



Now They're Going to Find Out that I'm a Fraud...

Managing "Impostor Syndrome" in Gifted Individuals

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Who am I?



Dr. Matt Zakreski – you can call me
"Dr. Matt"



I'm a clinical psychologist,
professional speaker, and
neurodivergence advocate



I'm known as someone who can
bridge neuroscience and clinical
practice to make skills accessible for
you and your loved ones

Who identifies with this quote?

“I’ve just been fooling everyone
all of these years... I’m not as
_____ as everyone thinks I am.
It’s only a matter of time before
they all find out.”

Impostor Syndrome



PAULINE ROSE CLANCE



SUZANNE IMES

- A psychological pattern in which an individual doubts their accomplishments and has a persistent internalized fear of being exposed as a "fraud."
- Identified by Dr. Pauline R. Clance and Dr. Suzanne A. Imes
- Researching women on Wall Street (1978)
 - Successful
 - Well-liked and highly rated/respected by colleagues
 - What was different?
 - What about men?
- https://www.paulineroseclance.com/pdf/ip_high_achieving_women.pdf

Further Information

The person lacks a stable, internal sense of their accomplishments

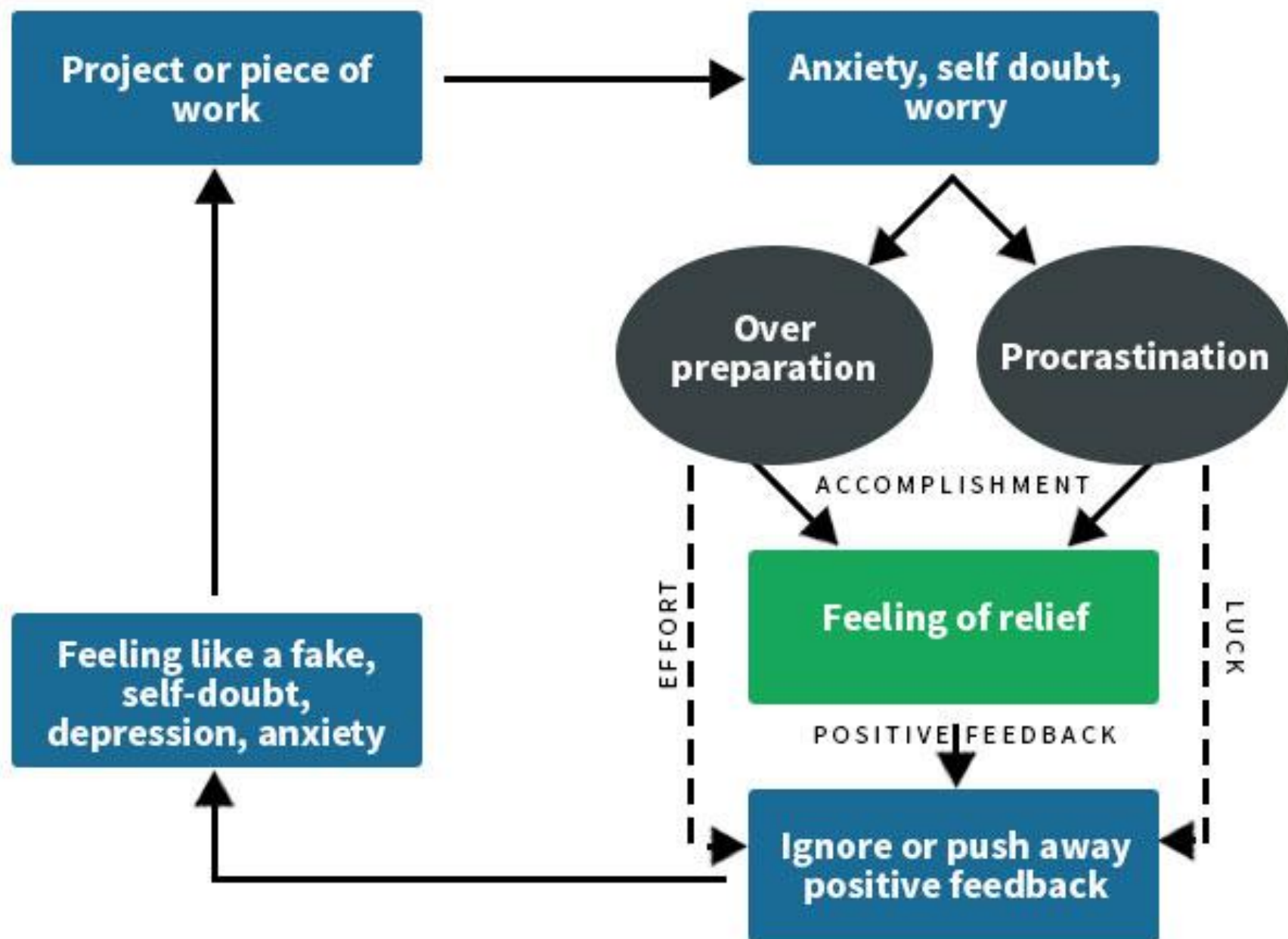
Despite external evidence of their competence, people remain convinced that they do not deserve all they have achieved.

