

Dear Katty Kay and Claire Shipman,

On January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017, an astonishing 3.3 million women from the United States as well as millions more across the world marched for their voices to be heard. The Women's March will forever go down in records as one of the greatest and most noteworthy demonstrations for social justice in the history of the world. We have come so far together in this fight for equality and basic human rights. So why are women still not making it to the top of any profession in the world? As a young woman, at a time when questions about my future have been coming up increasingly, I've lately found myself especially puzzled and maddened by this. Before I read *The Confidence Code*, I considered myself an assertive person and I refused to accept that a lack of confidence could be holding *me* back in any way. However, thanks to your collection of eye opening research, I have been exposed to the *many* areas of my everyday life where I do feel excess pressure as a woman.

One example is just a casual conversation within any predominantly male realm, such as that of football. I don't even play football; this is simply about me being a football fan at a middle school. After a lot of time spent keeping up with every bit of news possible to make sure nobody caught me unprepared, my male classmates have finally accepted me as a football fan. It is embarrassing to admit this, but I often felt pride after even a couple sentences of casual football talk with any male peer. To me it almost felt like a sanction. When discussing football with a group of males, they often make inaccurate claims and the whole group merely shrugs them off. On the other hand, if I'm ever called out for saying something wrong – which I constantly live in fear of, I am immediately hit with sexist comments or jokes. “Since when have *you* been into football anyway?” They pick me apart. *Why do I need to put in more effort than they do simply to earn their approval?* Your book taught me about the “stereotype threat” and when I found out that women performed lower when being reminded that they were ‘supposed’ to be bad at something, I was stunned. I found that this was really similar to my situation in this casual football talk. From your book I learned that by constantly being reminded by my male peers that I am not supposed to be into football, I am letting myself be impacted by this stereotype. Now, I try not to take those comments as seriously in order to overcome this “stereotype threat.” Since I read your book, I have become so much more comfortable with being wrong sometimes when talking to male peers about such topics.

Additionally, your book made me notice that in certain environments where I don't feel comfortable, I tend to doubt myself more often than I admit. In classes such as science, I realized I was barely raising my hand even though most of the time I knew the correct answer. Many of the boys in that class raise their hand for every single question even though I am sure that I am just as capable as them. Often they don't even get the answer right, but that doesn't stop them from trying. *So why does it stop me? Why does it stop the majority of the other girls in my class?* Originally I shook it off and figured these small nerves would go away eventually. However your book talked about the results of Hewlett Packard's study, which revealed that men comfortably apply for a job position when they only meet 60% of the requirements, whereas women comfortably apply when they meet 100% of the requirements. These statistics left me in shock and irritated me to the point of ultimate frustration. My seemingly trivial science class issue was just a smaller scale of the overlying issue of capable women holding back from getting to the top. This is where your analysis on competence vs. confidence turned my life around. Your book stated how women have misunderstood the issue of confidence vs. competence for decades. I learned that having talent is not just about competence; confidence is a huge if not bigger factor of success.

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Finally, another environment that I realized I was holding back in was the basketball court. Being a newcomer to the highest-level team was really frightening to me. I am obviously not one of the best players on the team and that really messed with my confidence. Your interviews with Monique Currie and Crystal Langhorne really opened me up to this. Monique explained how even the worst player on the roster of a men's team has the same ego as the star player, whereas on a women's team if a woman isn't one of the best players it really throws her confidence off. I had never even thought about this before reading your book. Going from the lowest level team to the highest-level team, I have 100% felt my confidence take a toll. I *know* that I am capable of more than what I have displayed on the court. *So why is there always a fear of failure, a slight hesitation in my eyes before I pass the ball instead of taking the shot myself?* From your book I learned that this fear is never going to go away if I don't take chances. Your book talked about David Rodriguez's opinion on how women often have a desire to do something perfectly. It really shocked me how much I could relate to this, as well as many of the stories in your book even if on a much smaller scale.

Courage. That's it. That's the answer to *all* the questions I found myself dwelling over. I finally got the answers I've been searching for and it's so much simpler than I ever could have guessed. The way to build confidence is by becoming comfortable with something. And you can't be comfortable with something unless you try, *even if* there is a chance of failure. Thanks to your book I have learned how to overcome the small voice inside my head and have a little more courage. Something I've always wanted to do is run for the middle school student body president. I was terrified that I would fail and forever go down in history as a loser. But feeding off of the infuriating examples in your book where perfectly capable women held themselves back, I decided to do it. As a matter of fact I did lose the election. But I gave it my absolute best and now if I'm asked to give a speech in front of the school I won't be afraid. All it took was a little courage to build up forever lasting confidence. The simplicity of the complex answer I was searching for is so empowering and satisfying. Whether its everyday conversations, school, or basketball, I learned to just take a shot. Don't overthink it.

Being a part of Generation Z and *still* being able to relate to almost everything your book explains is a fundamental part of the greatness of it. After reading this compelling book I have reached a groundbreaking conclusion as to what confidence really is and the ability it has to shape my entire life as a woman. I firmly believe that every woman of every age must read this book at some point in their life because regardless of what they are going through, I know they will still be able to relate to it. This book was aimed as a guide for women yet to come and I want to say it has served its purpose beautifully.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Riya Sharma

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