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GC7404

Research Proposal:

BUILDING WOMEN'S SELF-ESTEEM IN THE WORKPLACE:
AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH

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Abstract

Given the weak representation of women beyond middle management across most professions, many organizations are focusing on women's leadership development. The programs being implemented are primarily aimed at building career self-efficacy in order to facilitate women's professional success. However, women continue to struggle to rise above the 'glass ceiling', citing self-esteem as one of the key issues they face through all stages of their careers. It appears that the cognitive approach of building workplace competence is not adequately empowering women to rise to top positions within their organizations; in fact, without addressing the implicit attitudes of the self in memory, it may be leading to a fragile form of high self-esteem that is detrimental for both the individual and the organization. Positive psychology, with its central concern to help individuals and organizations flourish, has yet to address this discrepancy.

This study attempts to do so by taking an integrative approach to self-esteem formation and functioning. In a longitudinal experimental design that uses a quantitative method of data collection, two groups of working women of 50 participants each will take part in a 4 week online course called Building Confidence in the Workplace (BCW) that will address both the cognitive and the affective components of self-esteem. Findings will offer insight into whether building congruence between conscious and non-conscious feelings of self-worth will help women build long lasting optimal self-esteem that is reciprocally related to authenticity, and a driver of intrapersonal creativity, interpersonal empathy and organizational success. If it is indeed so, this approach will be a timely introduction of affect in the workplace setting, despite

its long-standing entrustment to the therapeutic industry, since the majority of individuals with low self-esteem lie in the non-clinical population.

Introduction

Despite great strides that women have made in the western workplace, their representation in top corporate leadership positions remains remarkably low and stagnant across most professions (Darnell & Gadiesh, 2013, Tinsley, 2012). In fact, the projected trend indicates that it could be many decades before women achieve gender parity in corporate officer position (Catalyst, n.d.). As such, numerous vocational interventions are in place, some with a psychological research backing, that aim to enhance women's professional development (e.g. Betz & Schifano, 2000; Sullivan & Mahalik, 2000). These programs are based on Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1999), and aim to build career self-efficacy, broadly defined as "confidence in one's ability to manage career development and work-related tasks" (Lopez & Snyder, 2003, p. 110), on the premise that career self-efficacy leads to self-esteem (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991) and occupational success (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001; Flores & O'Brien, 2002). However, given that women cite self-esteem and authenticity as some of the greatest barriers to their professional growth (Kay and Shipman, 2014; O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005), it appears that this approach needs readdressing.

A review of self-esteem literature points to two opposing views of self-esteem formation and functioning that may underlie this dissonance. As such, a better understanding of the construct of self-esteem, its development, its components and its consequences justifies further

scientific inquiry. This proposal attempts to do so, by first explaining the two psychological models of self-esteem, the components that underlie each model, and the consequences of a singular focus on self-efficacy. It then discusses the psychological research and implications of building optimal self-esteem (Kernis, 2003), the issues that raises for organizations and the impact of an integrative approach to self-esteem, especially from a positive psychology perspective. The remainder of the proposal will consist of the research framework of the study, the methodology it will undertake, the risk assessment involved and a plan for disseminating the findings.

A Better Understanding of Self-esteem

Despite its widespread usage both in academic and non-academic circles, the term self-esteem is used to refer to one of three conceptually distinct and highly correlated constructs by different academic psychologists (Brown & Marshall, 2006). Further difference of opinion lies in how each of these constructs of Global Self-Esteem, Feelings of Self-Worth and Self-Evaluations are related to each other.

The cognitive approach to self-esteem assumes that global self-esteem results from the rational judgments that individuals make of their momentarily salient knowledge about the self, and dependent on the quality of evaluative feedback they receive (Crocker & Park, 2004; Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). As such, "positive beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1997, p. 3) arise from external feedback and lead to increased feelings of self-worth and global self-esteem (Brown &

Marshall, 2006). (Figure 1)

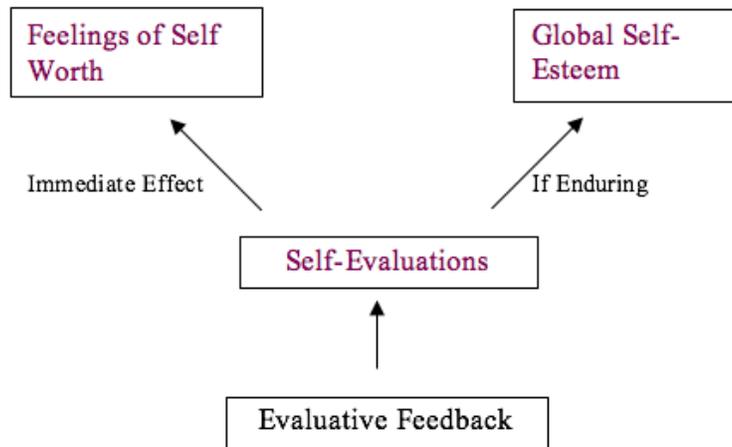


Figure 1. A Cognitive (Bottom-Up) Model of Self-Esteem Formation and Functioning by J. D. Brown and M. A. Marshall, 2006.