Success is attributed to luck or others' failures – so success doesn't make it better

Failures are seen as “proof” of being an Impostor

- The beginning of the end
- I was never that good to begin with

The Imposter Cycle



THIS IS DR. ADAMS. SHE'S A SOCIAL
PSYCHOLOGIST AND THE WORLD'S TOP
EXPERT ON IMPOSTOR SYNDROME.

HAHA, DON'T BE SILLY! THERE
ARE LOTS OF SCHOLARS WHO
HAVE MADE MORE SIGNIFICANT...

...OH MY GOD.



Who Does it Impact?

Dr. Valerie Jones has come up with five different subgroups:

- Perfectionists – any mistake make them doubt their accomplishments
- Experts - feel the need to know every piece of information before they engage in a task
- The “natural genius” - used to skills coming easily, and when they must put in effort, their brain tells them that’s proof they’re an impostor.
- Soloists – feel if they need to ask for help, they think that means they are a failure or a fraud; they must work alone, even if they don’t know the task.
- “Superheroes” - feel the need to succeed in all aspects of life—at work, at home, etc—and may feel stressed when they are not accomplishing something.

WHO
AM
I?

Where does it
come from?

There is no single answer, but
multiple pathways

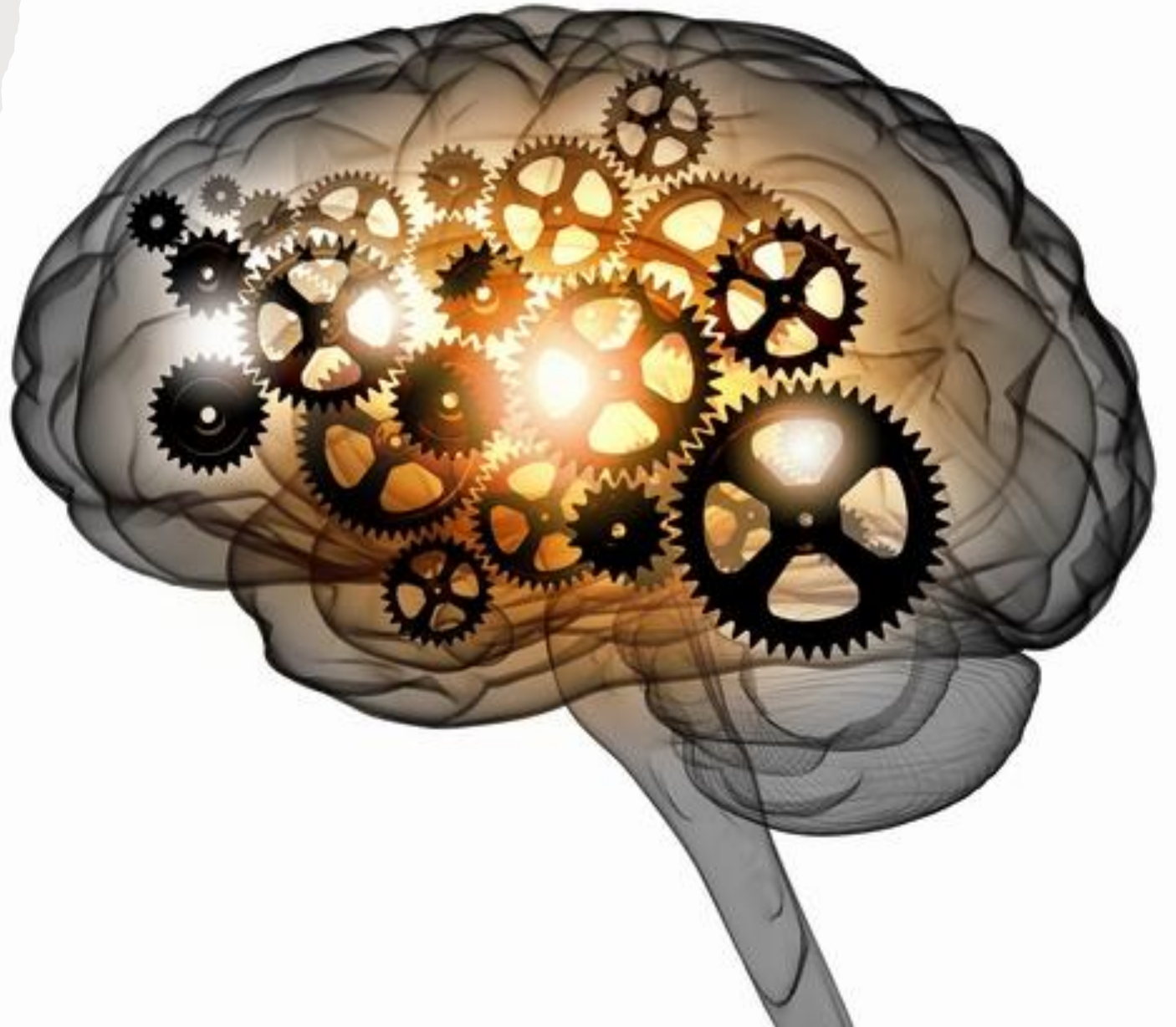
- Behavioral - What behaviors get/got reinforced?
- Cognitive - How do you approach tasks?
- Environmental - Feeling isolated, unsupported, or discriminated
- Psychological - People who are more anxious and neurotic
- Self - How passionate are you? How important is this task to you?

What Maintains it?

Two Automatic Thought processes:

- “In order to be loved/happy, I need to achieve”
- “What I’ve done doesn’t count/matter, I need to do more.”

These processes set up self-perpetuating cycles that create and maintain Impostor Syndrome



