in a single moment, to change our lives and our worlds even if we do not overtly realize it.

Relating to positivity is the optimistic mindset, viewpoint, and life perspective from which one can approach life and all of life's adventures. Optimism's purpose is ever expanding. Orienting oneself with such a perspective can yield the aforementioned benefits of positivity as well as improving one's mental health, an additional benefit that is provided by positive messages too.

Individuals who suffer from mental health conditions and illnesses find treatment and therapeutic benefits through positive messages and optimistic mindsets thanks to the inspiration established in positivity. Those who are interested in protecting their mental health find assistance in positive messages, positivity, and optimism for each serve as preventative measures to improve and maintain sufficient overall health. The benefits of each carry into preventing

physical health conditions, thus marking a distinct connection between positivity and optimal health.

Oppositely, there are concerns with overarching positivity. A negative mindset of pessimism can actually act as a motivator for some individuals. Additionally, pessimism can reflect a more realistic mindset, according to some theorists and researchers who argue that optimism negates the reality of the life experience. Some are also concerned that an extensive optimistic belief will prevent one from realizing potential threats, harms, and dangers. However, each of the arguments against the positivity perspective can be rebutted by the overwhelming benefits to positive messages and optimistic mindsets.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that positivity is essential to a happy, meaningful, purpose-filled life. Positivity provides an abundance of hope, love, and peace for everyone, from the individual level to the global society, and positive messages are the gateway through which positivity is born. Positive messages can take shape through music, photographs/photography, religion/faith/spirituality, YouTube videos, films, real life stories, books, poetry, news stories/headlines, articles, and podcasts: There is no limit to their form. Additionally, positive messages can be discovered through a variety of outlets, including but not limited to social media, email, mail, books, digital music, and CDs as the list continues. Research shows that individuals obtain their positivity through a multitude of such positive message outlets and in through several different forms.

Thus, a result has surfaced: We are in endless pursuit of positivity. Why? Because we are beginning to realize we need it. As a collective culture and as a whole society, we are beginning to understand the importance positivity has upon our lives and we are beginning to actively search for such positivity and positive messages of optimism, inspiration, hope, peace, and love.

While research shows we are together in the beginning stages of this understanding, our mindsets are beginning to shift to where we are learning the beneficial impact positive messages have upon us. Therefore, visibility toward positive messages needs to increase as a whole.

We, as a society and as collective cultures, need to respect positivity and positive messages along with their distinctly similar impacts upon us to continue to shine light on their need within our global world. There is no limit to the good positive messages can provide, so we should be in endless pursuit of positive message promotion to continue to spread said “good” worldwide. The sharing of positive messages will broadcast their benefits to the world, helping everyone who is in need of love and up-lifting.

Consider this: After posting an inspirational message on social media, I received this message from a dear friend: “Hi Kevin! Sometimes your Facebook and Instagram posts and quotes are so helpful. It’s nice when I’m having a bad day, scrolling through Instagram, and seeing a post that makes me feel loved!! Just wanted to let you know. Keep doing you !” (Russell).

It is not always known how positivity, optimism, and positive messages can impact others throughout the world. Therefore, we shall always pursue and promote them with proper intention. In doing so, we might just make the world a more loving and peaceful place for all.

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