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Irene Tiefenthaler
Reniet3@gmail.com

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CONQUERING IMPOSTER SYNDROME

Irene Tiefenthaler is an Early Childhood Professional Development Specialist and Consultant. She has been a center director for ten years and has taught in both early childhood and elementary school settings. She recently completed her Master's Degree in Curriculum & Instruction with an emphasis in Advanced Early Childhood Education from the University of Montana.

Do you feel like everyone else is an expert on a subject that you have been studying, yet you will never measure up? If so, you may be suffering from *Imposter Syndrome*. Many successful, intelligent women experience a strange phenomenon in which they suffer from feelings of inadequacy in comparison to others in their field. *Imposter Syndrome* can be described as having a persistent feeling of lack of competence and intelligence which is compounded by the feeling that their achievements are unfounded and that they were just lucky (Young, 2011). There is good news for those who suffer from these feelings and simply learning about the syndrome can be a huge relief.

In the 1970's, psychologists Suzanne Imes, PhD, and Pauline Rose Clance, PhD, introduced the idea of an imposter phenomenon. Their research looked at undergraduate and graduate women who were quite successful but felt "overvalued" by their peers or administrators and additionally felt like imposters (Clance & Imes, 1978). While those with imposter syndrome have feelings of self-doubt and often anxiety, it is not listed in the DSM as an official diagnosis (Weir, n.d.). Furthermore, Clance & Imes (1978) found that this phenomenon occurred more with woman than with men. They attribute this to the way that women and men synthesize their success. Men were found to believe success came from within, while women tended to believe that success came from the outside. To complicate matters, it appears that the more skills and education women acquire, the more they doubt their abilities (Bahn, 2014). Because of this, women who have imposter syndrome often work harder than others in the hopes of finally achieving the status that they fear they have never earned. This can either lead to more success or to burn out.

Fortunately, there are several things that can be done to counteract the imposter syndrome. First, identify what is causing your self-doubt (Vengoechea, 2015). Even if you have less experience than others in your field, it does not mean that you are not competent. Instead of worrying that you do not measure up, use this as an opportunity to present new ideas and offer a fresh perspective to your field. Try to find another person who can work as an ally with you and help advocate for your position (“Imposter Syndrome,” 2012).

Second, try to focus more on what you are presenting rather than on yourself and your credentials (Molinsky, Andersen, Davey, & Valcour, 2016). If the individual is suffering from imposter syndrome they are mostly worried about their own credibility. By transferring the focus to their research-backed work the focus is removed from the person who feels they do not deserve the credit and placed on the subject matter. As time passes, the person filled with doubt should be able to look back on their work and start to acknowledge their credibility.

Finally, what will help the most to overcome imposter syndrome is discussing it with other colleagues and administrators. Evidence shows that many women who experience imposter syndrome do so in silence (Young, 2011). Discovering that others whom you admire also experience imposter syndrome helps you realize that your feelings of inadequacy might be unfounded. Instead, it may just be that you are not used to being treated with the respect that you are now being given. Instead of using your energy to doubt your abilities, try and live up to it. Realize that most people who are experts in their field usually are because they never stop learning. Share what you have learned with others by mentoring and becoming a lifelong learner.

Recognizing that imposter syndrome exists and that you are not alone in your feelings is the first step to conquering this state of mind. You have worked hard to achieve success. With continued practice and self-awareness, you will begin to realize that you are deserving of your accomplishments.

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