Agile ORLANDO
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#AGILE2023
Imposter Systems
The Structures that Induce the Syndrome
Hello!

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Imposter
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Agenda

1. The current state of Imposter Syndrome
2. Systemic causes of widespread Imposter Syndrome
3. Addressing Imposter Systems
4. Call to action!
Why We’re Here

The current state of Imposter Syndrome
Imposter Syndrome

A thought pattern in which a person diminishes their own accomplishments, often attributing their successes to luck. This is coupled with a fear of being discovered as a “fraud”, or less capable than they appear to be.

Source: Paraphrased from Wikipedia
Imposter Syndrome: An individual diagnosis

Much of the literature on Imposter Syndrome focuses on individuals and self-help:

✓ Definition, symptoms, and traits
✓ Quizzes to determine if you have it
✓ Tools for coping with it
What I Normally Cover

Imposter Syndrome: Slaying the Beast

- 1978: Dr. Pauline Rose Clance and Dr. Suzanne Imes coined “Imposter Phenomenon”
- Warning signs of Imposter Syndrome
- Weapons to fight Imposter Syndrome
- Normalizing Imposter Syndrome
You will never climb Career Mountain and get to the top and shout, ‘I made it!’ You will rarely feel done or complete or even successful. Most people I know struggle with that complicated soup of feeling slighted on one hand and like a total fraud on the other.”

— **Amy Poehler**, decorated Actor, Producer, & Writer
“I’ve written eleven books, but each time I think, ‘Uh oh, they’re going to find out now. I’ve run a game on everybody, and they’re going to find me out.’”

— Maya Angelou, renowned author and Nobel Laureate

Source: Stylist, 12 Successful Women on Imposter Syndrome and Self-Doubt
“It never goes away. It’s sort of like, ‘You’re actually listening to me?!’ It doesn’t go away, that feeling of, ‘I don’t know if the world should take me seriously; I’m just… that little girl on the South Side who went to public school.’”

— Michelle Obama, attorney, author, and former First Lady of the United States

Source: Stylist, 12 Successful Women on Imposter Syndrome and Self-Doubt
Should We Be Normalizing Imposter Syndrome?

*Stop Telling Women They Have Imposter Syndrome* by Ruchika Tulshyan and Jodi-Ann Burey

- Flips the conversation on its head
- The goal is not to “fix women at work”
- The goal should be “fixing the places where women work”

Source: [Harvard Business Review, Stop Telling Women They Have Imposter Syndrome](https://hbr.org/2020/04/stop-telling-women-they-have-imposter-syndrome)
‘Typical’ does not equal ‘Normal’”

— Alyssa Nickow, Software Engineer, former principal, esteemed colleague
Systematic Review of Imposter Syndrome Studies

2019: Prevalence, Predictors, and Treatment of Imposter Syndrome

✓ 1990 - 2018
✓ 62 studies of 14,161 participants
✓ ½ published within 6 years of review
✓ They found...a pretty mixed bag
  o Studies were heterogeneous
  o Possibility of publication bias

Source: PMC Labs, Prevalence, Predictors, and Treatment of Imposter Syndrome: a Systematic Review
Systematic Review of Imposter Syndrome Studies

2019: Prevalence, Predictors, and Treatment of Imposter Syndrome

✓ Gender differences
  ○ Higher rates in women?

✓ Age differences
  ○ Negative correlation to age?

✓ Racial and ethnic differences
  ○ Insufficient measures

Source: PMC Labs, *Prevalence, Predictors, and Treatment of Imposter Syndrome: a Systematic Review*
9 of 16 studies reported prevalence of Imposter Syndrome between 30% and 50% of subjects.

Source: PMC Labs, Prevalence, Predictors, and Treatment of Imposter Syndrome: a Systematic Review
How We Got Here

Systemic causes of widespread Imposter Syndrome
Imposter Systems

The institutional structures that lead to widespread Imposter Syndrome, especially among folks with marginalized identities.
Imposter Systems: The real problem

Contributors to the alarming rates of Imposter Syndrome “diagnosis”

✓ Organizations
✓ Institutions
✓ Culture

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Imposter Systems Funnel

- **Imposter Syndrome**
- **Internalized Prejudice**
- **Bias & Micro-aggressions**
- **Exclusion**
- **Inequity**
- **Homogeneity**

- Being an “only”
- Less recognition, less pay, etc.
- No sense of belonging
- Daily slights, reducing confidence
- Lack of growth opportunities
- Justification of lack of recognition
- Justification of lack of recognition
“Bias and exclusion exacerbate feelings of doubt”

“Who is deemed ‘professional’ is an assessment process that’s culturally biased and skewed”

Workplaces seek “individual solutions for issues disproportionately caused by systems of discrimination and abuses of power”

Source: Harvard Business Review, Stop Telling Women They Have Imposter Syndrome
Stop Telling Women They Have Imposter Syndrome

Results of Imposter Systems

✓ The once-engaged Latina woman suddenly becomes quiet in meetings
✓ The Indian woman who was a sure shot for promotion gets vague feedback about lacking leadership presence

Source: Harvard Business Review, Stop Telling Women They Have Imposter Syndrome
Stop Telling Women They Have Imposter Syndrome

Results of Imposter Systems

✓ The trans woman who always spoke up doesn’t anymore because her manager makes gender-insensitive remarks.

