Tools and strategies for enabling self-belief:

The confidence deficit and what to do about it

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BREAKING BINARIES RESEARCH

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About us

Podcast: *Prefer not to say…*

Advanced Qualitative Methods

Leadership Teaching UG, PGT & MBA

Based at
Swansea University
Exploring complex identities at work (including outdoors)

Research funding from
Swansea University
CIPD
ISBE

Negotiating Difference At Work

Gendered expectations as & at work

Inequalities in Entrepreneurship

Safer Workspaces

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Understanding yourself

Pitch perfect?

How do you see yourself?

How do you think others see you?

How would you like to be seen?

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Climbing to the top

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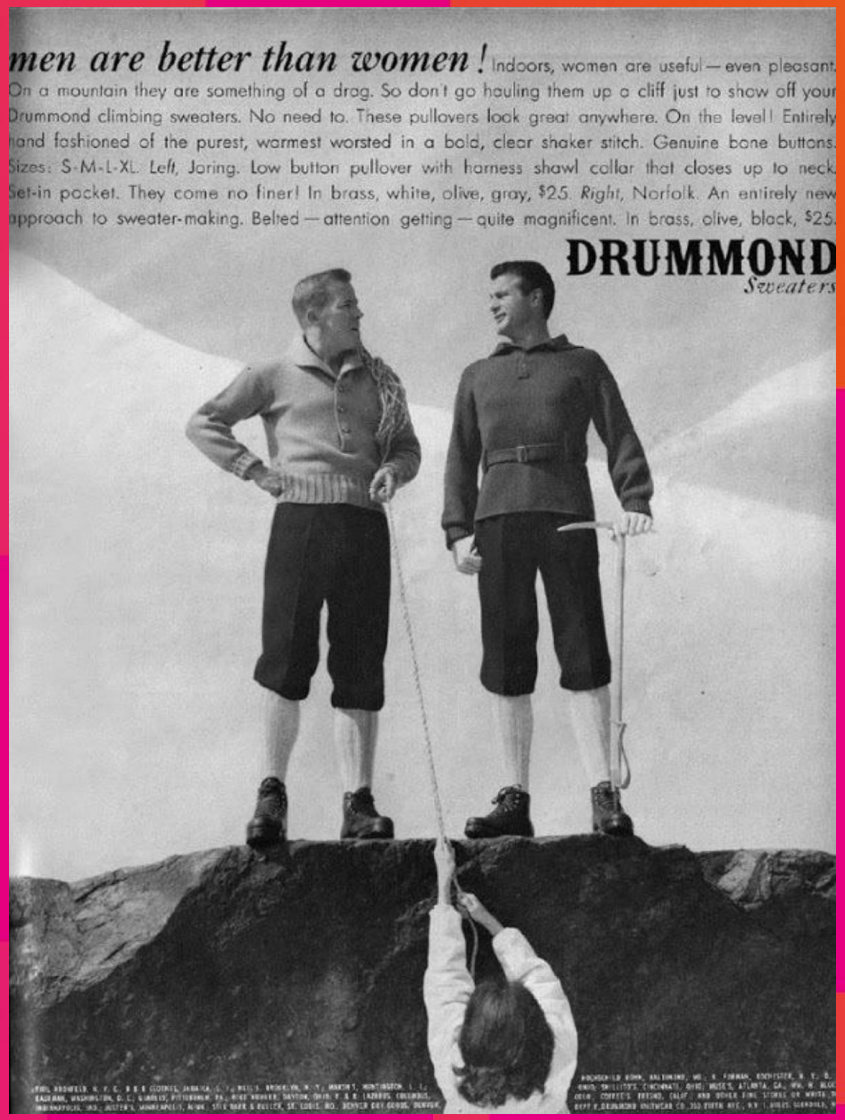
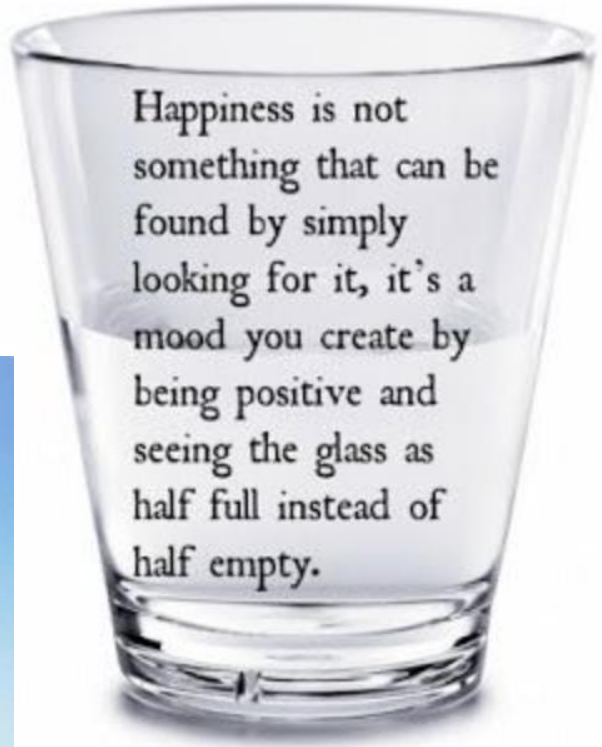
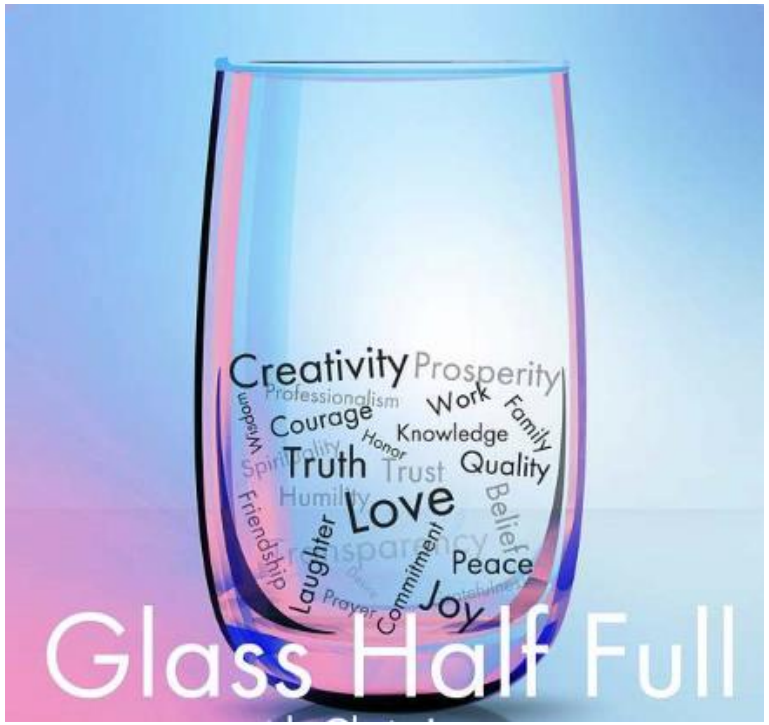