Atelophobia

the fear of not being
good enough

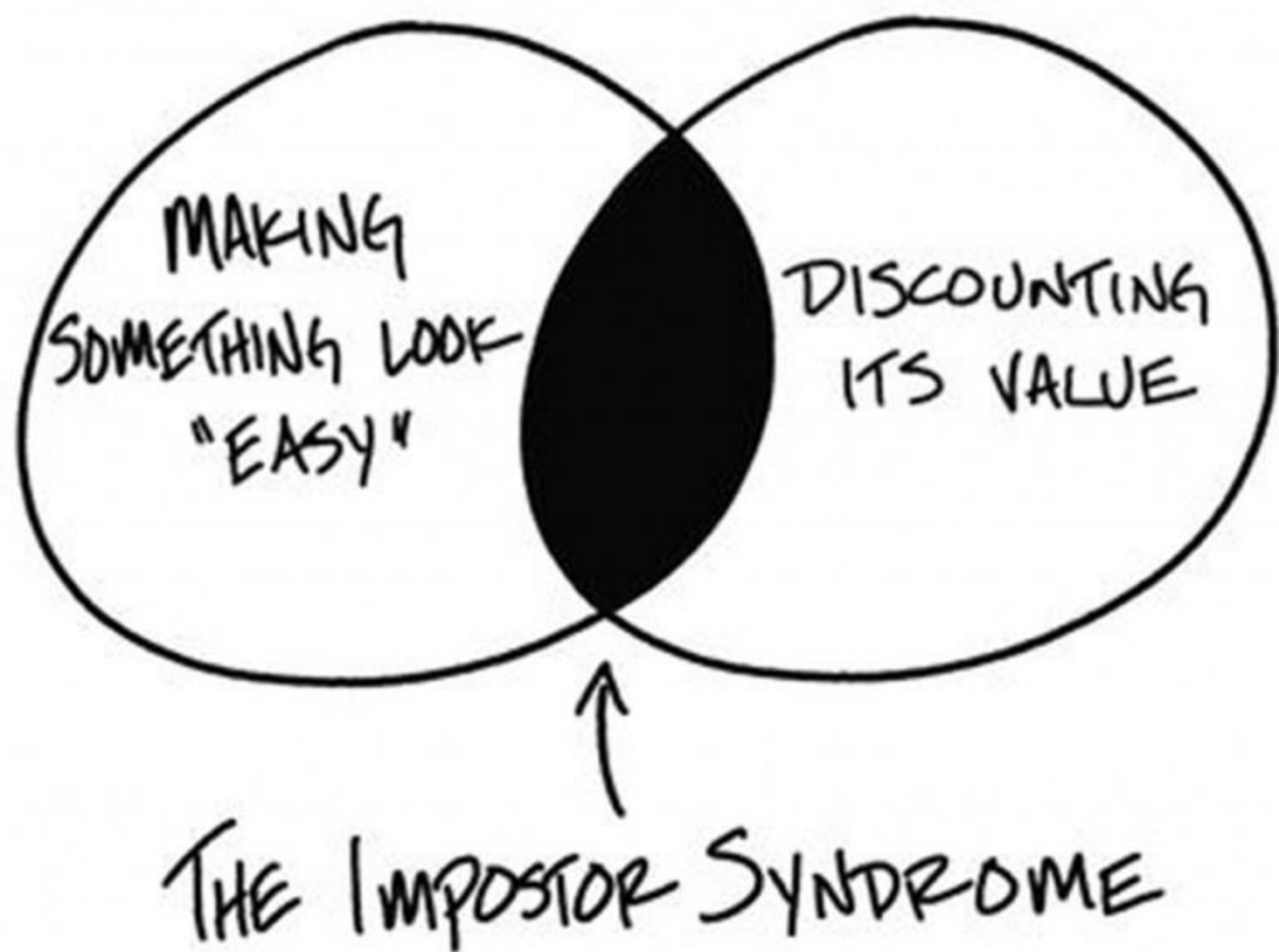
wordstionary.

How many astrophysics words do you recognize? Know? Can explain? (One point for each word, each round)

- Astronomy
- Big Bang Theory
- CNO Cycle
- Doppler Shift
- Electron
- Galaxy
- Hydrogen
- Light year
- Meteor
- Nebula
- Neutron
- Photon
- Proton
- Planet
- Quark
- UV rays
- Super-Nova Remnant (SNR)

