

# IMPOSTOR EXPERIENCE

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# REFLECT ON BELONGING & COMMUNITY:

What does being an impostor mean to you?

Have you felt that way since beginning medical school?

Has that old impostor shown up and tried to fool you?

What does a sense of belonging mean to you?

Where has this shown up in since starting school?

# INTERSECTION OF LEARNING AND WELL-BEING



# IMPOSTER PHENOMENON/ SYNDROME

**First described by  
psychologists  
Suzanne Imes, PhD,  
and Pauline Rose  
Clance, PhD**

**Occurs among high  
achievers who  
struggle to internalize  
and accept their  
success**

# IMPOSTER QUIZ

(VALERIE YOUNG, 2008)

- Do you sometimes shy away from challenges because of nagging self-doubt?
- Do you tend to chalk your accomplishments up to being a "fluke," "no big deal" or the fact that people just "like" you?
- Do you hate making a mistake, being less than fully prepared or not doing things perfectly?
- Do you tend to feel crushed by even constructive criticism, seeing it as evidence of your "ineptness?"
- When you do succeed, do you think, "Phew, I fooled 'em this time but I may not be so lucky next time."
- Do you believe that other people (students, colleagues, competitors) are smarter and more capable than you are?
- Do you live in fear of being found out, discovered, unmasked?

## IMPOSTER EXPERIENCE

- Accomplishments are attributed to luck rather than to ability
- There can be a fear that others will eventually unmask them as a fraud-feeling like a fake
- Fostered by feelings of not belonging
- Can be accompanied by anxiety and depression

# IMPOSTER EXPERIENCE

- **Discounting Successes:**

**You do well on a quiz.....**

- “It wasn’t really that hard, everyone would have done well”
- “It was just an easy quiz”



**By definition, most people with impostor feelings suffer in silence**



**People don't talk about it as they are afraid they're going to be found out-**

# IMPOSTER EXPERIENCE



# IMPOSTER EXPERIENCE

**Professional students are at risk as they are often asked to function in a capacity that they often do not feel ready to handle**

**It is typical to have self doubt, but this is more of an all-encompassing fear of being found out to not have what it takes**

STEREOTYPE  
THREAT-

EXTERNAL  
EXPECTATIONS  
ABOUT WHAT  
YOU SHOULD DO,  
CAN'T DO, CAN  
INFLUENCE  
PERFORMANCE

Gender

Sexual identity


Race

Socio-economic status

Cultural background

Religion

Ableism



"I have written eleven books, but each time I think, Uh oh, they're going to find me out now."

Maya Angelou

[impostorsyndrome.com](http://impostorsyndrome.com)

# IMPOSTER EXPERIENCE

- 22-60% medical students
- 33-44% residents
- Senior Faculty:
  - Especially in transitions and facing professional challenges-
  - Patient complaint
  - Poor evaluations
  - Rejected grants
  - Lack of promotion
  - Role of feedback or lack there of
- Women more than men]
- URM

# IMPOSTOR CONSEQUENCES

- Anxiety, depression, and burnout
- Withdrawal school
- Suicidal ideation
- Lower self-compassion, sociability, self-esteem

# MEDICAL STUDENTS:

Study in 2016, found that **50% of female** medical students and **25% of male** students have Imposter Syndrome and it was significantly **associated with increased burnout**

