Supporting Interview Readiness by Building a Positive Mindset

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Abstract

To address client-reported anxiety and self-doubt during interviews, a training was developed for the Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES) Career Services at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). The purpose of this article is to describe a literature review of five peer-reviewed sources (2011-2024), including a meta-analysis, which supports the effectiveness of building a positive mindset by using affirmations and power poses. This review also validated the relevance of a 2024 interview coaching video that emphasized the role of positivity in interview performance. The training objectives were: 1) explain why a positive mindset is beneficial during the interview process, 2) identify how affirmations build a positive mindset, and 3) assess how power posing builds positive mindsets. Pop culture examples were included to enhance engagement. Final training was presented to DRES Career Services staff and clients, and a video version was available on the DRES Career Services website. Further research and review of training evaluations could improve the identification of best practices for preparing clients for interviews.

Keywords: interview readiness, positive mindset, affirmations, power poses, social work training

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Introduction

DRES (Disability Resources and Educational Services) Career Services provides clients with job coaching on how to respond to interview questions. However, clients reported feeling anxious about applying what they had learned. To address clients' needs, a comprehensive research process was undertaken to identify evidence-based strategies to increase their confidence. The use of a positive mindset was identified as critical to improving the interview process. A positive mindset is "the tendency to focus on the bright side, expect positive results, and approach challenges with a positive outlook" (Ackerman, 2018, p. 4). The research was then developed into an agency training that improves clients' interview readiness by building a positive mindset through affirmations and power poses.

Methods

The research process began with investigative searches on Google using key search terms such as ('interview success' and 'interview preparation'). Positivity emerged as a recurring central theme on how to improve confidence during interviews. Sipes' 2024 video, *"Positivity in Job Interviews,"* was selected because it addressed how positivity prepares interviewees to approach negative questions, such as how they navigated a toxic environment while appearing calm, competent, and confident.

Next, a formal literature search was conducted in EBSCOhost and Google Scholar. Key search terms included ('positivity,' 'positive mindset,' 'affirmations'), and ('power poses'). The search terms were inspired by the author's prior exploration of explanatory styles from the field of positive psychology, experience using affirmations, and familiarity with Cuddy's (2012) TED Talk on body language (Beal, 2021).

Five peer-reviewed articles were selected for inclusion in training development: one focused on positive mindsets (Saraswati et al., 2024), one on affirmations (Cascio et al., 2016), two on affirmations as part of motivational interviewing (Arbuckle et al., 2020; Flinn & Jones, 2011), and one was a meta-analytic review of the effectiveness of power poses (Körner et al., 2022). Three central themes emerged while examining the five peer-reviewed articles: 1) positive mindsets can help individuals manage stress, 2) affirmations and power poses can build positive mindsets and self-confidence, and 3) despite criticism regarding the effectiveness of power posing, a meta-analytic review concluded its statistical significance.

To create engaging handouts and presentation materials for the training, an additional Google search was conducted. Key search phrases, such as ('benefits of positive mindsets,' 'examples of power poses,' 'how to use affirmations,' 'dangers of catastrophizing'), and ('debate on power posing effectiveness'), were used. Of the eight sources referenced, two contained information on a positive mindset's ability to reduce stress (Ackerman, 2018; Mayo Clinic, 2023), two were on how to use affirmations (Davis, 2024; Moore, 2019), one was on catastrophizing (Allstate, 2025), two gave examples of power posing (Calm, 2024; Sudeikis et al., 2021), and one reported on the debate of power posing's effectiveness (Elsesser, 2020). These informal (pop culture) sources complemented peer-reviewed literature to create engaging, relatable, and memorable training. These engaging resources allowed the training to demonstrate the benefits of applying research during interview preparation in a low-stress manner.

Results

Theme 1: Positive Mindsets' Effect on Stress

A positive mindset reduces stress by helping individuals focus on how their strengths can help them meet challenges. Individuals with a positive mindset display a willingness to learn and

acknowledge areas that require improvement. They believe in their ability to cope; they are more likely to engage in problem-solving, seek help, and view setbacks as opportunities for recovery and learning (Saraswati et al., 2024). Additionally, "Positive thinking helps in reducing the levels of cortisol, a stress hormone, which in turn helps in managing anxiety more effectively" (Saraswati et al., 2024, p. 1). Therefore, individuals with a positive mindset are psychologically and physiologically preparing themselves to successfully manage stress. After completing the training, DRES clients will be ready to face the stressful event of interviewing.

According to the Mayo Clinic (2023), maintaining a positive mindset correlates with an individual's practice of engaging in positive self-talk. Self-talk is the constant, inner voice in a person's mind that either encourages or sabotages them. A culturally relevant example is a 2025 Allstate commercial demonstrating the catastrophic effect of the inner voice saying you are "pathetic" versus "athletic." Negative thoughts drive behavior incongruent with an individual's abilities, resulting in subpar performance. In contrast, an individual who maintains a positive mindset will have an inner voice encouraging them to use their strengths to face their current situation. Likewise, a job candidate is better prepared to answer interview questions when their self-talk reflects their strengths.

