Agile ORLANDO
JULY 24–28
2023

PRESENTED BY **Agile Alliance®** JOIN US TODAY!

#AGILE2023

LEARN MORE

Imposter Systems
The Structures that Induce the Syndrome

Hello!

'Tine Zekis (she/her/hers)

Software Engineer

Former Teacher

Imposter

@tinezekis

Agenda

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

@tinezeiks #Agile2023

Why We're Here

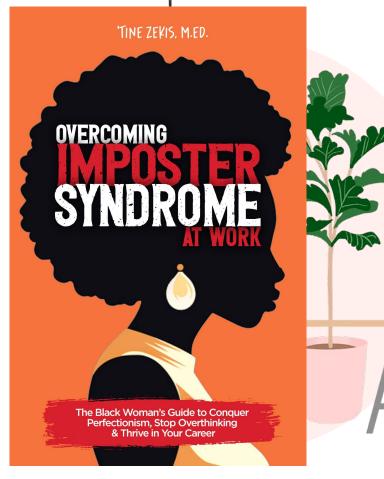The current state of Imposter Syndrome

1

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.

@tinezekis #Agile2023

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

'TINE ZEKIS, M.ED.

OVERCOMING
IMPOSTER
SYNDROME
AT WORK

The Black Woman's Guide to Conquer
Perfectionism, Stop Overthinking
& Thrive in Your Career

@tinezeiks #Agile2023

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."
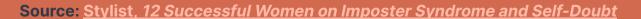
— **Amy Poehler,** *decorated Actor, Producer, & Writer*

@tinezekis #Agile2023

> " 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*

"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*

@tinezekis #Agile2023

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"

@tinezekis #Agile2023

"'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
  - ○ Studies were heterogeneous
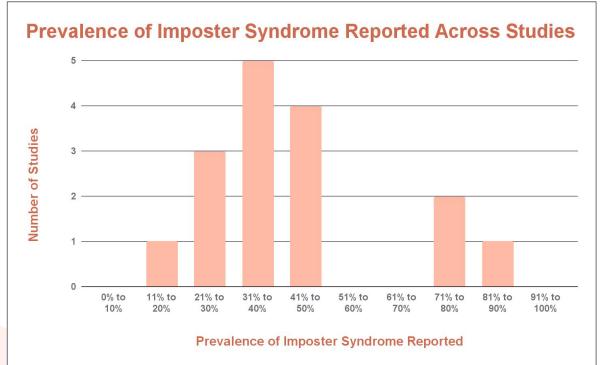 - ○ Possibility of publication bias

@tinezekis #Agile2023

Source: **_PMC Labs, Prevalence, Predictors, and Treatment of Imposter Syndrome: a Systematic Review_**
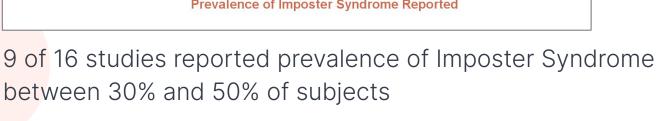
Systematic Review of Imposter Syndrome Studies

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

@tinezekis #Agile2023

Prevalence of Imposter Syndrome Reported Across Studies

Number of Studies (y-axis)

5									
4									
3									
2									
1									
0									

x-axis categories: 0% to 10%, 11% to 20%, 21% to 30%, 31% to 40%, 41% to 50%, 51% to 60%, 61% to 70%, 71% to 80%, 81% to 90%, 91% to 100%

Prevalence of Imposter Syndrome Reported

9 of 16 studies reported prevalence of Imposter Syndrome between 30% and 50% of subjects

@tinezekis #Agile2023

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

How We Got Here

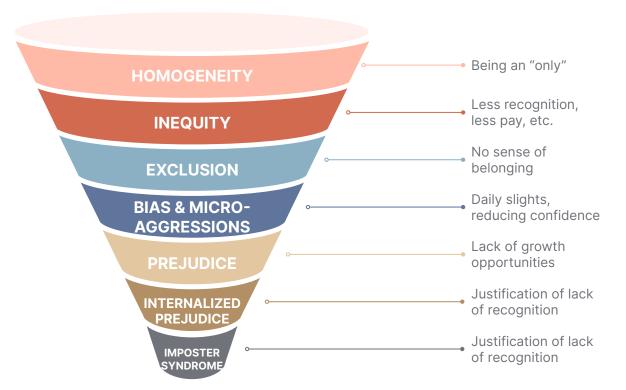Systemic causes of widespread Imposter Syndrome

2

Imposter Systems:
The real problem

Contributors to the alarming rates of
Imposter Syndrome "diagnosis"

- ✓ Organizations
- ✓ Institutions
- ✓ Culture

Imposter Systems Funnel

HOMOGENEITY — Being an "only"

INEQUITY — Less recognition, less pay, etc.