The affective approach, on the other hand, takes the view that self-esteem is a relatively stable construct that develops early on in life *before* the capability to self-evaluate and form judgments about the self, and is thus independent of rational processes and uninfluenced by evaluative feedback (Brown, 1998). In this view, self-esteem is the affective valence felt towards the self, and results from the “internal working model” formed through early childhood attachments (Bowlby, 1969). This global view of the self plays a key role in the self-evaluations individuals develop, and the feelings of self-worth they go on to experience (Brown, Dutton, & Cook, 2001; Brown & Marshall, 2001, 2002). (Figure 2)

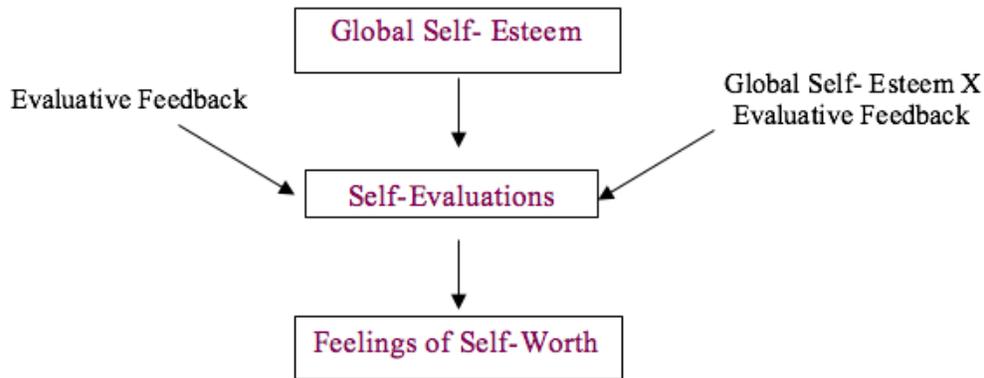


Figure 2. An Affective (Top-Down) Model of Self-Esteem Formation and Functioning by J. D. Brown and M. A. Marshall, 2006.

Brown and Marshall (2006) argue that cognitive models fail to account for the fact that individuals can feel good about themselves while lacking any objective indicators to support positive qualities, and that rationally acknowledging their positive attributes does not always make them feel particularly worthy. As such, self-esteem and self-evaluations may relate to different aspects of one's life (Bernishon, Cook, & Brown, 2003), and it would be worth understanding the consequences of addressing one without the other.

The Consequences of a Cognitive Approach

Focusing on career self-efficacy as a way of building self-esteem is based on the cognitive model, and can result in an inconsistency between implicit and explicit feelings of self-worth, especially when early affective experiences fail to harbor feelings of belonging or mastery (Hoare, 2002; Matas, Arend, & Stroufe, 1978). This gap gives rise to Fragile High Self-Esteem (FSE; Kernis, 2003), marked by underlying, and often unconscious feelings of low self-worth

despite holding a favorable view of one's abilities (Kernis, 2000). It shows up as defensiveness and a misrepresentation of true feelings (Kernis & Paradise, 2002), an obsession with outcome in self-esteem dependent domains (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001; Deci & Ryan, 1995), and an instability in emotional response due to thinking errors (Kernis, Paradise, Whitaker, Wheatman & Goldman, 2000). As such, negative feedback or failure can lead to a self-defeating emotional, cognitive and/or behavioral response (Brown, 1998).

Furthermore, FSE has organizational consequences, given that the way an individual evaluates or feels about themselves reflects their interactions with people and their environment (Baumeister, 1993; Baumeister & Leary, 1995). People with fragile high self-esteem appear to respond in ways strikingly similar to narcissists resulting from self-protective and self-aggrandizing strategies to mask underlying insecurities (Kernis, 2003). FSE is especially detrimental for women in the workplace where they face the double bind of competence and likeability (Bilimoria & Piderit, 2007; Catalyst, 2007). In displaying their abilities and competence, they are often seen as "bossy" and disliked as a result, further perpetuating unaddressed feelings of low self-esteem given that women tend to experience increased self-esteem through relational interdependence (Brown & Marshall, 2006; Heatherton, Wyland, & Lopez, 2003; Josephs, Markus, & Taforodi, 1992).

Introducing an Affective Approach in the Workplace

Kernis and Goldman (2006) have identified another form of high self-esteem called Optimal Self-Esteem (OSE) where people's favorable feelings about themselves are aligned with

their positive self-views. OSE is characterized by little to no dependence on specific outcomes, the relative absence of defensive behaviors, and non-substantial context driven fluctuations in mood (Kernis, 2003). In addition, their research has found is that OSE and authenticity are reciprocally related, where authenticity is “the unobstructed operation of one’s true, or core, self in one’s daily enterprise” (Kernis, 2003, p. 13). Interestingly, this characterization of authenticity ties in with Rogers’ (1961) conceptualization of a self-actualizing individual, and is considered a key marker of 21st century leadership (George, 2003).