Climbing to the top

(L):1959 Advert for Drummond Sweaters (R)Photograph: Charlotte Wales/Agent Provocateur

Confidence deficit?





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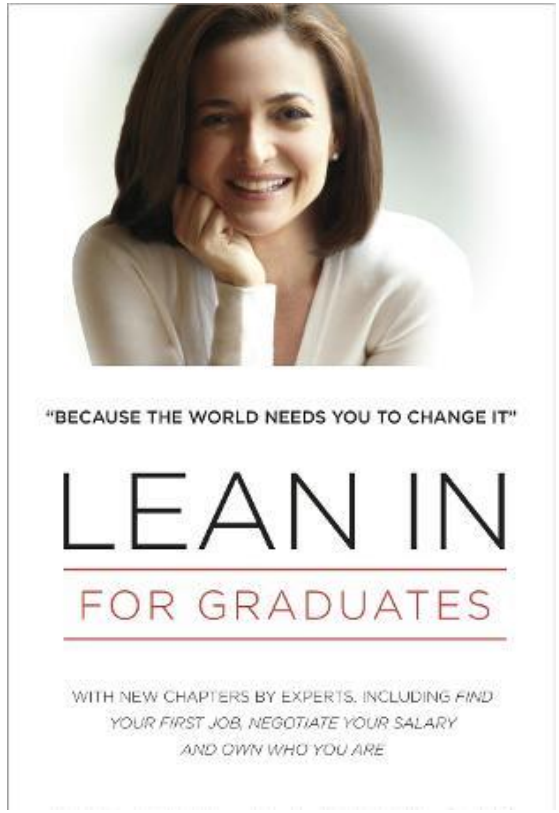
Confidence deficit



