

Self-Esteem and Women with Physical Disabilities



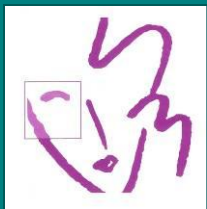
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Development of an Internet-Based Self-Esteem Intervention for Women with Disabilities

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Our Stories

Peg:

"If you truly believe you are a woman of value, you gain tremendous strength to forge your way through the most stubborn of barriers. I learned early on that everything that matters is in your head."



Our Stories

Susan:

“There can be such power and healing in the support, encouragement, and friendship of others who share similar life experiences. It is so important to reach out and connect with others.”



Our Stories

Rosemary:

“I believe it’s really important for us to love and esteem ourselves with both our strengths and weaknesses, and to love and esteem others in the same way.”



Our Stories

Pam:

"Our culture actively promotes low self esteem for women by sending messages we are not enough without Product X, Y, Z, or a man or significant other or looking a certain way to prove we are worthy. So for a woman to have a healthy sense of self-esteem, she must actively dispute these messages and basically think and live in a manner that is in opposition to our American culture."





Roadmap





Sense of Self

and more...

Self-Control

Self-Ownership

Spirituality

Emotions

Personality

Body Image

Mind

Gender

Self-Esteem

Personal Identity

Intelligence

Ego

Social Being





Body Image





Body Image

- A person's feelings of the aesthetics and sexual attractiveness of his or her own body
- A product of personal experiences, personality, and various social and cultural forces, usually in relation to others or in relation to some cultural "ideal"
- Reflection of self-esteem



Important for a Women with a Disability to...

- Assert her right to make choices about her body
- Feel ownership of her body
- Restrict the limitations resulting from her disability to physical functioning only and not impose those limitations on her sexual self
- Be accepting, not ashamed of her body
- Take action to enhance her attractiveness





What Is Self-Esteem?

- Self-esteem involves one's sense of worthiness, adequacy, and self-respect.
- According to the feminist perspective, women's self-esteem may be based on participating in mutual relationships, caring for others, a sense that they can influence and be influenced by others, and the perception that they are really visible to others.



What Is Self-Esteem?

- Do I like myself?
- What do I think about myself?
- Am I deserving of respect or love?
- Am I a worthless person?
- Am I capable of giving or receiving love?



Positive Influences on Self-Esteem

- Greater age
- More affection in the home
- Positive expectations from family
- Positive school environment





Negative Influences on Self-Esteem

- Pain
- Fatigue
- Dependence on others
- Being perceived as a burden to the family
- Over-protection
- Development of secondary conditions
- Losses, such as employment and health insurance