Theme 2: Affirmations and Power Poses Contribution to Positive Mindsets

Affirmations and power poses can be used together to build a positive mindset by fostering productive internal thought patterns and promoting positive body language. Affirmations facilitate positive self-talk, while power poses positively influence an individual's feelings and behavior (Elsesser, 2020; Mayo, 2023). To meet the training's objectives and support clients' self-reported anxiety about interviews, handouts (Figures 1 and 2) were created and presented to help clients build positive mindsets through practicing these techniques.

Understanding Affirmations Use in Interviewing

Affirmations, the self-talk that functions as a personal cheerleader, help reduce stress, build self-confidence, and enhance an interviewee's ability to believe in their capacity to answer questions and remain focused on their strengths. Affirmations "don't make our thoughts come true. Rather, they help us think in ways that make our lives better" (Davis, 2024, p. 1). Affirmations improve our ability to think critically because they "can restore self-competence by allowing individuals to reflect on sources of self-worth, such as core values" (Cascio et al., 2016, p. 621). When an individual has high self-confidence, their mind has an improved capacity to think critically and draw upon past experiences to answer interview questions. Affirmations cannot manifest an outcome, such as a successful job interview, but they can lead to beliefs and actions (e.g., the ability to communicate engaging stories that convey competency) that support a client's goals.

While affirmations are popular in self-help books, they are also "an empirically supported clinical method to help individuals make behavioral changes to achieve a personal goal" (Arbuckle et al., 2020, p. 1; Moore, 2019). Affirmations represent the 'A' in OARS (open-ended questions, affirmations, reflective listening, and summarizations), a key tool in Motivational Interviewing, an evidence-based technique for helping clients change behaviors (Flinn & Jones, 2011). The key to successfully using affirmations in interview preparation is to help the client create an authentic inner voice that reminds them of their strengths and why they are worthy of the interview opportunity.

Understanding Power Pose Use in Interviewing

Power posing, engaging in an expansive rather than constrictive body posture, facilitates positive non-verbal body language that conveys attentiveness, engagement, and openness during

an interview. It promotes a client's ability to 'act into confidence' and is associated with stress reduction through hormone regulation (Cuddy, 2012). Since gaining prominence in Cuddy's 2012 TED Talk, power posing has become part of pop culture through various sources, ranging from stress management apps to popular television shows (Calm, 2024; Sudeikis et al., 2021). While holding expansive poses (Figure 2) can be awkward during interviews, they can be adapted to fit individuals' needs: Clients can sit tall, maintain eye contact, and use expressive hand gestures to demonstrate openness, enthusiasm, and trustworthiness.

Theme 3: Effectiveness of Power Posing

While both affirmations and power poses have gained mainstream attention, power posing has often been dismissed as pseudoscience. In response to critics, researchers have continued to publish study results on how power posing can change behaviors and moods to achieve intended outcomes (Elsesser, 2020; Körner et al., 2022). Like affirmations, power posing will not guarantee that interviewees succeed, but it can enhance an individual's ability to make a favorable impression and increase their chances of achieving their employment goals.

Conclusion

This literature review demonstrates that developing a positive mindset through affirmations and power poses can help clients achieve their career goals by reducing their anxiety and self-doubt during interviews. The objective of demonstrating why a positive mindset is beneficial during the interview process was addressed by examining how building confidence and reducing stress improve a client's ability to present as capable, competent, and trustworthy, thus improving their professional opportunities. Affirmations and power posing were also evaluated for their ability to promote psychological and physical readiness to engage in a positive mindset and achieve improved interview performance.

One key limitation of this review is that results will vary because interviews are subject to many variables. By identifying variables, such as artificial intelligence (AI) based interviews, as opportunities, practitioners can better coach clients on using affirmations and power poses. Through continued research and application of these methods, practitioners can improve their ability to empower clients with the resources they need to achieve their career goals. Further research could be conducted to determine the effectiveness of positive mindsets during interviewing by comparing results pre- and post-training in AI-based interviews.

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Figure 1

Affirmation Training Handout

Intro to Affirmations: By Wyatt Beal

DRES Career Services

What's an affirmation?[1]
- "Affirmations are statements that we say to ourselves that can shift our minds in ways that can make us feel better about ourselves and our lives. They don't make our thoughts come true. Rather, they help us think in ways that make our lives better."

How do affirmations help create a positive mindset?[2]
- Practiced in positive psychology
  - Retraining your brain
- Increase your levels of self esteem
  - Emphasize your strengths and capabilities
- Decrease your level of stress
  - Overcome doubts

Examples of affirmations to use during interview prep (align each to your career goals):[2]
- I am qualified for this [your industry/desired position] job
- I am proud of my accomplishments as a [your major/previous positions]
- I am growing professionally everyday

Examples of affirmations that work for me:
- #1:_____
- #2:_____
- #3:_____

Tips on how to practice affirmations:[2]
- Use your affirmations regularly (make a habit of bringing them up)
- Add emphasis and emotion into how you say them (act into believing)
- Make sure the affirmations are authentic to you (highlight the real you)

Sources:
1. https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/click-here-for-happiness/202105/a-guide-to-affirmations-and-how-to-use-them
2. https://positivepsychology.com/daily-affirmations/

Figure 2

Power Poses Training Handout