Why Smart People Suffer from the Impostor Syndrome and How to Thrive in Spite of It

Dr. Valerie Young
WEPAN 2011-2012 Webinar Series

- **Host:** Diane Matt, Executive Director, WEPAN (Women in Engineering ProActive Network)

- **Moderator:** Jenna Carpenter, Ph.D., Associate Dean; College of Engineering & Science, Louisiana Tech University; Director of Professional Development, WEPAN BOD

- **Presenters:** Dr. Valerie Young, Speaker, Author of *The Secrets Thoughts of Successful Women: Why Capable People Suffer from the Impostor Syndrome and How to Thrive in Spite of It* by Crown Publ./Random House
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How to Ask a Question

• Participant microphones are muted for webinar quality.
• Type your question in the “Question” space in the webinar control panel.
• A presenter will respond as time allows.
Who’s on the Call Today

- We have over 450 registered participants.

- Thank you to ASEE WIED, ASEE CMC, ASEE ERM, NAPE Stem Equity Pipeline, PGEList, ADVANCE, and others for helping us spread the word!
What’s WEPAN?  www.wepan.org

WEPAN is the nation’s leading organization for transforming culture in engineering education to promote the success of all women.

• mobilize diverse, inclusive and collaborative stakeholders
• foster diversity in engineering graduates
• inspire a network of advocates to empower and advance the education of women pursuing engineering and related disciplines
• translate research into practice and develop national models to attract and retain women in engineering
WEPAN Knowledge Center

http://wepanknowledgecenter.org

Goal: Increase the number, scope and effectiveness of initiatives to advance women in engineering.

• Catalogued and fully cited resources
  Research, reports, data and statistics, agenda papers, bibliographies, best practices, key programs, and more—1,000+

• Online Professional Community
  Network, collaborate, identify experts, share information

• Special online events
  Feature WKC Professional Community and networking opportunities

• Use the research, information & data, Submit & suggest resources, Share the WKC with colleagues
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Why Smart People Suffer from the Impostor Syndrome and How to Thrive in Spite of It

Dr. Valerie Young, author

Secret Thoughts of Successful Women
Where Does Gender Fit In?
Despite *evidence* to the contrary, many bright, capable *people* do not experience an inner sense of competence or success.

Instead achievements are chalked up to luck, timing, connections, charm, computer error, etc.

Not on the list: *Cheating*
Success Brings Relief vs. Confidence or Joy

- More visibility
- More accountability
- Pressure to repeat past success
Impostors Biggest Fear...

Being FOUND OUT!
Coping and Protecting Strategies

- Watch for indicators of common coping & protecting strategies
- Make students/employees aware of their behaviors – and the costs
Sources of Impostor Feelings

- Parental messages/expectations
- First-generation professional
- Studying/working in another country or are an immigrant
- Being in a creative field
- Students
- First or the few in a major/field, job, or level
- Organizational culture which fuels self-doubt
Unsustainable Self-Expectations Relative to Competence

- The Perfectionist
- The Expert
- The Rugged Individualist
- The Natural Genius
- The Superwoman/man/student
Failure & Mistake Making

- Evoke shame
- Internalized
- Personalized
- Remembered longer than achievements
Social Context of Female Self-Doubt

- Lower/higher expectations
- Same behavior different perceptions
Help Students/Employees

- Break the silence
- There can be no change without changes
- Role model normalizing impostor feelings
- Shift language to separate feelings from fact
Help Students or Employees Recognize

- Legitimate role luck, timing, connections, and charm play
- Why faking it ‘til you make it is harder for women – and why they must
#1 SOLUTION

Help Students/Employees Embrace the “Competence Rulebook for Mere Mortals”
Healthy Competence Scripts

- Perfectionism is a refusal to let yourself move ahead. *Jennifer White*
- I use not only all the brains I have but all that I can borrow. *Woodrow Wilson*
- Everybody is ignorant, only on different subjects. *Will Rogers*
- Sometimes you win and sometimes you learn. *Robert Kiyosaki*
Shoring Up Confidence May Not Be Enough

- Role of female other-directedness and real or perceived relationship consequences of success on or with others
- Women’s more layered definition of success vs. “fear” of success
- Help sort out: “Am I afraid because I don’t think I can do it or…”
“I’m burdened by a great potential”

“Your fear of being inadequate pales in comparison to your fear of being extraordinary”
Playing Big

“The flip side of giftedness.”

*Manfred F. R. Kets de Vries*

*Everyone* loses when you play small
Additional Support/Resources at ImpostorSyndrome.com

- Free weekly “Wise Words”
- Coming soon: Guidelines for book club/discussion groups
- Live presentation/workshops
- New institutional webinar
Coming Soon:
Book Club Guidelines
Questions?

• Remember:
  – Type your question in the “Question” space in the webinar control panel.
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Thank You!

- We will E-mail a link to the PowerPoint to you.
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