**Stopped students from “raising their hand” in class settings**

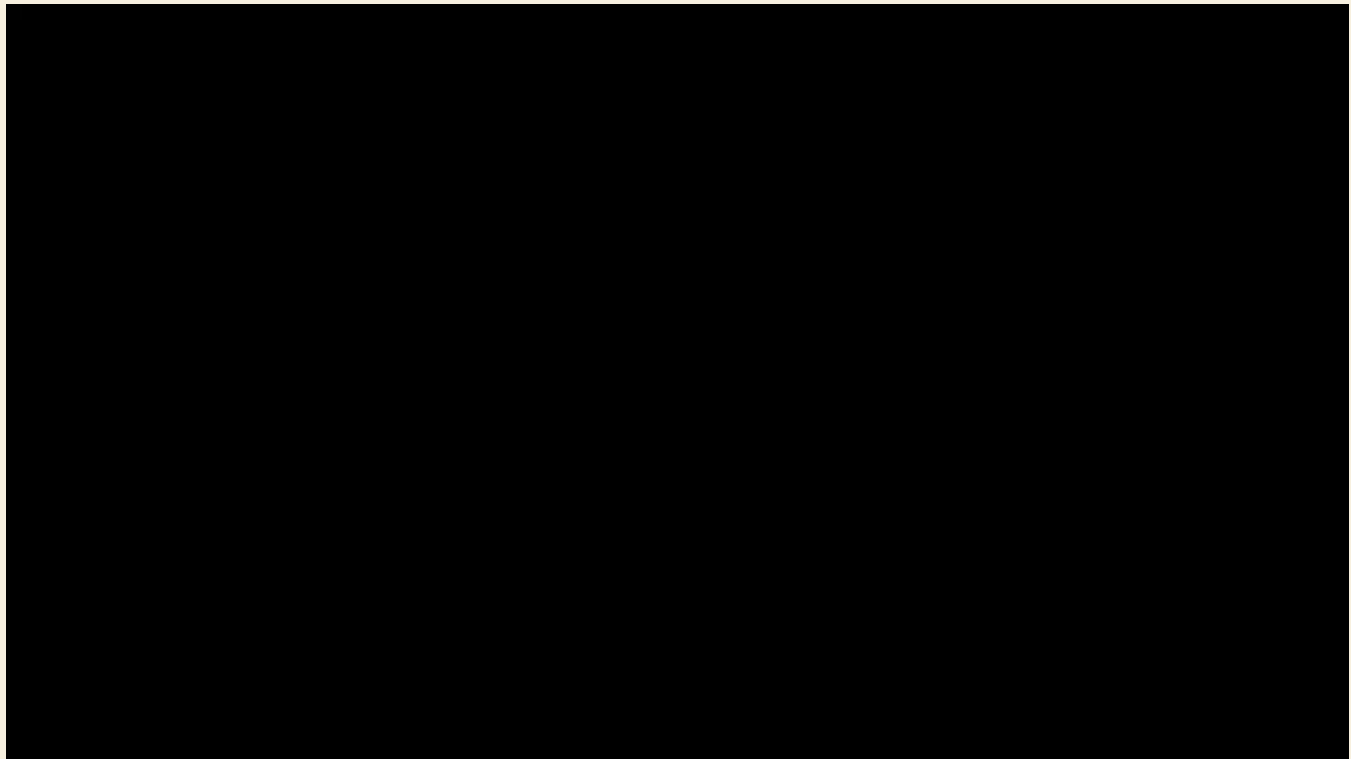
# CONCERNS OF DISCRIMINATORY GASLIGHTING

- Imposter syndrome can put the blame on individuals, without accounting for the historical and cultural contexts that are foundational to how it manifests in both women of color and white women.
- Imposter syndrome directs our view toward fixing women at work instead of fixing the places where women work.
- Even if women demonstrate strength, ambition, and resilience, daily battles with microaggressions, especially expectations and assumptions formed by stereotypes and racism, often push us down.

## **IMPOSTER SYNDROME: TREAT THE CAUSE, NOT THE SYMPTOM**

Imposter syndrome is but a symptom; inequity is the disease. Promoting equitable representation of women and minorities among the leaders of medicine through concerted systems-level intervention is the most appropriate treatment.



