

*Do I really belong here?:  
Recognizing and overcoming  
Imposter Syndrome*

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# Objectives

➤ **At the end of this session, you should be able to:**

1. Interpret your own scores from the Clance Imposter Syndrome test
2. Be able to define the Imposter Syndrome and its characteristics
3. Recognize how the Imposter Syndrome can impede career progress
4. Learn about actions to take if you experience Imposter Syndrome
5. Learn how to help other people who have Imposter Syndrome feelings

70% of people are expected to experience at least one episode of Imposter Syndrome in their lifetime

# Imposter Syndrome Defined

- ▶ 'Imposters' suffer from feelings that they are less competent than others perceive them to be. These feelings override feelings of success or external proof of their competence. (This is situational)
- ▶ Individuals who are high achievers yet have persistent feelings of inadequacy despite evident success.
- ▶ They tend to attribute their successes to external factors out of their control rather than to their own skills, talents, or expertise.
- ▶ Important: IS is NOT a lack of self-confidence or self-esteem (which is defined as confidence in one's own worth, or self-respect). It is NOT a mental illness/disorder diagnosis

## ► The Clance Imposter Phenomenon Questionnaire

20-item questionnaire comprised of **3 subscales** that rate:

1. Your feelings about your professional or intellectual competence and how you think others perceive it
2. Your tendencies around dealing with objective evidence and praise about your abilities
3. Your tendencies regarding to what you attribute the reasons for your success

From *The Impostor Phenomenon: When Success Makes You Feel Like A Fake* (pp. 20-22), by P.R. Clance, 1985, Toronto: Bantam Books.

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# The Clance Impostor Syndrome Scoring

## Determine where someone falls on the IS Continuum:

- Few Impostor characteristics (score of 40 or less);
- Moderate IS experiences (between 41 and 60);
- Frequent Impostor feelings (between 61 and 80)
- Often and intense IS experiences (80 or higher).

**Note:** The higher the score, the more frequently and/or seriously the Impostor Syndrome interferes in a person's life.

My scores: Dec. 2011...72

Oct. 2014...56

Oct. 2017...62

Feb. 2020... 77

Symptoms often worsen/reappear at life/career transitions.

## Who is susceptible to IS?

- ▶ Often found in persons that are in professions different from family of origin
  - ▶ First generation college students
  - ▶ First to complete graduate or professional school
- ▶ Lack of role models or support of achievements...had to figure things out on their own
- ▶ Also found in some people who had privilege growing up and may feel they did not earn what they have achieved
- ▶ Once thought to be much more common among women who are successful, but has since been shown to also occur just as often in men

# Attributes of Imposter Syndrome

1. Inability to internalize accomplishments
2. Despite external evidence, the person remains convinced that they did not earn the success they have achieved
3. A persistent tendency to attribute successes to external factors (luck, timing, quota filling, others being deceived).
4. Feeling that other people are mistaken about them and have an inflated perception of your abilities
5. Fear that they don't really belong in the particular environment and are going to be "found out"



# Consequences to self...

- Anxiety, depression, and psychological distress (Oriel et al, 2004; Henning et al, 1998)
- Perfectionism and fear of failing, disappointing others (Henning et al, 1998). That can add stress.
- Fear of success - paradoxical (Fried-Buchalter, 1992)





## Consequences to career...

- Setting a lower performance expectancy
- Avoiding new challenges for fear of failure
  - IMPORTANT: By trying to avoid failure you also avoid success
- Hinder abilities to *advocate* and *negotiate* for things that you deserve or need to succeed



## How can these feelings be overcome?

The person needs to learn to accept that they had an important role in their successes.

At some point you may have been given an opportunity that others weren't. The reason for this may not be 100% clear. You may therefore conclude that things achieved after that opportunity were not actually deserved.

Try to be objective...

## Take action . . .

- Understand why you are having these feelings
- Talk to others about it (could be with a counselor or peers)
- Make a list of successes and accomplishments
- Get honest feedback from someone you really trust

It may not be realistic to eliminate IS feelings, but everyone can work on strategies to *reduce* or *manage* it



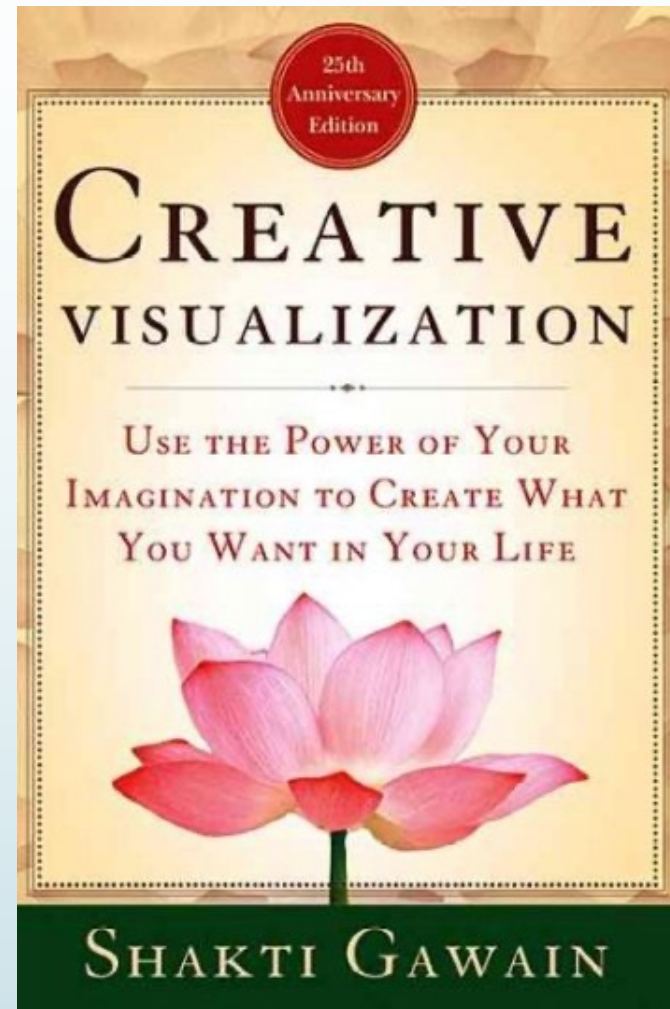
## Prevention (?)

- ▶ Be realistic about strengths and weaknesses (seek feedback from trusted friends and professors/advisors).
- ▶ Be pro-active about doing things to fill in gaps in skill set or training.
- ▶ Ask mentors/faculty to tell their stories. Ask about education and career experiences. Ask about things they struggled with and how they overcame them.

Symptoms may worsen/reappear at life/career transitions.

# Be empowered: Cognitive Behavior Techniques

- ▶ Choose to see/view things the way you want them to be...creative visualization
- ▶ Take action to make this a reality
- ▶ Practice makes perfect!
- ▶ Practice...just saying "thank you" when receiving a compliment...helps to internalize praise





# Parting Advice

*“I am the one thing in life I can control”*

*Aaron Burr, “Hamilton”*

- ◆ Ultimately, it matters more what one does with a given opportunity rather than how or why they were given that opportunity
- ◆ Make the most of opportunities that come
- ◆ You are the one responsible for your path in life

July 8  
Imposter Syndrome  
Dr. Maureen Gannon