- 'Experts' establish women's lack of confidence as a fundamental obstacle to achievement and happiness.
- Most profound barrier to women in the work-place is a 'lack of self-belief'.
- Acknowledges some structural barriers but argues 'it's up to us' to believe in ourselves!
- Talks exclusively from a gender binary and heteronormative position.

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Kim, J. Y., Fitzsimons, G. M., & Kay, A. C. (2018). Lean in messages increase attributions of women's responsibility for gender inequality. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 115(6)*, 974.

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Confidence (cult)ure

- Being self-confident is the new imperative of our time.
- Specific promotion of female self-esteem and self-confidence.
- Women are constantly being told to work on their confidence – from employment to relationships to parenting, the message that they can improve their lot by working on themselves is everywhere.

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The Imposter Phenomenon

- The 'impostor phenomenon' occurs among high achievers who are unable to internalize and accept their success.

- Those who claim to experience the phenomenon often attribute their accomplishments to luck rather than to ability, and fear that others will eventually unmask them as a fraud.

The Imposter Phenomenon in High Achieving Women: Dynamics and Therapeutic Intervention

Pauline Rose Clance & Suzanne Imes

Georgia State University
University Plaza
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

Abstract: *The term impostor phenomenon is used to designate an internal experience of intellectual phonies, which appears to be particularly prevalent and intense among a select sample of high achieving women. Certain early family dynamics and later introjection of societal sex-role stereotyping appear to contribute significantly to the development of the impostor phenomenon. Despite outstanding academic and professional accomplishments, women who experience the imposter phenomenon persists in believing that they are really not bright and have fooled anyone who thinks otherwise. Numerous achievements, which one might expect to provide ample object evidence of superior intellectual functioning, do not appear to affect the impostor belief. Four factors, which contribute to the maintenance of impostor feelings over time, are explored. Therapeutic approaches found to be effective in helping women change the impostor self-concept are described.*

In the past five years we have worked in individual psychotherapy, theme-centered international groups, and college classes with over 150 highly successful women -- women who have earned PhDs in various specialties, who are respected professionals in their fields, or who are students recognized for their academic excellence. However, despite their earned degrees, scholastic honors, high achievement on standardized tests, praise and professional recognition from colleagues and respected authorities, these women do not experience an internal sense of success. They consider themselves to be "impostors." Women who experience the impostor phenomenon maintain a strong belief that they are not intelligent; in fact they are convinced that they have fooled anyone who thinks otherwise. For example, students often fantasize that they were mistakenly admitted to graduate school because of an error by the admissions committee. Numerous women graduate students state the their high examination scores are due to luck, to misgrading, or to the faulty judgment of professors. Women professionals in our sample feel over evaluated by colleagues and administrators. One women professor said, "I'm not good enough to be on the faculty here. Some mistake was made in the selection process." Another, the chairperson of her department, said, "Obviously I'm in this position because my abilities have been overestimated." Another women with two master's degrees, a PhD., and numerous publications to her credit considered herself unqualified to teach remedial college classes in her field. In other words, these women find innumerable means of negating any external evidence that contradicts their belief that they are, in reality, unintelligent.*

*The question has been raised as to whether or not men experience this phenomenon. In our clinical experience, we have found that the phenomenon occurs with much less frequency in men and that when it does occur, it is with much less intensity. We have received mixed opinions from male colleagues with whom we have consulted. The attribution research findings, summarized later, imply that the impostor phenomenon would be found less frequently in men than in women. We have noticed the phenomenon in men who appear to be more in touch with their "feminine" qualities. This clinical observation needs to be researched.