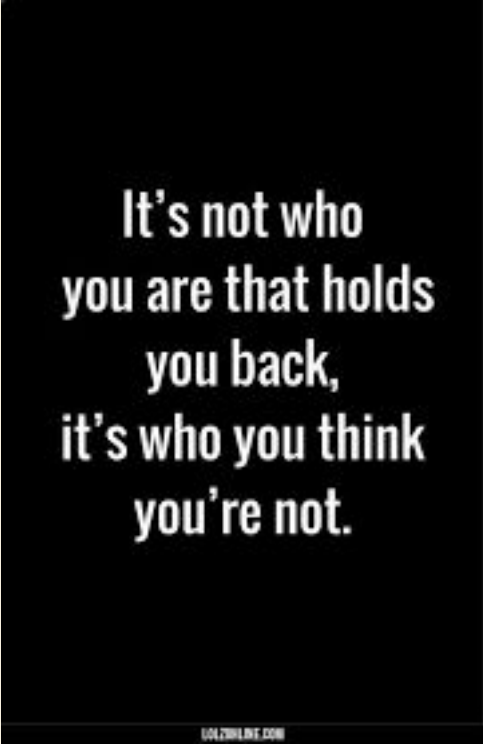


# MICHELLE OBAMA DISCUSSING IMPOSTOR

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dumm\\_XfHkmY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dumm_XfHkmY)

# SO WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?





**It's not who  
you are that holds  
you back,  
it's who you think  
you're not.**

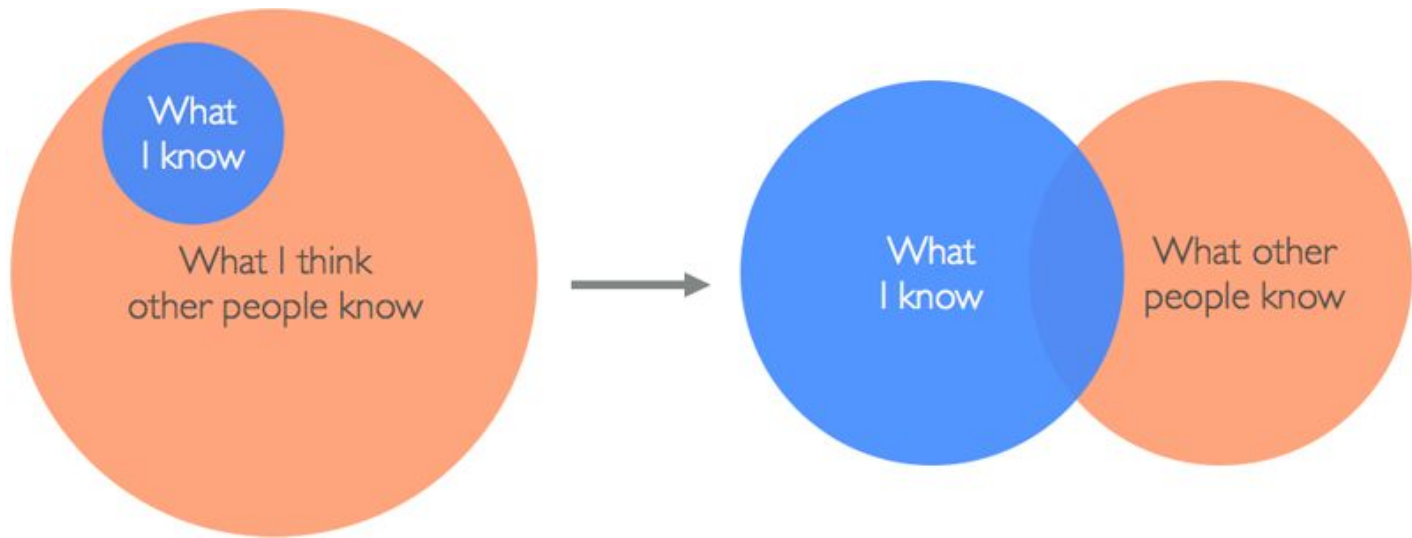
[LOLZMILK.COM](http://LOLZMILK.COM)

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"I think instead of worrying about why people don't believe in you, we should worry about why you don't believe in *yourself*."





