Increasing self-compassion and body neutrality for university students: The journey of the “Freedom From Your Cage” body image program at University of Queensland
Zarinah Hienekamp & Keren Jones, University of Queensland

Many university students experience an extremely negative relationship towards their body, which can result in eating and perceptual disturbances, and negatively affect their academic progress. Efforts to address this body distress led to the development of a group program in 2015 to support body image change over time. The current research assessed both the usefulness of the program and the content, and the importance of self-compassion and body neutrality. Focus groups were held with university counselling staff and past group participants to evaluate these key questions. The results demonstrated strong support in the usefulness of the program and the overall themes in the content but also identified the need for further clarification of body neutrality as a relational stance as well as reflecting the challenging nature of building self-compassion for many university students.

**Learning outcomes**
- An understanding of the development and facilitation of a therapeutic group based program aimed at supporting students to gain knowledge about body image, and to build a different emotional relationship with their body and with themselves.
- Information about self-compassion, how it can relate to the inner critic and its role in supporting more positive body image and wellbeing outcomes in students.
- An introduction to the new and emerging area of body neutrality, including focus group feedback from students.

**Presenters**
Zarinah Hienekamp, University of Queensland

Zarinah Hienekamp is a Psychologist whose speciality areas are psychological resilience and self-compassion. She has many years of experience in the community, youth work and TAFE sectors, works in private practice and has nearly ten years of experience as a Student Counsellor at UQ. She enjoys working with both individuals and groups from a range of ages and diverse cultural backgrounds. She utilises a range of therapeutic interventions with a focus on use of a positive psychology approach to assist people to uncover and utilise their strengths and potential.

Keren Jones, University of Queensland

Keren Jones is a Psychologist with over 20 years of experience supporting individuals in community settings including disability, rehabilitation and paediatric roles, in addition to her Student Counsellor role at UQ. She is a passionate believer in the value of preventative strategies, the capacity for growth and change as well as honouring everyone’s journey in life.

Zarinah and Keren’s professional connection was founded in a concern that students could not recognise their own worth and value they bring to their lives. This led to the development of the Freedom From Your Cage body image program in 2014. They fundamentally believe that our capacity to develop self-compassion for ourselves leads to less suffering and more living.