Psychotherapy Theory, Research and Practice
Volume 15, #3, Fall 1978

Imes & Clance 1978

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Fixing ourselves

- Imposter syndrome takes fairly universal feelings of discomfort, mild anxiety in work context and pathologies it.
- What is less explored is why imposter syndrome exists in the first place?
- These narratives directs our view toward fixing women, rather than fixing the places in which they work – context!

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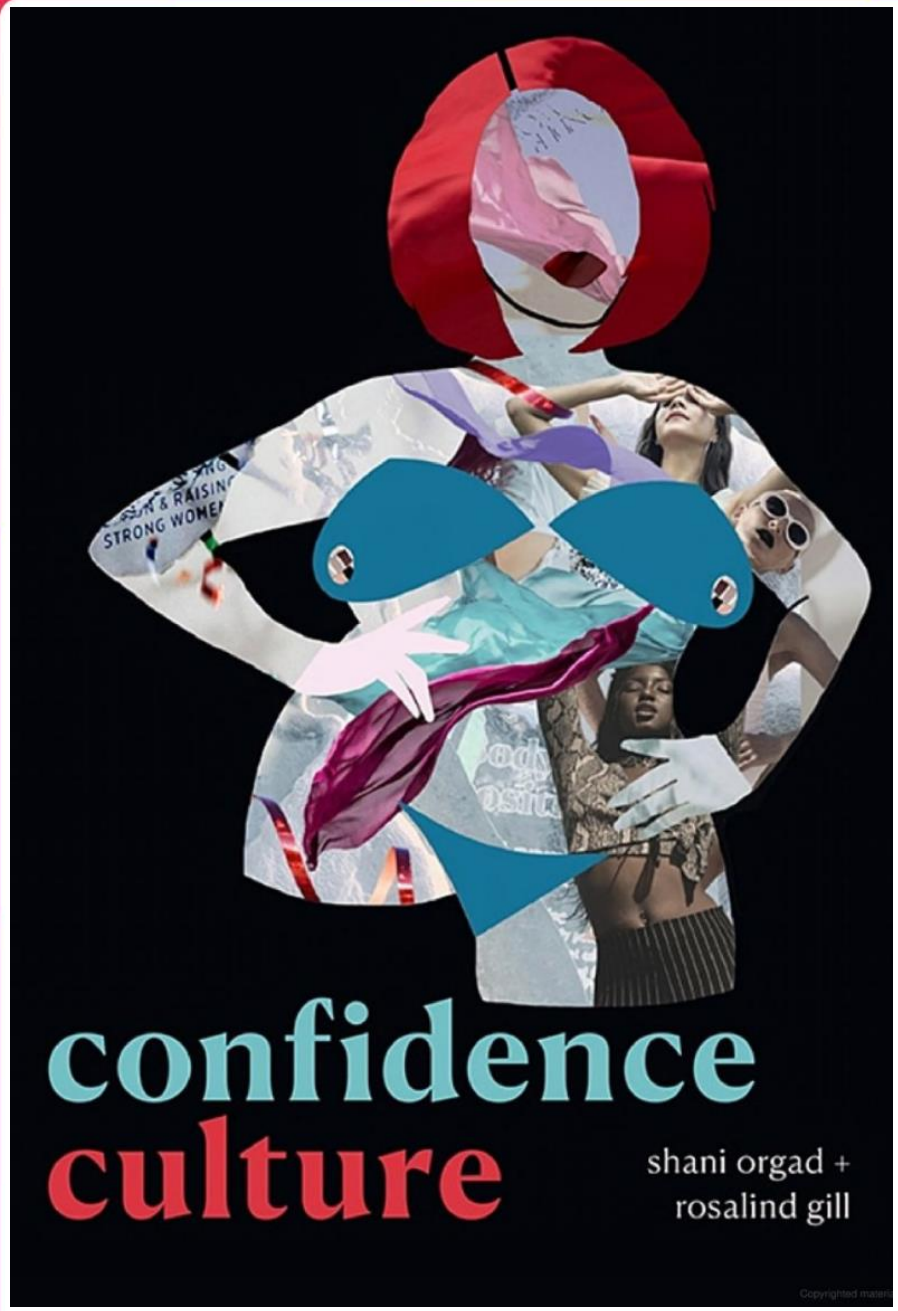

"Women are led to believe that the issue isn't that our workplaces fail to cultivate meaningful inclusion, or that our bodies are routinely subject to suffocating beauty standards, or the impossible expectations of motherhood or the omnipresent threat of assault – no, the issue is a lack of self-belief and self-regulation, and the solution is more."