# FIXED MINDSET

**ATTRIBUTING SUCCESS TO  
AN INNATE ABILITY- SO YOU  
HAVE IT OR YOU DON'T**



# GROWTH MINDSET



**ATTRIBUTING SUCCESS NOT TO  
INHERENT TALENT THAT YOU DO  
OR DO NOT POSSESS**



**ALLOWS FOR GROWTH AND  
DEVELOPMENT**

# I DO WELL ON A PHYSIOLOGY QUIZ

- Response 1: “I am good at physiology”

= Fixed Mindset


- Response 2: “ I figured out how to approach physiology and I am proud of myself”

= Growth Mindset

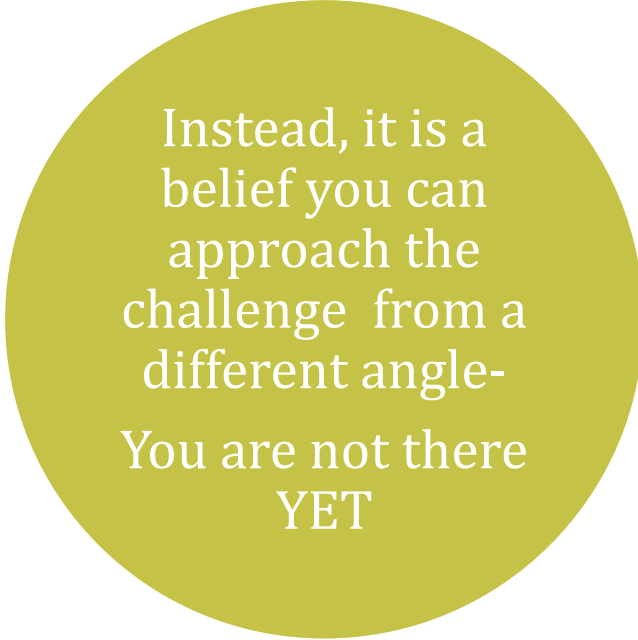
# I FAILED A PHYSIOLOGY QUIZ

- Response 1: “I am bad at physiology”  
= Fixed Mindset

- Response 2: “ I need to figure out how I can approach physiology”  
= Growth Mindset



Perhaps the most  
common  
misconception is  
simply equating  
the growth  
mindset with  
effort.



Instead, it is a  
belief you can  
approach the  
challenge from a  
different angle-  
You are not there  
YET

# NOT YET

- Are you not smart enough to solve it ... or have you just not solved it yet?
- Gives you a path to the future
- Process error, learn from it, correct it

# RESEARCH

GROWTH  
MINDSET CAN  
CHANGE  
PERFORMANCE



TAKE CONTROL  
OF YOUR  
THOUGHTS AND  
BE  
EMPOWERED

# WHAT TO DO?

CAROL DWECK, PH.D.

- Step 1. Learn to hear your fixed mindset “voice.”
- Step 2. Recognize that you have a choice.
- Step 3: Talk back with growth mindset voice
  - You can interpret challenges with a fixed mindset as signs that your fixed talents or abilities are lacking.
  - Or you can interpret them in a growth mindset as signs that you need to ramp up your strategies and effort, stretch yourself, and expand your abilities, just not there yet

**WHAT TO DO:**

**TAKING CHARGE OF  
YOUR PROBLEMATIC  
MINDSETS**

**HELPFUL, HEALTHY, BALANCED  
MINDSETS**





# COGNITIVE REFRAMING

- **Situation:** You don't know do as well as you hoped on a quiz
- **Thoughts:**
  - “What if I fail the course, what will happen to me?”
  - “Everyone seems more on top of it than me!”
  - **What would you be feeling?:** Scared, anxious, hopeless

# COGNITIVE REFRAMING

- **Situation:** You don't know do as well as you hoped on a quiz
- **Thoughts:**
  - “ This was just one quiz, it is not helpful to beat up on myself ?”
  - “I am usually on top of things, let me talk with others and see if I could have studied differently”

**What would you be feeling?:** Hopeful, optimistic

# MALADAPTIVE PERFECTIONISM

Developing an unrealistic standard of performance that one expects of oneself every time. This sets up a person for being repeatedly disappointed in oneself-setting bar too high.

*Imperfection is the human condition even if the medical culture implies otherwise*



## VIEWING PERFORMANCE AS AN IDENTITY

Assuming that your performance defines your full identity. For, example, if you make an error, you think “I’m a bad student, therefore I’m an impostor”

*“I made an error, that will happen”*



# ALL OR NOTHING THINKING

A dichotomous thinking pattern -seeing things in extremes.