OSE is based on the affective model of self-esteem formation (Brown & Marshall, 2006), as it grows from secure attachment with primary caregivers, where feelings of belonging and mastery established early on in life, later give rise to realistic self-evaluations and an acceptance of one’s strengths and limitations (Brown, 1998; Kernis, 2003). However, studies show that a large number of individuals do not grow up with secure attachment (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall, 1978), almost 50% across cultures by some accounts (Bakermans-Kranenburg & van IJzendoorn, 2009), of which well over half lie in the non-clinical population (Main & Solomon, 1990). This would imply that a significant number of functioning individuals who show up at work every day, struggle with effective coping mechanisms to handle the pressures of competitive workplaces (Brown, 1998; Liotti & Gilbert, 2011), and are vulnerable to the influence of unconscious affective associations with the self in memory (Brady, 2011; Ziegler-Hill & Jordon, 2011). For women in particular, whose reactivity to emotional stimuli is higher than that of men (Bagley, Weaver & Buchanan, 2011; Plant, Kling & Smith, 2004; Spalak et al., 2015), this can lead to behavioral responses that limit their rise to top positions in their organizations.

Relegating implicit beliefs and attitudes to the therapeutic setting as has been the norm (Maxwell and Bachkirova, 2010), leaves many working women in the throes of insecure striving, marked by social comparison, high self-monitoring, the need for achievement, the drive to do better than others and a vulnerability to shame, self-criticism, anxiety and depression (Gilbert et al., 2007). This is even more evident in male dominated environments, such as top corporate leadership positions and the Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) professions, where women compare themselves to their pre-dominantly male colleagues, and have few female role models to support them (Buse & Bilimoria, 2014). Conversely, addressing the experiential psychological system of implicit beliefs gives rise to non-judgmental self-concept clarity, increased emotional regulation, feelings of empathy and compassion, and connection with one's core values and self-identity (Hanley & Garland, 2016).

Considering a Dual Approach

Given the likely prevalence and the negative consequences of high explicit and low implicit self-esteem, and the benefits of having congruence between the two, both for the individual and the organization, it seems that building implicit self-esteem is at least as important as building explicit self-esteem. The importance is accentuated by the fact that implicit attitudes are often hidden from conscious awareness (Kernis, 2003) and can blind individuals to the reasons they fail to flourish. Additionally, connecting with one's feelings, and with the mental associations that underlie them is shown to spill over into explicit self-esteem (Grumm, Nestler, & von Collani, 2009), largely because the way individuals feel about themselves is closely tied

to how well they do with regards to intrinsically established goals and values (Pelham & Swann, 1989). From an organizational perspective, it leads to increased job satisfaction and work performance (Judge & Bono, 2001).

However, implicit attitudes may not be as malleable as desired. John Bowlby (1979), the architect of the internal working model, called it a “cradle to grave” mental framework (p. 154) that is highly resistant to change, and some researchers even argue that it may have a genetic component (Neiss, Sedikides, & Stevenson, 2002). As such, both implicit and explicit beliefs need to be addressed together, given that individuals can reject implicit beliefs when they call for a response that challenges rationally considered information (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006). This dual approach appears all the more important in light of research spanning over a century that shows that self-efficacy in domains of personal importance affects people's overall self-esteem (James, 1950; Pelham, 1995), where personal importance is often culturally constructed (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt and Schimel, 2004). The increasing prominent role that work plays in women's lives in the 21st century thus makes it a key source of self-esteem development.

The Role of Positive Psychology

In his opening address at the 1st World Congress of the International Positive Psychology Association (WCPP), Martin Seligman, founder of WCPP, challenged the community to increase the ‘flourishing’ percentage of world population to 51% by the year 2051 (Seligman, 2009). Given that work continues to consume people's active hours (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013),

and that women constitute around half the world's population, women's flourishing in the workplace is of the utmost importance in reaching this goal.

However, despite multiple studies linking self-esteem and flourishing (Diener & Diener, 1995; Hanley & Garland, 2016, Totan, 2014) and a better scientific understanding of the somewhat independent cognitive and affective components of self-esteem (Mruk, 2008), it appears that we have been addressing “only half of the ‘malady’ of low self-esteem” by ignoring the more rudimentary factors of negative and positive emotional states (Pelham & Swann, 1989, p. 678). And although integrative approaches exist for the clinical population (Maxwell, 2009), such an approach to low self-esteem for the non-clinical population has largely been left unattended. As far as we know, no scientifically validated programs exist in the literature that have turned the research into practical steps for the workplace (Bachkirova, 2004), and none that takes women's biological makeup and relational strengths into account.

Founded on this gap in the research, and given that one of positive psychology's objectives is to provide practical application of theory (Pluskota, 2014), the researchers will create a 4 week online course called Building Confidence in the Workplace (BCW) where the topics will be equally distributed between implicit and explicit self-esteem. We hypothesize that by addressing both the affective and the cognitive components of self-esteem, participants who complete the course will experience a long-lasting increase in optimal self-esteem in the workplace.

Conceptual, theoretical and epistemological framework

In this research, the researcher takes the view that observable phenomena provide credible facts; hence it follows a positivist conceptual, theoretical and epistemological framework. Positivist philosophy is underpinned by empirical evidence and based on the belief that the causal relationships among variables is considered a valuable source of knowledge (Brunswick, 1952). In line with this view, quantitative statistical methods are used to confirm or disprove connections among the independent and dependent variables.