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Implications

- Too much focus on the self risks distracting attention from other aspects of life/work, this becomes even more challenging in the outdoor contexts.

- Safety - psychologically and physically - is often understood homogenously.

- Materials and protocols provide a means to mitigate risks, but often these materials and protocols were developed without consideration of difference.

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Understanding your world

Genders, sexes, and sexuality

Cisnormativity

Assumes individuals are cisgender or identify as either "male" or "female", and that "male" and "female" are the only and mutually exclusive options for gender identification (Suárez et al., 2022)

Hegemonic Masculinity

Refers to gendered social practices that normalise and legitimise men's dominance over women, and other men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2019).

Cisgenderism

Refers to the prejudicial ideology that gender identities differing from that ascribed at birth and defined by social conventions are less valid than cis identities (Galupo, 2017; Ansara & Hegarty, 2014; Hines, 2019).

Heteronormativity

Is distinct from cisnormativity in that it also points towards the normalisation of particular familial and relational heterosexual structures (Herz & Johansson, 2015).

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Binaries and beyond

Gender is an economic, social and cultural binary: men and women

Gender is often assumed based on various physical factors, how people dress talk and behave (regardless of an individual's gender identity)

Gender is therefore constructed through bodies and their meanings; Academics (including Judith Butler) highlight that gender is both performed and performative

More recently biological sex, long assumed to be a natural categorisation of male and female, is also revealed as constructed through the labelling of an individual at birth

Both male/female sex or men/women gender binaries are therefore problematic

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Binaries and beyond

In a binary one category is ascribed with positive characteristics, while the other is negative

The ‘good’ half of the binary also comes to stand for normal and neutral

With gender this means the way the binary plays out is in fact men/not-men

We see this with other characteristics, for example sexuality being reduced to straight vs not-straight.

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How to think about you and your world

It's not you: critical incident reflection

- Critical reflection is a process of identifying, questioning, and assessing our deeply-held assumptions – about our knowledge, the way we perceive events and issues, our beliefs, feelings, and actions.

- Critical incident reflection (CIR) can be used in different ways to produce narratives (individual and/or group) based on the recall of an experience.

- For example, CIR can be of a "one-off" event/experience or of different experiences about the same issue/focus.

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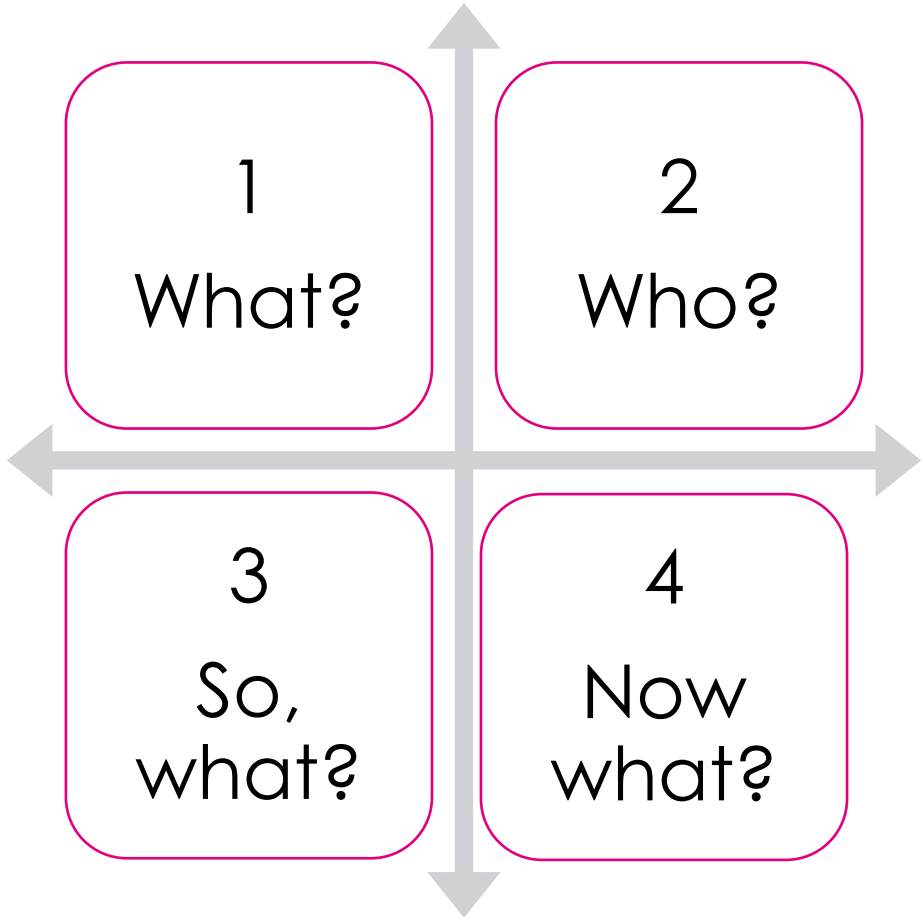
Critical Reflection Toolkit

