

Pitfalls of Positive Thinking

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newwave@tulane.edu

"I'm here to speak out against positive thinking," author Barbara Ehrenreich proclaimed Wednesday (March 24) night as the Newcomb College Institute's Spring 2010 Powerhouse Speaker. Ehrenreich's lecture focused on her newest book, *Bright-sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking has Undermined America*.



Barbara Ehrenreich, right, prepares to take the podium for her talk in the Newcomb College Institute's Powerhouse Speaker Series. (Photo by Cheryl Gerber)

The author, who also wrote *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy* made it clear that she is *not* against having a nice day or smiling at strangers. "So you can't call me a sourpuss, because I wrote the book on joy," she said to the standing-room-only crowd at the Lavin-Bernick Center on the Tulane uptown campus.

Ehrenreich first encountered the positive thinking phenomenon when she was diagnosed with breast cancer nine years ago. She was bombarded with "this mandatory optimism ? that you should think, talk and feel positive," she said. "There I was in 2001 being told essentially that if I did not survive my cancer it would be my own fault because I did not think positive enough. I had two diseases. One was cancer, and one was a bad attitude."

The positive-thinking ideology also exists in corporations and evangelical churches, she said, where the messages are "your misfortune is an opportunity" and "God wants you to be rich."

The best alternative is not negative thinking, Ehrenreich said. She prefers realism.

"There never would have been a women's movement in the 1970s if we subscribed to positive thinking," she said. "We did something different. We listened to each other. We found out the cause of the problem and we set out to change it. You can be motivated by anger. You can be motivated by determination. You can be motivated even if you don't think you can win."

The Newcomb College Institute's [Powerhouse Speaker Series](#) has brought lecturers to campus such as publisher/activist Gloria Steinem and environmentalist C line Cousteau.

Tammy C. Barney is the external affairs officer for the Newcomb College Institute.