No Connections with Self-Esteem

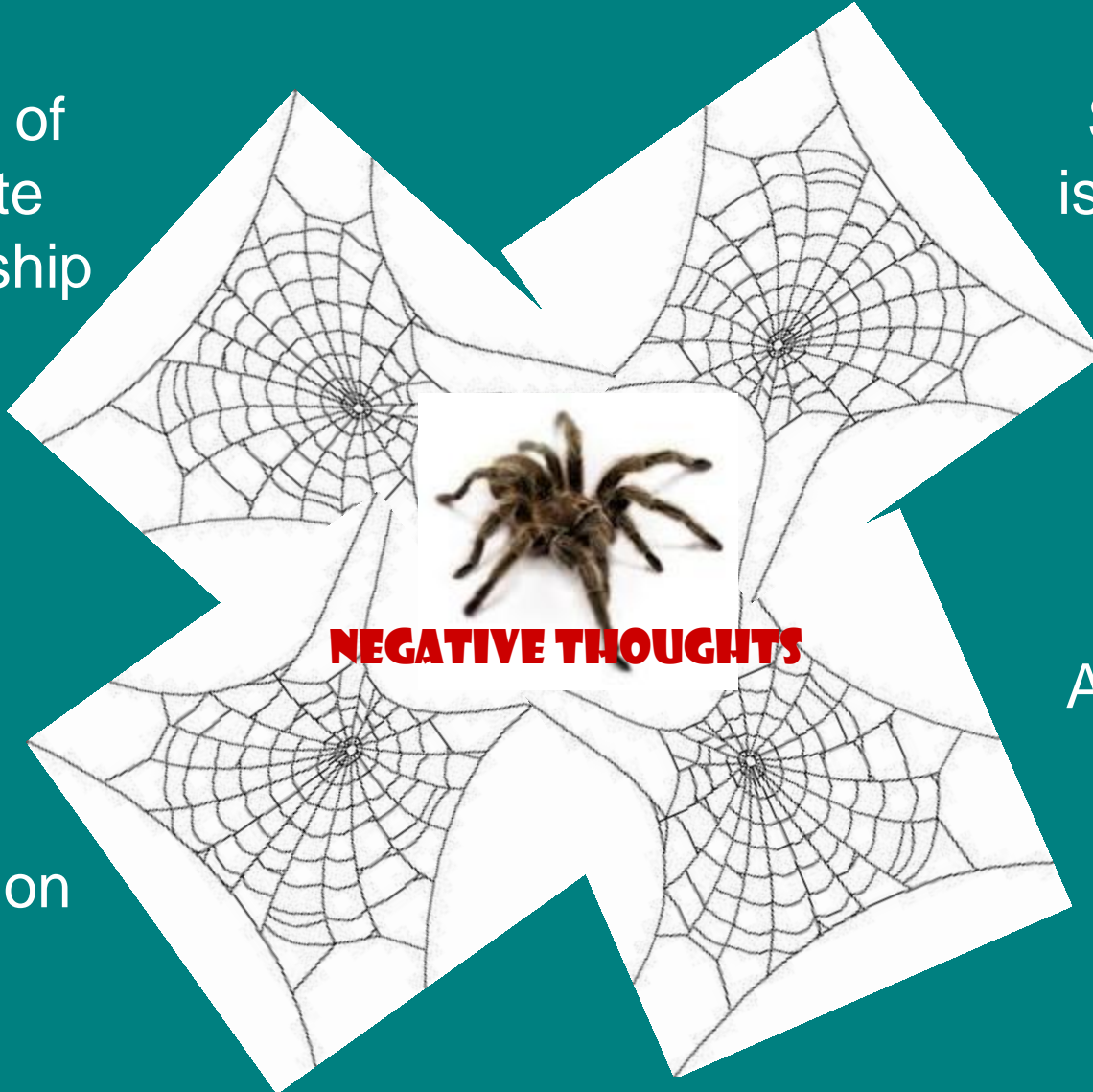
- Severity or duration of disability (mixed findings)
- Level of education



Strong Connections with Self-Esteem

Quality of intimate relationship

Social isolation



Abuse

Depression



Improving Self-Esteem...

- takes a lot of hard work
- starts with small changes
- is a lifetime process





In Summary...

- It is not disability per se but rather the contextual, social, physical, and emotional dimensions of the impact of disability that may influence self-esteem
- Women with disabilities face numerous barriers and challenges as a result of both disability and gender biases and must continually cope with assaults to their self-esteem by negative societal attitudes



Need for Interventions

- Need for safe, inclusive personal development programs for women with disabilities (Fine & Asch, 1988)
- Need an environment where women with disabilities can serve as role models for one another (Deegan & Brooks, 1985)
- Opportunities to share important information about resources and confront internalized multiple oppressions, including ableism and sexism (Saxton, 1985)



So we developed one!





Theoretical Framework

- **Social learning theory** (Bandura, 1986, 1997)
 - self-efficacy -- a belief in one's ability to influence outcomes for desired goals
- **Feminist psychology** (Jordan, 1994)
 - importance of supportive relationships that offer a sense of connectedness and mutuality
- **Independent living philosophy** (M. A. Nosek & Fuhrer, 1992; M. A. Nosek & Hughes, 2004)
 - personal autonomy, empowerment, and self-advocacy



Format

- Small groups of 8-10 women
- 2 peer facilitators
- Meet for 2 hours per week for 6-8 weeks
- Face-to-face
- Over the Internet using Second Life, a free public virtual 3-D world
- Leaders' manual, participants' manual
- Highly interactive
- Homework



