Elevating Confidence: Implications of Impostor Syndrome

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Session Overview

• What is impostor syndrome?
• History of impostor syndrome
• Key research
• Personal definition & internal reflection
• Strategies for overcoming impostor syndrome
• Mentoring rising leaders
• Takeaway(s)
What is Impostor Syndrome?

• Psychology
  – A cognitive distortion that prevents a person from internalizing any sense of accomplishment
  – Fear of being discovered to be a fraud
  – Attributes success to luck rather than skill

• Higher education (faculty-specific)
  – Shock attributed to events such as being published in a top journal or receiving tenure

• Valerie Young, Ed.D.
  – “people who have a persistent belief in their lack of intelligence, skills, or competence” (Young, p. 16)
  – Impostor syndrome does not equal low self-esteem
History of Impostor Syndrome

• Clance & Imes, Psychotherapy, 1978
  – Phenomenon prevalent in 150 high-achieving women
  – First research done with ties to culture and gender
  – 1980’s-Clance and Matthews discover that 70% of people (men and women) have felt like impostors in their career

• Swedish Immunologists Wenneras & Wold, 1997
  – Discovered for women scientists, it is two and a half times more difficult for women to succeed than men

• Valerie Young, 2011
  – *The Secret Thoughts of Successful Women*
  – Helping successful women to FEEL successful
Key Research

• Gender-specific research
  – Females internalize criticism and externalize success
  – Males-externalize criticism and internalize success
  – Oprah Winfrey & Sheryl Sandberg Video

• Population-based examples and research
  – First-Year College Students
  – New Graduate Students/ Graduate Assistants
  – Underrepresented Minority Students (STEM specific)
  – Applicable to first-generation students, minority students, rural students…others?
"I have written eleven books, but each time I think, Uh oh, they’re going to find me out now."

Maya Angelou

 impostorsyndrome.com
“It’s almost like the better I do, the more my feeling of inadequacy actually increases, because I’m just going, Any moment, someone’s going to find out I’m a total fraud, and that I don’t deserve any of what I’ve achieved.” – Emma Watson
“I still doubt myself every single day. What people believe is my self-confidence is actually my reaction to fear.” – Will Smith
Reflection

• Given past research and definitions, what does impostor syndrome mean to you personally?
• Identify one point in your life up until this point when you doubted your success?
• Have you ever avoided taking on an opportunity because of nagging self-doubt? If yes, please describe.
Strategies for Overcoming Impostor Syndrome

• Literature review suggestions
  – Know your skills and be secure in them
  – Fake it until you make it, don’t wait for feelings of confidence
  – “Your fear of being inadequate pales compared with your fear of being extraordinary” (Young, p. 243)
  – Accept praise
  – Be aware of your own self-perception

• Additions from the audience

• Implications at your institution
Mentoring Rising Leaders

• Many individuals cite that mentoring can be a “cure” for impostor syndrome, both from the mentor and mentee perspective

• The power of leading by example
  – Feel, believe, and act that you are indeed just as capable, successful, and intelligent as others think you are
  – When a mentor praises their mentee, this allows the mentee to internalize these positive emotions

• Is this happening in your OTR program? On your campus? How?
List of Rights & Additional Resources

- *The Secret Thoughts of Successful Women* by Valerie Young
- *Feeling Like a Fraud* by Peggy McIntosh

You have the right to...

Say no without feeling guilty
Make mistakes or be right
Express pride in your accomplishments
Have an off day or not perform perfectly
Fail and learn from the experience
Be treated fairly without discrimination of identity
To say “I don’t understand”
To not be the spokesperson for my entire race, culture, gender, etc.
References


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Please complete an evaluation of this presentation.

Thank you!

Evals can be dropped off next to the registration desk.

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