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

Identify Learning Needs

Setting goals, creating a plan

Selecting resources

Implementing learning plan

Self-assessment

Poor Self-Care

Avoidance

Anxiety

Cognitive Distortions

Imposter Experience

Belonging

Fixed Mindset

YOU

Maggie Rea, Ph.D. et.al.
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?
• 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.
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

Maggie Rea, Ph.D. et al.
"I have written eleven books, but each time I think, Uh oh, they’re going to find me out now."

Maya Angelou

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 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
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.
“I think instead of worrying about why people don’t believe in you, we should worry about why you don’t believe in yourself.”
What I know

What I think other people know

What I know

What other people know

https://www.gailgazelle.com/
“Failure is an opportunity to grow”
\textbf{GROWTH MINDSET}

“I can learn to do anything I want”
“Challenges help me to grow”
“My effort and attitude determine my abilities”
“Feedback is constructive”
“I am inspired by the success of others”
“I like to try new things”

“Failure is the limit of my abilities”
\textbf{FIXED MINDSET}

“I’m either good at it or I’m not”
“My abilities are unchanging”
“I don’t like to be challenged”
“My potential is predetermined”
“When I’m frustrated, I give up”
“Feedback and criticism are personal”
“I stick to what I know”
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 then 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
TAKE CONTROL WHERE YOU CAN

Step1: Awareness-Notice

Step 2 - Decide to ignore 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

http://intranet.ucdavis.edu/publish/insidernews/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.”

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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

1. When you are reminded of stereotype individuals perform less poorly.

2. Focus on the fuller definition of yourself not the stereotype.

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?

Maggie Rea, Ph.D.et.al.
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
Impostor!
"It's perfectly okay to occasionally feel like a fraud when it comes to your career. I'm just not sure you need to say that on your resume."