If you are unable to achieve the outcome you want, you respond as if there is no gray area

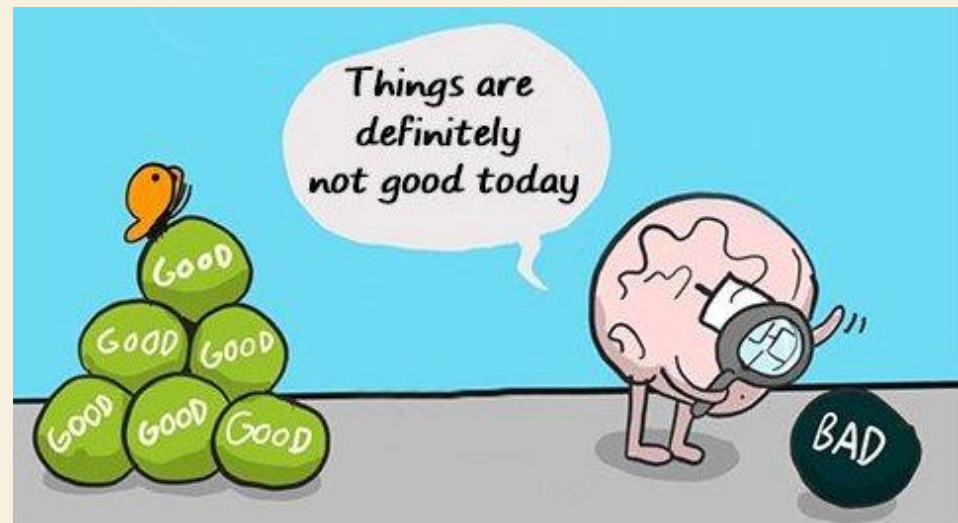
*Make room to say, "I did pretty well."*



## NEGATIVITY BIAS/DISCOUNTING THE POSITIVE

Discounting positive  
information about  
yourself

*Please don't be that  
student who walks home  
rehashing the one  
negative comment and  
fails to honor all that was  
accomplished*

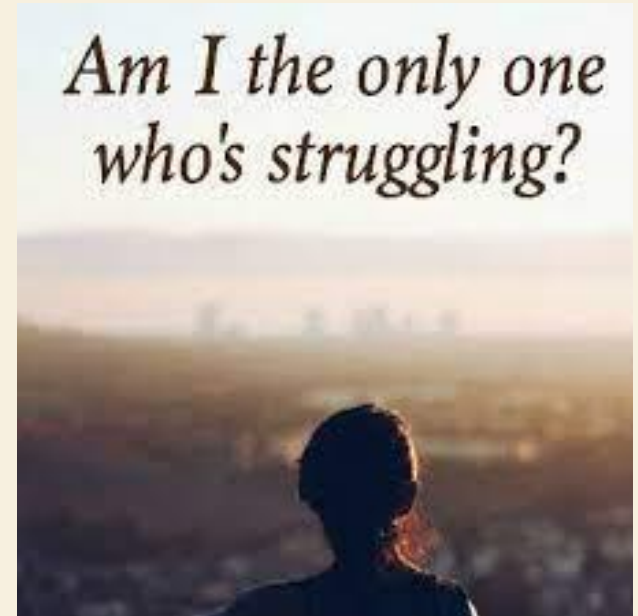


# I'M THE ONLY ONE STRUGGLING

Going into the underground tunnel that you are the only one who is finding the year hard.....the only one whose knowledge base is not perfect.....the only one who is tired and lonely...the dangerous isolation bubble

*You are certainly not alone, and it only looks darker and skewed in the isolation bubble alone...normalize, validate, connect*

*Am I the only one  
who's struggling?*



# TAKE CONTROL WHERE YOU CAN

Step1: Awareness-Notice

Step 2 -Decide to ignore and it and not engage with it- *"I see you but I don't have time for you now"*

Or Step 3- Dispute it; find an alternative; argue with it- *"Wait, let me consider another way of thinking about this."*

ASK: "What is a more balanced, helpful and healthy way for me to think about this?"