✓ The Black woman whose questions once helped create better products for the organization doesn’t feel safe contributing feedback after being told she’s not a team player.

Source: Harvard Business Review, Stop Telling Women They Have Imposter Syndrome
3 Where We Can Go

Addressing Imposter Systems to create imposter-free institutions
The answer to overcoming imposter syndrome is not to fix individuals, but to create an environment that fosters a number of different leadership styles and where diversity of racial, ethnic, and gender identities is viewed as just as professional as the current model.”

— Ruchika Tulshyan & Jodi-Ann Burey, speakers, authors, disruptors

Source: Harvard Business Review, Stop Telling Women They Have Imposter Syndrome
Roadmap to Imposter-Free Organizations
Diversity

- It’s *not* the pipeline
- A culture shift is needed
- But there are things our organizations can do in the meantime
Diversity

✓ Job descriptions
  ○ Remove masculine, racist language (ninja, guru, etc.)
  ○ Include salary range
  ○ Remove degree requirements

✓ Expand the candidate pool
  ○ Diverse job boards
  ○ Partner with diversity-focused organizations
Diversity

- Consider team distribution
  - Avoid “onlys”
  - Avoid homogeneity
Roadmap to Imposter-Free Organizations

Diversity

Equity
Equality vs. Equity

Equality
Everyone is given the same supports. They are treated equally.

Equity
Everyone is given the supports they need. They are treated equitably.

Alternatively...
No accommodations or supports are needed. The systemic barrier has been removed.

Source: Unknown
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Equity

- Pay equity
  - Audit for pay equity by gender, race, age, and other protected statuses

- Opportunity equity
Equity

- Parental leave
  - Equal for all genders
  - Women are not a liability
  - Maternity, Paternity
Roadmap to Imposter-Free Organizations

1. Diversity
2. Equity
3. Belonging

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“[To a cishet, white, male colleague at a former job:] Have you ever dropped your wife off at a baby shower and thought, ‘No way I’m going in there!’ That’s what it’s like to come to work every day.”

— Kate Donaldson, Engineering Manager and former colleague
Belonging > Inclusion

- Acceptance > Tolerance
- Inclusion is an afterthought
- Example: child includes toddler
  - Inclusion is an act by the people in power
  - Belonging is a state of being
Belonging

✓ Culture Add > Culture Fit
✓ Embrace change in company culture
✓ Belonging ≠ Family
✓ #UnpopularOpinion: people shouldn’t feel like they have to bring their whole selves to work
Belonging

✓ Belonging for all genders
  ○ Non-gendered bathrooms
  ○ Avoiding gendered language everywhere
  ○ Normalizing the sharing of personal pronouns
  ○ Preferred pronouns
Roadmap to Imposter-Free Organizations

1. Diversity
2. Equity
3. Belonging
4. Acknowledgement
Acknowledgement

✓ Public recognition
✓ Equity of acknowledgement
✓ Develop systems to acknowledge everyone
✓ Compensate extra work
Roadmap to Imposter-Free Organizations

1. Diversity
2. Equity
3. Belonging
4. Acknowledgement
5. Mentorship & Sponsorship

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Mentorship

- Formalized mentorship programs
- Mentor and mentee both benefit
- Junior level talent is an asset
Sponsorship

✓ Advocating behind closed doors
✓ Commitment from leadership
  ○ Anti-bias training
  ○ Seeking out potential
Roadmap to Imposter-Free Organizations

1. Diversity
2. Equity
3. Belonging
4. Acknowledgement
5. Mentorship & Sponsorship
6. Opportunity
7. Transparency

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Opportunity Transparency

- Clearly defined paths to advancement
- Publicize internal openings
- Representation in leadership
Destination

Imposter-Free Organizations

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Roadmap to Imposter-Free Organizations

1. Diversity
2. Equity
3. Belonging
4. Acknowledgement
5. Mentorship & Sponsorship
6. Opportunity Transparency

Imposter-Free Organizations

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What Comes Next

Our call to action!

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SWOT Analysis

**STRENGTHS**
Things along the roadmap the org is already doing well

**WEAKNESSES**
Areas where a lot more work is needed

**OPPORTUNITIES**
Things the org can do next to get closer to the goal

**THREATS**
Things that might get in the way of taking next steps

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Call to Action!

- “Do the next right thing”
- Determine a plausible, valuable next step
  - Pronouns in email template
  - Pay equity audit
- Decide who to talk to about it
- Start talking!

Source: Anna, Frozen II
Thanks!

Questions?
Contact ‘Tine:
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Credits

Special thanks to all the people who made and released these awesome resources for free:

✓ Fresh Folk illustrations by Leni Kauffman
✓ Presentation template by SlidesCarnival
✓ Stop Telling Women They Have Imposter Syndrome by Ruchika Tulshyan & Jodi-Ann Burey
✓ Quotes from Marie Claire and Stylist
✓ Imposter Syndrome definition paraphrased from Wikipedia
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