However, this research is also grounded on a both/and epistemological position where both observable phenomena and the subjective meanings attached to them can be sources of acceptable knowledge. This dual position underlies the rationale of the online course, with the view that following a purely functional ontological and epistemological assumption leads to the development of fragile high self-esteem. As such, the ontological assumptions of “the nature of reality,” and the epistemological assumptions of “how things really work” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108) are both positivist and constructivist, with the view that people's self-esteem develops through external feedback (Bandura, 1997) *and* through the process of meaning making that often operates at the level of unconscious awareness (Kierkegaard, 1987). The qualitative data that exists in the literature on the way people create meaning of their experiences will be of profound value in creating the contents of the course (George, Kaplan, & Main, 1985; Smith, 2017). However, the methodological assumptions that relate to the process of building the conceptual framework will follow a purely positivist philosophy, since measurement will take place only through quantitative statistical methods.

Methodology

Research Design

The study will be a randomized control trial (RCT) with a longitudinal experimental design. An RCT provides a standardized testing model where the effects of possible confounding and/or extraneous variables (such as personality traits, demographics, life stresses etc.) are minimized (Langdridge, 2004).

Two groups of women will participate in a 4 week online course called Building Confidence in the Workplace (BCW). The timing of the course will be staggered for both groups such that the control group will begin their course 8 weeks after the experimental group begins theirs, thus allowing 4 weeks for course completion and an additional month for follow-up measures. As such, it will be a between and within participants study, where the between subjects factor is the course, while the within subjects factor is time. This design fits with the rationale of the study, where the researchers wish to measure the relationship between course completion and its long-term impact on both explicit and implicit self-esteem through an online survey comprising of 6 pre-validated quantitative questionnaires.

Participants

The proposed number of participants is 50 for each group for a total of 100 participants.

Although this is a relatively small sample size including a built-in margin for a 40% drop-out rate, it is based on large studies on self-esteem formation and functioning (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Kling, Hyde, Showers & Buswell, 1999; Orth, Robins & Widaman, 2012).

The inclusion criteria for participants is that they are adult females, working part time or full time in any role within an organization. They will be recruited online through an email campaign sent out to the researcher's personal email subscriber list. This list consists of a heterogeneous group of women, with variation in age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and nationality, who have voluntarily signed up on the researcher's website to receive free weekly newsletters. The course will be advertised as Building Confidence in the Workplace (BCW), and the inclusion criteria and the aim of the study will be explained. The participants will self-select based on their personal need for greater confidence in their jobs and no incentives shall be provided. The age range of participants is expected to fall mainly between 40-60 years of age, and they are expected to hail primarily from the U.S., Canada and the U.K, given the general make-up of the researcher's subscriber list.

Procedure

Interested members of the subscriber list will be able to sign up to a list who will receive further information on the course and a link to confirm voluntary participation (see Appendix 1). Those who do will then be transferred to Qualtrics, a survey software enterprise that will randomly assign each individual into a control vs an experimental design group. Each group will be send an email with a different start date with a two-month interval in between the two dates.

Individual accounts will then be created for both groups on an online learning platform called LearnDash, through which the course will be delivered. Both groups will be sent an email with a link to register to their LearnDash account, personalize their password, and read and sign an online consent form (Appendix 2). Their only task at this point will be to complete the pre-course survey. From thereon, the timelines for the two groups will differ. The experimental group will be sent an email shortly after, with a link to access the contents of week one, and a summary of the lesson objectives for that week. The weekly emails will continue over the following 3 weeks. A week after the release of the contents for week four, participants will receive a reminder to complete the course within the next three days, as access to the course will be removed after that. They will then receive a debriefing email explaining the aim of the course (Appendix 3) and a link to retake the survey in order to collect post course measures. A final email will be sent one month later, with a link to the survey to obtain longitudinal measures.

Meanwhile, the control group will also be sent an email both times the experimental group retakes the survey, with a link to do the same. They will gain access to the course as soon as they have taken the survey a third time. No more data will be collected as they complete their four week course in a similar manner to the experimental group, at which point they will also receive the debriefing email.

The Intervention

BCW, the four week online course to be created for the purposes of this study, will be

divided into two units based on the two models of self-esteem. The first two weeks will address the two components of the affective model of self-esteem, namely belonging and mastery (Brown, 1998), while the following two weeks will address two components of the cognitive model that are relevant to working women – purpose and autonomy. Each of these components will be broken down into four topics, which will address a research backed concept related to the component. The component of belonging, for example, will comprise of the 4 topics of (1) making sense of the past, (2) practising self-compassion, (3) building networks in and outside of work, and (4) balancing give and take. Each topic will consist of a 5-7 minute video explaining the theoretical basis of the topic and an optional downloadable worksheet to help participants reflect on how the learning applies to their daily lives, both at home and at work. The emphasis each week will be on taking action, as this counters feelings of helplessness common in low self-esteem (Miller, Seligman & Kurlander, 1975; Seligman, 1973) and builds mastery (Maier & Watkins, 2005). To facilitate action taking, nine practical ways will be suggested as part of each week's lesson.

A compulsory weekly self-reflection practice will lie at the heart of the course design. The worksheet will be akin to Positivity Logs in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (Wilding & Milne, 2008), and will encourage participants to reflect on the component relevant action(s) they took (or did not take) over the week in one of three ways. (1) If they failed to take action, they will be asked to write about the obstacles that came up and make a plan for the future. (2) If they took action and it went well, they will be encouraged to savour it for a few minutes and reflect on their role in making it happen. (3). If they took action, and it did not go as planned, they will be asked to write about what they can change with regards to thought patterns and/or behaviours in

the future. The purpose will be to solidify new learning through Kolb's (1984) Learning Cycle, and to strengthen empowering beliefs about the self and change negative and self-defeating ones (Lyubomirsky, Sousa, & Dickerhoof, 2006). A technical setup on LearnDash will ensure that participants undertake this reflection practice in order to advance to the following week's contents.