# COGNITIVE REFRAMING

PEANUTS By Charles M. Schulz



<http://intranet.ucdavis.edu/publish/insideneews/ucdhs/11890>

# STRATEGIES

Acknowledge

Acknowledge luck helps but you wouldn't be here without hard work and skill

Let go

Let go of the perfectionism that is unhealthy-stop comparing yourself to "that" person

Be

Be cautious of comparison- stay your own course

# TIPS THAT CAN HELP

- **Break the silence.** Shame keeps a lot of people from “fessing up” about their fraudulent feelings. Knowing you are not alone can be tremendously freeing.
- **Separate feelings from fact.** There are times you don’t feel smart. It happens to everyone from time to time. Realize that just because you may feel that, doesn’t mean you are.
- **Recognize when you should feel fraudulent.** If you’re the only or one of a few people who look or sound like you recognize that it might be a normal response to being on the receiving end of social stereotypes about competence and intelligence.

# TIPS THAT CAN HELP

- **Develop a healthy response to failure and mistake making.** Learning value from the loss and move on reminding yourself, “I’ll get there next time”
- **Develop a new script.** Become aware of the conversation going on in your head when you’re in a situation that triggers your Impostor feelings.
  - Consider a new script, “Everyone who starts something new feels off-base in the beginning. I may not know all the answers but I’m smart enough to find them out.”

# TIPS THAT CAN HELP

- **Visualize success.** Do what professional athletes do. Spend time beforehand picturing yourself making a successful presentation or calmly posing your question in class.
- **Reward yourself.** Learn to pat yourself on the back.
- **Fake it 'til you make it.** Instead of considering “winging it” as proof of your ineptness, learn to do what many high achievers do and view it as a skill.

# STRATEGIES THAT MIGHT HELP STEREOTYPE THREAT



When you are reminded of stereotype individuals perform less poorly-



Focus on the fuller definition of yourself not the stereotype



Cognitive strategies that expand self-identity- growth mindset

# STEREOTYPE THREAT

**Connect with  
Mentors and  
Community**



A few additional  
strategies that might  
help keep the impostor  
from fooling you





# SUCCESS LOG

Each day identify three things you achieved-

Write down accomplishments- seeing them in black and white can help

Log the positive feedback

# RECONNECT TO YOUR MISSION



# KNOWING AND LEADING WITH YOUR STRENGTHS

- People most often change by building on their strengths
- Paying attention to strengths is not just ignoring problems
- It is responding to a challenge by starting from a place where you've got assets.

# STRENGTHS

What is a strength you have utilized this year that has supported your success?



# HONOR YOUR STRENGTHS

- Compassion
- Humility
- Deliberate
- Caring
- Funny
- Loving
- Hardworking
- Ambitious
- Empathic
- Adaptable
- Connected
- Engaged
- Curious
- Determined
- Focused

# CONNECT TO YOUR VALUES

Accountability

Achievement

Adventurousness

Altruism

Ambition

Challenge

Commitment

Community

Compassion

Contribution

Creativity

Curiosity

Decisiveness

# SELF-COMPASSION



**INSTEAD OF JUDGING AND CRITICIZING YOURSELF  
FOR VARIOUS INADEQUACIES OR SHORTCOMINGS....**



**PRACTICE SELF-COMPASSION – BE KIND AND  
UNDERSTANDING WITH YOURSELF WHEN  
CONFRONTED WITH PERSONAL FAILINGS –  
THE HUMAN CONDITION**

## **TOOL KIT:**

# **WHAT TOOL/ STRATEGY MIGHT YOU TRY TO IMPLEMENT?**

- Talk About It
- Growth Mindset
- Cognitive Reframing
- Self-Compassion
- Honoring Strengths (Accepting Values)
- Logging Successes
- Connect with mentors/community
- Teach/mentor
- Staying connected to Mission/Goal