Return to an event that has had a significant impact on you

What:
- happened?
- did you see?
- did you do?
- was your reaction?
- was the reaction of other people?
- are the key aspects of this situation?



Who were the key players and what do you know about them?

So, what:
- are you feeling now?
- are there the differences and, if so, why?
- was the impact of your reaction?
- positives emerged from the situation?
- is troublesome, if anything?

Now, what:
- are the effects for you?
- should happen to alter the situation?
- will happen if you do not alter anything?
- might you do differently if faced with a similar situation?
- are the best ways of getting information about the situation?

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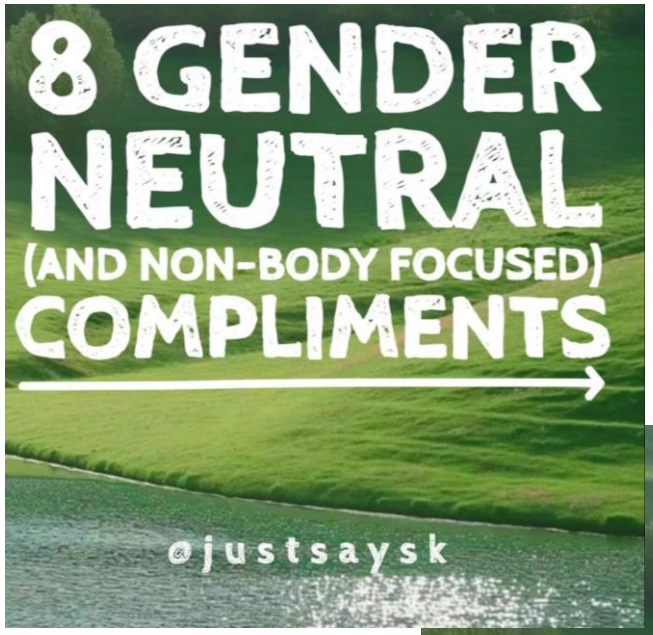

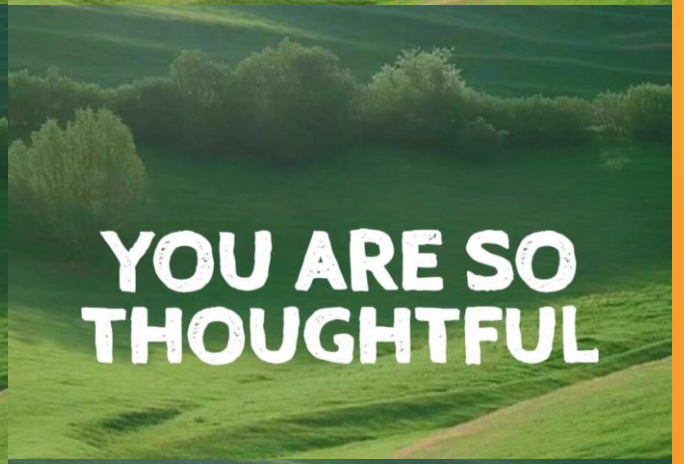

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LGBTQIA+ UK WORKFORCE SURVEY

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