Data Collection

Data collection will take place on Qualtrics via an online link to a Qualtrics generated URL (a website location on the researcher's Qualtrics account). These links will be provided to the participants on their Learndash accounts and also in the emails they receive.

The six questionnaires that will comprise the survey (Appendix 4) are pre-validated quantitative self-report scales with good internal reliability. The first is the 10-item *Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale* (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965), one of the most widely used measures of global self-esteem. It is made up of 10 items on a 4-point Likert scale with good internal reliability ($\alpha = .920$).

Since RSES measures explicit self-esteem only, the 12 item *Authentic Personality Scale* (AS; Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliousis, & Joseph, 2008) will be used to measure implicit self-esteem, since OSE and authenticity are reciprocally related (Goldman & Kernis, 2006). AS is scored on a 7-point Likert scale and comprises of 3 sub-scales with good internal reliability ($\alpha = .690 - .780$).

The Emotional Tolerance subscale of the *Affective Style Questionnaire* (ASQ; Hofmann & Kashdan, 2010) will be used to measure acceptance of and tolerance towards emotions as low self-esteem is marked by an inability to regulate emotions well (Brown, 1998; Kernis, 2003). It contains 5 items and is scored on a 5-point Likert scale with good internal reliability ($\alpha = .680$).

The *Generalised Self-Efficacy Scale* (GSE; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) will be used to assess perceived self-efficacy across a broad range of stressful situations. It is a 10-item scale scored on a 4-point Likert scale, with good internal reliability ($\alpha = 0.896$).

While GSE measures general feelings of self-efficacy, the *Work Self-Efficacy Scale* (WSES; Avalone, Pepe, & Porcelli, 2007) will be used to assess perceived self-efficacy in work-related domains. It is a 10-item scale, scored on a 5-point Likert scale with good internal reliability of the two factors it measures ($\alpha = .820$ and $.850$).

Finally, the Work-related performance, Competition and Approval of others subscales of the *Contingencies of Self-Worth* scale (CSW; Crocker, Luhtanen, Cooper, & Bouvrette, 2003) will be used to measure the dependency on work, on doing better than others, and on other people's approval respectively, as these are common contingencies for individuals with low self-worth (Kernis, 2003). Each subscale consists of 5 items for a total of 15 items, all measured on a 7-point Likert scale with good internal reliability ($\alpha = .820 - .910$).

It is expected that participants who complete the course will show significant

improvements in the first five scales, and a decrease in the three contingency subscales.

Data analysis

The reliability of all scales at baseline will be checked using Cronbach alpha coefficients. Independent samples two-tailed t tests will also be used to assess successful randomization of the two groups by comparing their pre-course outcomes on all scales. Pearson's coefficients will assess the relationship between scales; in particular whether increasing explicit and/or implicit self-esteem leads to a decrease in self-worth dependency on performance, competition or approval. Mixed design analyses of variance (mixed ANOVAs) will be run to compare the outcomes for the experimental and the control groups over the three time periods and to examine the group x time interactions. All analyses will be conducted on the statistical software SPSS 20 for Mac.

Ethics and risk assessment

The proposed study has received permission from the University of London's (UEL) Research Ethics Committee and is aligned with the British Psychological Society's (BPS) Code of Conduct. Participants are not expected to experience any harm during or after the intervention. The heightened awareness of early childhood history may increase emotional states; however, the simultaneous practice of self-compassion meditation should help cope with any potential discomfort. All participants will be provided with the contact details of both the researcher and the dissertation supervisor and urged to ask questions or raise concerns at any stage of the study.

No harm is anticipated to the researcher either, due to the online nature of the course. Deception is not used in the study, as all participants will be fully aware of the rationale of the course before signing up for it. They will also be informed about confidentiality, the purpose of data collection and a breakdown of the contents of the course before they sign the consent form. Participants retain the right to withdraw from the course at any time before and during the course, and to request that their data is destroyed up to 4 weeks after course completion, without the need to provide a reason for doing so. The study does not involve financial transactions.

All data collected will be kept on a password protected account on Qualtrics and later transferred to the statistics software package SPSS on the researcher's password protected personal computer for analysis. The researcher will not have access to participants' LearnDash accounts who will be known to the researcher only through their email addresses and the usernames they provide. Data collection, analysis and the writing process will not involve any reference to participant identity. All data will be destroyed in line with the Data Protection Act (Data Protection Act 1998, n.d.)

A plan for dissemination

Dissemination of results will involve, firstly, the publication in a peer-reviewed journal related to applied positive psychology.

If the findings confirm the hypothesis that addressing both the affective and the cognitive

components of self-esteem increases women's optimal self-esteem in the workplace, this will require a significant shift from the thinking dominating current approaches to professional development, which are largely based on the cognitive model of self-esteem. As such, dissemination of the findings will involve an emphasis on awareness and understanding of self-esteem as first steps towards commitment and implementation of the intervention.