68%

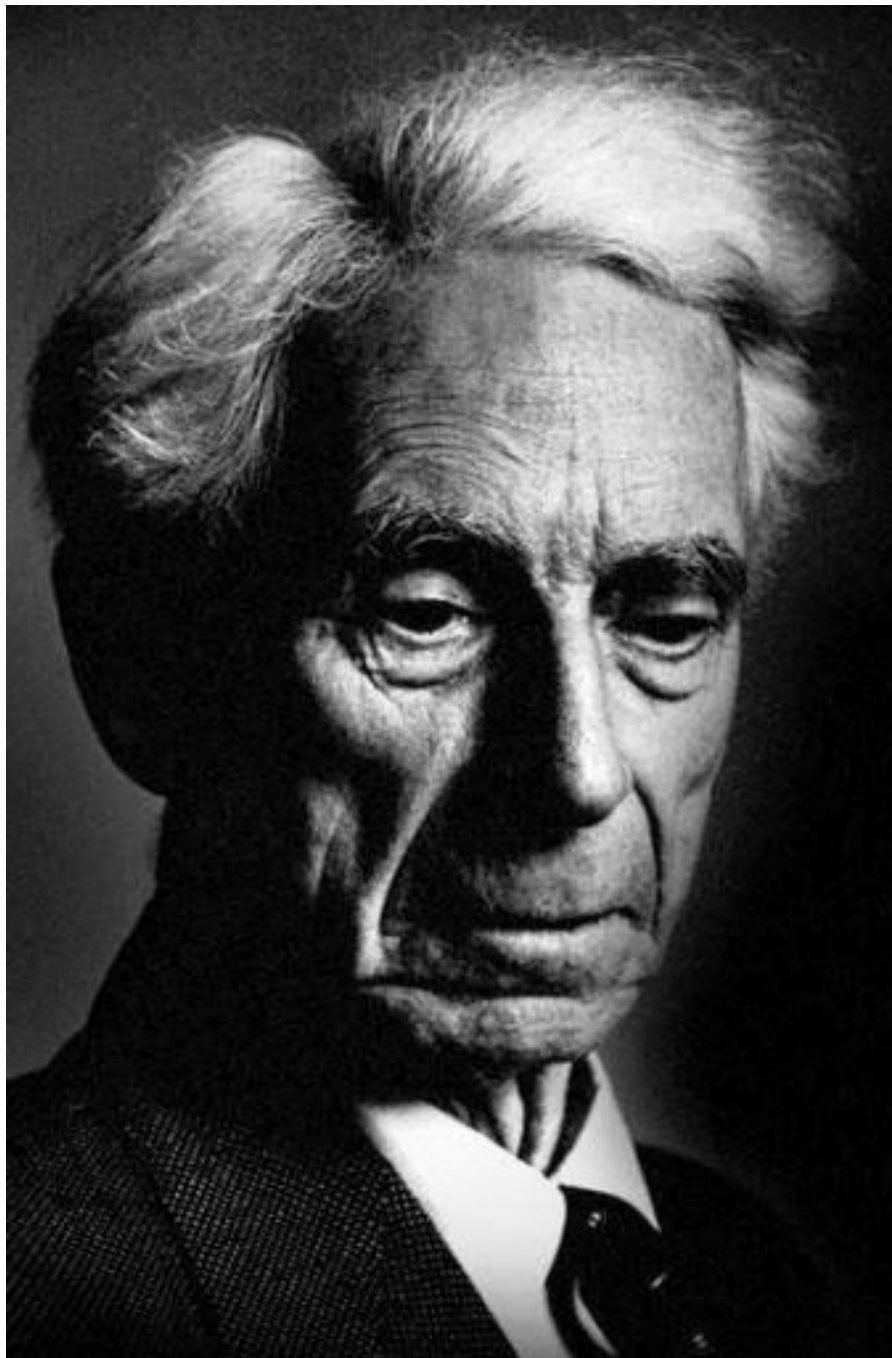




Why in Kids and Teens?



