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WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION: NAVIGATING IMPOSTOR PHENOMENON

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TODAY'S CONVERSATION

- ✓ **Welcome & brief introduction**
- ✓ **Icebreaker: Checking in**
- ✓ **Understanding impostor phenomenon vs. imposter syndrome**
- ✓ **Recognizing impostor feelings**
- ✓ **How common is it in higher education?**
- ✓ **Conditions that contribute to impostor phenomenon**
- ✓ **How impostor phenomenon shows up in work**
- ✓ **Small-group reflection**
- ✓ **Strategies to survive and thrive**
- ✓ **Key takeaway**

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ABOUT ME

Lifelong Learner

Researcher

Educator

Assistant Professor of Educational Studies

Co-Director of EdD in Adult and Community Education



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HOW ARE YOU FEELING TODAY?

In the chat, please share one emoji that represents how you are feeling right now.



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YOUR CURRENT UNDERSTANDING OF IMPOSTOR PHENOMENON

In one word or one sentence, share what comes to mind when you think of impostor phenomenon or imposter syndrome.



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IMPOSTOR PHENOMENON VS. IMPOSTER SYNDROME

Impostor Phenomenon	Imposter Syndrome
A research-based psychological phenomenon	A popularized, non-clinical term.
Coined by Clance & Imes (1978)	Emerged through media, self-help, assumption, and workplace discourse.
Describes persistent self-doubt despite competence	Often used interchangeably with impostor phenomenon, but less precise.
Contextual and socially influenced (e.g., power, race, gender, academic culture)	Often framed as an individual problem.
Not a diagnosable mental disorder	Not an officially recognized mental health disorder.
Can change or improve with supportive environments	May unintentionally suggest that people are the problem, rather than the unequal conditions they are responding to.

(Bravata et al., 2020; Clance & Imes, 1978)



RECOGNIZING IMPOSTOR FEELINGS

ME: Happy that someone complimented me
ALSO ME: kinda sus

- ✓ Feeling like a fraud despite evidence of competence.
- ✓ Attributing success to luck or help from others.
- ✓ Fear of being “found out.”
- ✓ Overworking to compensate for perceived inadequacy.
- ✓ Self-doubt.



- ✓ Perfectionism.
- ✓ Hesitation to ask for help.
- ✓ Downplaying accomplishments.
- ✓ Hesitation to take on new challenges.
- ✓ Feeling uncomfortable when impostor feelings are discussed.

Impostor Phenomenon

(Clance & Imes, 1978; Kheang, 2023)



HOW COMMON IS IT IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

Everyone can experience it: leaders, faculty, staff, students

Especially common among:

- Women
- First-generation scholars
- International staff/faculty
- Staff/faculty of color
- Nontraditional students



(Clance & Imes, 1978; Cohen & McConnell, 2019; Kheang, 2023; Parkman, 2016; Vaughn et al., 2020)



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CONDITIONS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO IMPOSTOR PHENOMENON

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INDIVIDUAL: 5 TYPES OF IMPOSTORS



The Perfectionist



The Superwoman/man



The Natural Genius



The Soloist



The Expert

Which type resonates with you most?

(Young, 2011)



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INDIVIDUAL: OTHER INDIVIDUAL TENDENCIES



Internalized Doubts



Overthinking and Self-Criticism



Narcissistic Personality

(Clance & Imes, 1978; Kheang, 2023, 2024; Langford & Clance, 1993)



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ENVIRONMENT OR CONTEXT

Evaluation-heavy culture

Lack of feedback or mentoring



Competitive norms

Unclear expectations or processes

High-stakes decision-making

(Clance & Imes, 1978; Kheang, 2023, 2024)

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HOW IMPOSTOR PHENOMENON SHOWS UP IN WORK

- ✓ Over-preparing for meetings or reports
- ✓ Hesitation to make decisions or take initiative
- ✓ Difficulty accepting recognition or praise
- ✓ Difficulty admitting mistakes
- ✓ Fear of “being found out” in your role
- ✓ Over-explaining ideas or tasks
- ✓ Workaholism

(Ferrari & Thompson, 2006; Kheang, 2023)



IMPACTS: CAREER & WORKPLACE

Delayed leadership or advancement

- Hesitation to take on roles
- Avoids high-visibility opportunities

Self-silencing in staff meetings

- Reluctant to share ideas
- Fear of being judged



Burnout / emotional exhaustion

- Chronic overwork
- Stress from high self-imposed standards
- Reduced energy

Reduced sense of belonging

- Feeling like an outsider
- Less engagement with colleagues and team culture

(Cari Hampton & Feller, 2019; Ling et al., 2020; Mir & Kamal, 2018)



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SMALL GROUP REFLECTION

Please join a small group in your breakout room and discuss these following questions:

1. When have you experienced impostor feelings at work?
2. What helped (or could have helped)?

When back, send a group representative to share at least one key takeaway.



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MOVING TOWARD RESILIENCE

- ❖ Self-reflection leads to self-awareness
- ❖ Awareness reduces shame
- ❖ Contextual understanding shifts blame from self to environment
- ❖ First step toward building supportive work culture



STRATEGIES TO SURVIVE AND THRIVE

- ❖ Individual
 - ✓ Affirmation: Reframe self-talk (I am capable)
 - ✓ Document accomplishments
 - ✓ Seek mentors or peer allies
- ❖ Environment / Organizational Strategies
 - ✓ Transparent expectations and clear feedback
 - ✓ Mentoring and professional development programs
 - ✓ Recognize diverse pathways to success
- ❖ Applying Strategies at Work:
 - ✓ Publicly recognize staff contributions (build confidence and morale)
 - ✓ Provide consistent feedback (reinforce growth and learning)
 - ✓ Encourage professional growth opportunities (training, leadership roles)



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KEY TAKEAWAY

“Impostor phenomenon affects professional decisions, leadership engagement, and workplace confidence, **BUT** awareness and supportive environments can counteract these effects.”

- Somanita Kheang



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Thank you!





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