This will be done through blogs and articles on multiple positive psychology and work-related platforms in which the researcher is already a regular columnist. It will also include newsletters highlighting the findings to the researcher's email subscriber list, on their website, and on podcasts run by colleagues in the field. Additionally, attending and exhibiting in upcoming international conferences related to the topic will help spread the findings further. Locally, organizations will be approached and informed of the organizational need to harness female potential and on what it takes to help women rise to the top.

Other ideas under consideration include seeking the support of organizations working towards compassionate workplaces, women's leadership and organizational success, and creating partnerships with individuals committed to the same cause. The researcher has already begun the process by forming a partnership with two colleagues, forming a 'brain trust' of supportive and influential women, and establishing a platform to take the work of female leadership further. Once the findings emerge, the process of dissemination will begin through the awareness building and support seeking process described above. Next steps will involve reaching out to interested organizations, understanding their requirements, building trust and commitment, and delivering the program according to their specific needs. As such, preparing reports, keynotes,

business cases, free workshops, and multiple modes of delivery of the program will be part of the dissemination process. Appendix 5 contains a detailed look at the steps involved, the groups targeted and the methods to be employed.

Proposed Timeline

See Appendix 6

Appendices

Appendix 1

Information Sheet - Experimental Group Version

(sent as an email attachment)

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Building Women's Self-Esteem in the Workplace: An Integrative Approach

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the information that you need to consider in deciding whether to participate in a research study. The study is being conducted as part of my

Master's in Applied Positive Psychology and Coaching Psychology degree at the University of East London.

Project Title

Building Women's Self-Esteem in the Workplace: An Integrative Approach

Project Description

This 4-week online course aims to build women's optimal self-esteem in the workplace as an essential factor in helping them rise to their full potential. It will focus on the two components of self-esteem, namely the affective component and the cognitive component, each over a period of 2 weeks respectively. The affective component will address feelings of **belonging** and **mastery**, while the cognitive component will focus on **purpose** and **autonomy**.

The course will begin on March 1, 2017. **Please confirm your participation by replying to this email with your preferred email address before February 15, 2017.** You will then be registered for the course. 3 days before the start of the course, you will be sent an email with a link to create a personalized password for your account and to read and sign the online consent form.

On the day of the course, you will be sent an email with a link to login to your account, where you will first complete a survey of pre-validated questionnaires that will assist with our research. Once you do so, you'll be able to access the course contents for the first week.

Each week (over a 4 week period), you will receive an email with a link to access the subsequent week's content. The content will consist of a four 5-7 minute videos, related to an aspect of the concept for the week, explaining its theoretical basis of the concept, and accompanied by an optional reflective worksheet. You will be required to take action on the concept during the week and to reflect on your action once you do so. In all, your weekly commitment to the lessons will not be more than an hour.

At the end of the course, you will be sent a summary of what you have covered, and be requested to retake the same survey you did at the start of the course. This will be repeated one month later, to help us collect 1-month follow up results for our research.

We hope that the 4 weeks will be a reflective learning experience, that will be both enjoyable and informative, and that will provide you with the strategies to feel more grounded and confident in the workplace. Week 1, where you reflect on your early experiences as part of the concept of **belonging**, may bring back memories that may be somewhat upsetting. However, the self-compassion meditation during the week should hopefully help you. In the unlikely event that you need more support, I encourage you to contact me. My contact details are in this letter.

Confidentiality of the Data

The data for this course will be gathered anonymously. Only we (me and my supervisor) will have access to the data collected which will be kept in an electronic format on password-protected computer drives. The overall results reported will not contain any identification of the individual results or participants.

We will retain the data after the study to assist in our research, but it will remain anonymous and confidential. The answers to the worksheets you complete will not be available to the us.

Location

The study will be carried out online and you will have the flexibility to complete the contents of the week at your own pace during the course of the week.

Disclaimer

You are not obliged to take part in this study and should not feel coerced. You are free to withdraw at any time. Should you choose to withdraw from the study you may do so without disadvantage to yourself and without any obligation to give a reason. Should you withdraw, you retain the right to request the destruction of your data up to 8 weeks after the start date of the course.

Please feel free to ask me any questions. If you are happy to continue with the study, you will be asked to sign a consent form prior to your participation. Please retain this information letter for reference.

If you have any questions or concerns about how the study is being conducted, please contact the study's supervisor, Dr. Itai Ivtzan, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ. Email: i.ivtzan@uel.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0) 20 8223 4384.

Thank you in anticipation.

Yours sincerely,

Appendix 2

Consent Form

(an online form on the course platform Learndash)

Building Women's Authentic Self-Esteem in the Workplace: A Holistic Approach

I have read the information sheet relating to the above research study and have been given a copy to keep. The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to understand and/or discuss the details and ask questions about this information.

I understand:(To consent, you must check all boxes)

- what is being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me.
 - that my involvement in this study, and my particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential. Only the researcher(s) involved in the study will have access to identifying data.
 - what will happen once the research study has been completed.
 - that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason.
 - that should I withdraw, I retain the right to request the destruction of my data up to 8 weeks after the start date of the course.
- With this understanding, I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study.

Date

.....

Participant's Name

.....