EXCLUSION — No sense of belonging

BIAS & MICRO-AGGRESSIONS — Daily slights, reducing confidence

PREJUDICE — Lack of growth opportunities

INTERNALIZED PREJUDICE — Justification of lack of recognition

IMPOSTER SYNDROME — Justification of lack of recognition

@tinezekis #Agile2023

Stop Telling Women They Have Imposter Syndrome

✓ "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*   @tinezekis #Agile2023

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

@tinezekis #Agile2023

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*

@tinezekis #Agile2023

Where We Can Go

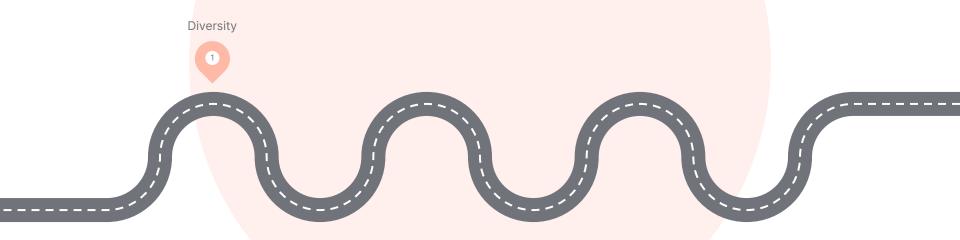Addressing Imposter Systems to create imposter-free institutions

"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

@tinezekis #Agile2023

Roadmap to Imposter-Free Organizations

Diversity

1

@tinezekis #Agile2023

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

1

Equity

2

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.

Equity

- ✓ Pay equity
  - ○ Audit for pay equity by gencer, 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

Diversity
1

Belonging
3

Equity
2

@tinezekis #Agile2023

> [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
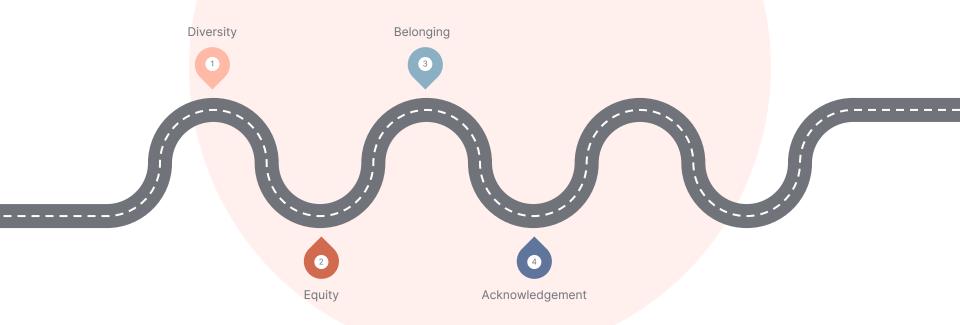
    ○ Belonging is a state of being

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

Diversity

1

Belonging

3

Equity

2

Acknowledgement

4

Acknowledgement

- ✓ Public recognition

- ✓ Equity of acknowledgement

- ✓ Develop systems to acknowledge *everyone*

- ✓ Compensate extra work

Roadmap to Imposter-Free Organizations

Diversity

1

Belonging

3

Mentorship & Sponsorship

5

Equity

2

Acknowledgement

4

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

Diversity

1

Equity

2

Belonging

3

Acknowledgement

4

Mentorship & Sponsorship

5

Opportunity Transparency

6

Opportunity Transparency

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

Destination

Imposter-Free Organizations

Roadmap to Imposter-Free Organizations

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

Imposter-Free Organizations

@tinezekis #Agile2023

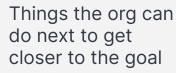# What Comes Next

Our call to action!

SWOT Analysis

STRENGTHS
Things along the roadmap the org is already doing well

WEAKNESSES
Areas where a lot more work is needed

S W O T

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

@tinezekis #Agile2023

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!

Thanks!

Questions?

Contact 'Tine:

info@tinezekis.com

www.tinezekis.com

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

- ✓ [Systematic Review](#) of Imposter Syndrome Studies by Bravata DM, Madhusudhan DK, Boroff M, et al.

- ✓ Quotes from [Marie Claire](#) and [Stylist](#)

- ✓ Imposter Syndrome definition paraphrased from [Wikipedia](#)