Intervention Topics

- Overview of self-esteem
- Role of gender and disability socialization
- Connecting to self and caring for self
- Relaxation skill training
- Connecting with others, including healthy and unhealthy connections, boundaries, improving relationships
- Communication skills and assertiveness
- Planning for the future



Intervention Strategies

- Presentation of information (PPT slides)
- Group discussion, group exercises, and role playing
- Goal setting and weekly action planning
 - Weekly review of progress
 - Group feedback and problem solving
- Homework exercises
- “Bud adventure”
 - Participants paired up and given a pre-planned, usually off-island task to complete
 - Examples: visit a garden, meditation site, race track
 - Designed to build navigation skills in SL and promote social connectedness and self-confidence
- Prizes in SL



Our First, Face-To-Face Study

- NIDRR grant 1997-2000
- Randomized trial
- Determine the efficacy of a 6-week self-esteem enhancement group intervention for women with physical disabilities (Hughes, Taylor, Robinson-Whelen, Swedlund, & Nosek, 2004)
- Recruitment and intervention conducted by staff of 5 centers for independent living (CIL) in different states
- $N = 102$, 51 per group



Findings

- Quantitative -- Intervention group showed significantly greater improvement on measures of:
 - self-efficacy
 - self-esteem
 - depression
- Qualitative –
 - group support and goal-setting activities highly valuable
 - learned new skills for improving self-esteem, gaining increased confidence in being assertive, connecting with others, and managing stress and depression.



Purpose of our Current Study

- Deliver this self-esteem intervention in Second Life to women with physical disabilities who face substantial transportation and health barriers to attending a face-to-face workshop

Our Parcel of Land in Second Life



- Beachfront location
- Water Garden





Our Parcel of Land in Second Life

- Office building with conference rooms



- Recreational activities





Venues for Convening Small Groups

- Living room
- Swimming Pool





Venues for Convening Small Groups

- Amphitheater



- Cabana





Venues for Convening Small Groups

- Cave



- Hilltop





Eligibility

- Disability that affects mobility, at least one year
- Have access to a computer with a high-speed internet connection (that meets minimum requirements to run SL)
- Understand English well enough to participate in written and voice online discussions
- Must not have visual or hearing impairments that prohibit the ability to participate in online groups and group activities
- Have (or willing to obtain) an e-mail account



Findings from the Pilot Test

- Recruitment posed many technical challenges
 - equipment did not meet the technical requirements of SL (RAM, graphics card, broadband speed)
- Analysis of data on 19 participants showed:
 - Significant improvement in Self-Esteem
 - Improvement in general Self-Efficacy
 - Small improvement in Social Support
 - Significant improvement in Depression



Positive Findings

- Qualitative feedback:
 - Amount of information was just right
 - Average session rating of excellent or good
 - Very to somewhat enjoyable
 - Well-organized
 - Information very clear, useful
 - Helped them make some positive changes in their lives
 - Not difficult to communicate with the leaders or other participants
 - Excellent level of support received from the leaders



Less Positive Findings

- Stressfulness of the sessions
 - Less stressful with each session
- Somewhat supported by the other group members
- Group excursions were enjoyable but not particularly helpful



What They Liked Best

- Exploring in SL and the new world it opened up to them
 - *I never would do the traveling, shopping, going to Paris, flying over the ocean, riding whales.*
- Privacy
 - *You can talk to people and discuss your problems without anyone knowing your true identity.*
- Action Planning
 - *I learned that with small goal setting/action planning I feel better about myself and can actually accomplish things.*
- The group sharing and discussion
 - *I learned that I am not alone.*
- The materials and information
- The facilitators



How do workshops in Second Life compare to face-to-face?

- Second Life is more convenient and more enjoyable
- Social interaction is about the same
- Face-to-face provides somewhat more opportunity for long lasting social connections
- One woman, who described herself as shy stated:
 - SL was less anxiety-provoking
 - allowed her to ‘hide behind her avatar’ until she was comfortable with the group



Comments, Questions

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