Participant's Signature

.....

Appendix 3

Debrief Sheet

(an email upon completion of the course)

Dear (name),

Congratulations for having completed the course – and for having stuck with it all the way through!

I do want to express my deep gratitude for your commitment and dedication, and hope that what you gained from the course will help you with your confidence in the workplace, and perhaps in more aspects of your life.

Would you please take a moment to retake the survey one more time *here* (link to survey on Qualtrics), as it'll help us see whether the course was effective in enhancing different aspects of your self-esteem.

As you know, the purpose of this study was to see whether addressing both the affective and the cognitive components of self-esteem would result in increased self-esteem, self-efficacy, emotional regulation and authenticity. Authenticity has been linked to greater levels of self-actualization, and if the data does indeed show that the course had the desired effects, then it's hoped that workplaces will shift from a purely cognitive model of self-esteem that's focused on performance, to a more holistic model that takes feminine strengths and qualities into account.

This will help women be more authentic in the workplace, rather than struggle to fit into workplace cultures where it's challenging for them to sustainably thrive.

Again, the data we collect will remain anonymous and confidential. Only me and my supervisor will ever have access to it, and it will be kept in an electronic format on password-protected computer drives. The overall results reported will not contain any identification of the individual results of participants. Please feel free to contact either of us if you'd like any information about the results of the study once it is completed. Both our contact details are below.

I hope that this course allowed you to reflect on your own life, and on the reasons you may be struggling to show up as the most authentic version of yourself. I also hope it gave you the tools and strategies to operate confidently in and outside of the workplace.

Please contact me if you wish to gather more information on the construct of optimal self-esteem. And if you have any questions about the study, please contact me (Tel: + (968) 2460 5258. Email: homaira@homairakabir.com) or my supervisor Dr. Itai Ivztan, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ. (Tel: +44 (0)20 8223 4384. Email: i.ivztan@uel.ac.uk)

Thank you sincerely for your participation! It's been a pleasure having you on the journey. A gentle reminder to complete the survey *here* (link to survey on Qualtrics) at your earliest.

Warmly,

Appendix 4

Survey

Q1 - Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. Please remember these are subjective statements and there are no right or wrong answers. Please answer according to the scale below:

Strongly agree (3), Agree (2), Disagree (1), Strongly disagree (0)

1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
- 2.* At times, I think I am no good at all.
3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
- 5.* I feel I do not have much to be proud of.
- 6.* I certainly feel useless at times.
7. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.
- 8.* I wish I could have more respect for myself.
- 9.* All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.
10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.

Scoring Instructions

Items with an asterisk are reverse scored, that is, SA=0, A=1, D=2, SD=3. Sum the scores for the

10 items. The higher the score, the higher the self esteem.

Source: Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the adolescent self-image*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

The scale may be used without explicit permission.

Q2 - Please respond to the following statements on how you would feel in the following situations. If you haven't experienced the situation described in a particular statement, please answer how you think you would feel if that situation occurred according to the scale below:

Strongly disagree (1), Disagree (2), Somewhat disagree (3), Neither disagree nor agree (4), Somewhat agree (5), Agree (6), Strongly agree (7)

- 1.* I don't care what other people think of me.
- 2.* What others think of me has no effect on what I think about myself.
- 3.* I don't care if other people have a negative opinion about me.
4. My self-esteem depends on the opinions others hold of me.
5. I can't respect myself if others don't respect me.
6. Doing better than others gives me a sense of self-respect.
7. Knowing that I am better than others on a task raises my self-esteem.
8. My self-worth is affected by how well I do when I am competing with others.
9. My self-worth is influenced by how well I do on competitive tasks.
10. I feel worthwhile when I perform better than others on a task or skill.

11. My self-esteem is influenced by my work performance.
12. I feel better about myself when I know I'm doing well professionally.
13. Doing well at work gives me a sense of self-respect.
14. I feel bad about myself whenever my professional performance is lacking.
- 15.* My opinion about myself isn't tied to how well I do at work.

Scoring Instructions

Items with an asterisk are reverse scored. Total items 1-5 for Others' Approval, items 6-10 for Competition and items 11-15 for Work Performance, and divide each by 5. The lower the score, the less contingent the self-esteem.

Source: Crocker, J., Luhtanen, R., Cooper, L., & Bouvrette, A. (2003). Contingencies of Self-Worth in College Students: Theory and Measurement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85(5), 894–908.

Q3 - Below is a list of statements about how you would describe yourself. Please indicate the degree to which each statement does not describe you at all or describes you very well according to the scale below:

Does not describe me at all (1), Does not describe me well (2), Does not describe me enough (3), Neutral (4), Describes me somewhat (5), Describes me moderately (6), Describes me very well (7)

- 1.* "I think it is better to be yourself, than to be popular."
2. "I don't know how I really feel inside."
3. "I am strongly influenced by the opinions of others."
4. "I usually do what other people tell me to do."
5. "I always feel I need to do what others expect me to do."
6. "Other people influence me greatly."
7. "I feel as if I don't know myself very well."
- 8.* "I always stand by what I believe in."
- 9.* "I am true to myself in most situations."
10. "I feel out of touch with the 'real me.'"
- 11.* "I live in accordance with my values and beliefs."
12. "I feel alienated from myself."

Scoring Instructions

Total Items 1, 8, 9, and 11 for Authentic Living; Items 3, 4, 5, and 6 for Accepting External Influence; and Items 2, 7, 10, and 12 for Self-Alienation. Lower scores indicate authenticity.

Source: Wood, A., Linley, P., Maltby, J., Baliousis, M., & Joseph, S. (2008). The authentic personality. A theoretical and empirical conceptualization and the development of the authenticity scale. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 55(3), 385-399.

Q4 - Below is a list of statements about how you relate to your emotions. Please choose the answer most accurate for you on the scale below:

Not true of me at all (1), A little bit (2), Moderately (3), Quite a bit (4), Extremely true of me (5)

1. I can tolerate having strong emotions.
2. It's ok if people see me being upset.
3. It's ok to feel negative emotions at times.
4. I can tolerate being upset.
5. There is nothing wrong with feeling very emotional.

Scoring Instructions

Add up the items for the subscale of Emotional Tolerance. The higher the score, the greater the emotional tolerance.

Source: Hofmann, S. & Kashdan, T. (2010). The Affective Style Questionnaire: Development and Psychometric Properties. *Journal of Psychopathological Behavior Assessment*, 32(2), 255–263.

Q5 - Please respond to the following statements on how you would approach different situations.

If you haven't experienced the situation described in a particular statement, please answer how you think you would feel if that situation occurred.

Not at all true (1), Hardly true (2), Moderately true (3), Exactly true (4)

1. I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough.
2. If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want.
3. It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals.
4. I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events.
5. Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations.
6. I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort.
7. I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities.
8. When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions.
9. If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution.
10. I can usually handle whatever comes my way.

Scoring Instructions

The total score is calculated by finding the sum of the all items, with a higher score indicating more self-efficacy.

Source: Schwarzer, R., & Jerusalem, M. (1995). Generalized Self-Efficacy scale. In J. Weinman, S. Wright, & M. Johnston, *Measures in health psychology: A user's portfolio. Causal and control beliefs* (pp. 35-37). Windsor, UK: NFER-NELSON.

Q6 - Please indicate the degree to which you strongly disagree or strongly agree with the following statements on the scale below. Thinking of future work, how well can you...

Strongly disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4), Strongly agree (5)

1. ... achieve goals that will be assigned
2. ... respect schedules and working deadlines
3. ... learn new working methods
4. ... concentrate all energy on work
5. ... finish assigned work
6. ... collaborate with other colleagues
7. ... work with people of diverse experiences and ages
8. ... have good relationships with direct superiors
9. ... to behave in an efficacious way with clients
10. ... to work in a team

Scoring Instructions

Adding up the scores indicates the extent of work self-efficacy. The higher the score, the greater the work-self-efficacy.

Source: Pepe, S., Farnese, M., Avalone, F., & Vecchione, M. (2010). Work Self-Efficacy Scale and Search for Work Self-Efficacy Scale: A Validation Study in Spanish and Italian Cultural Contexts. *Revista de Psicología del Trabajo y de las Organizaciones*, 26(3), 201-210.

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Appendix 5

Plan for Dissemination

	Target Groups	Method
Awareness and Understanding	Working women Professional organizations Email list Local organizations	Newsletters Conferences/ exhibitions Blogs Workshops/ keynotes
Support and Favorability	Catalyst Compassionate Mind Foundation Compassion	Reports Email
Involvement	MAPP graduates and affiliates Brain trust Local influential men and women	1-1 Skype/ In- person Business Case for intervention 1-1 Multiple modes of delivery Free workshops
Commitment	Local organizations International organizations	Free workshops

Appendix 6

Proposed Timetable

Dec 15 – Work on Ethics form

Jan 5 – Ethics form submission to Ethics committee

Jan 5 – 31 - Work on the first draft of the Proposal

Jan 31 – Hand in the first draft of the Proposal to Supervisor

Feb 1 – Feb 28 – Work on course content and develop it for online transmission

Feb 8 – 15 – Send email to email list to add name to waitlist if interested in course

Feb 17 – 23 – Send email to waitlist with Information sheet to confirm participation – names go to a final list

Feb 25 – Transfer final list to Qualtrics and create accounts for participants on Learndash

Feb 26 – 28 – Welcome letter to both lists with different start dates

March 3- 5 – Email to both lists asking to sign the Consent form

March 7 – Start of course for experimental group + pre-intervention survey (only survey for the control group)

March 10 – 30 - Understand Statistical analysis

March 14 – Email to experimental group announcing week 2 of course

March 21 - Email to experimental group announcing week 3 of course

March 28 - Email to experimental group announcing week 4 of course

April 7 - Debrief email + post intervention survey for the experimental group (only survey for the control group)

April 8 - 30 – Work on the final draft of the Proposal

May 7 – Email with 1 month follow up survey for the experimental group (+ retake of survey and start of course for the control group)

May 10 – 30 – Collect and analyze statistical data

June 1 – July 1 – Work on the first draft of the Dissertation

July 1 - Hand in the first draft of the Dissertation to the Supervisor

July 20 – Submit Proposal

July 20 – Aug 20 – Work on the final draft of the Dissertation

Aug 20 – Submit Dissertation

Sep/Oct - Submit to peer reviewed journal

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