- Impostor Syndrome is felt more in people who feel different from their surroundings (this can be explicit or internal)
- Children have different, developing brains
 - Know what they know
 - Can understand more of what their heroes can do/know
 - Know how much more there is to know
 - Can see (and articulate!!) the gaps in their knowledge
- The ability to self-reflect is a blessing and a curse
- Social comparison – who are the relevant peers?



The whole problem with the world is that fools
and fanatics are always so certain of themselves,
and wiser people so full of doubts.

-Bertrand Russell

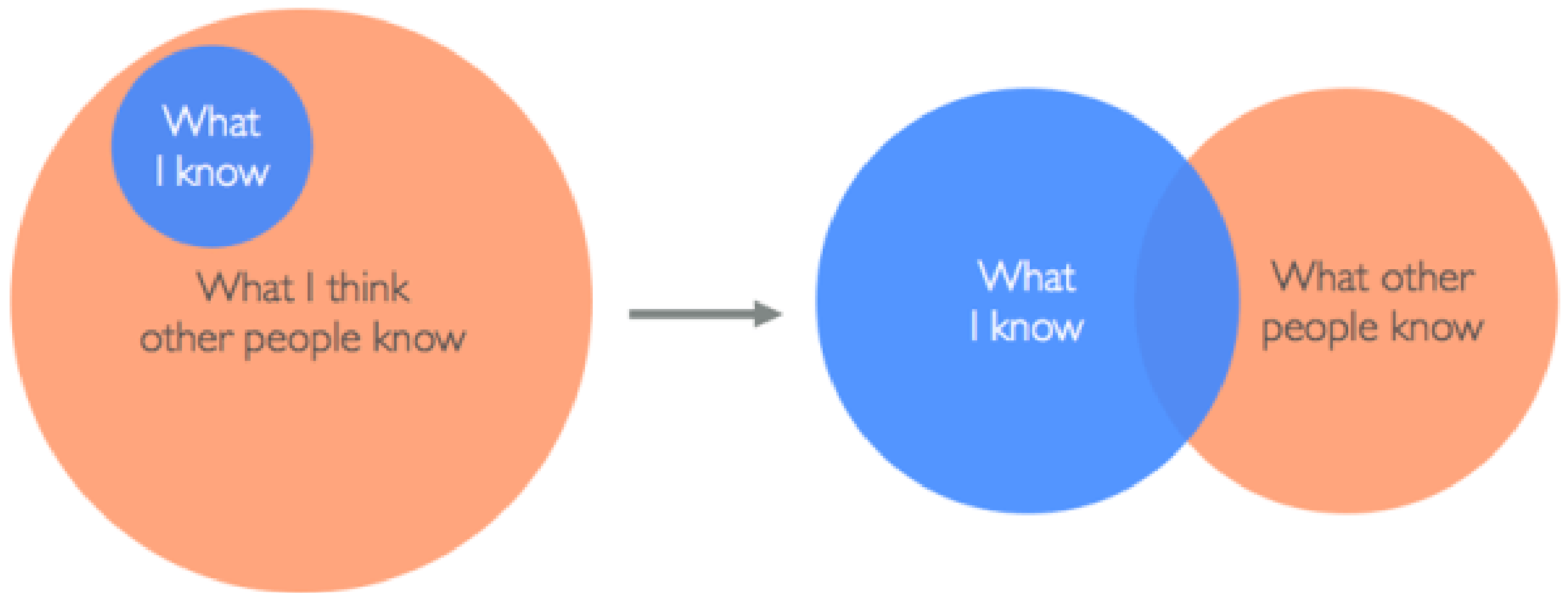
PERCEPTION OF KNOWLEDGE



A Venn diagram consisting of two concentric circles. The outer circle is red and contains the text 'WHAT THEY KNOW'. The inner circle is light blue and contains the text 'WHAT I KNOW'. The inner circle is positioned at the bottom of the outer circle, representing a subset of the outer circle's area.

WHAT THEY KNOW

WHAT I
KNOW



Better still.

This is closer to the truth.



What does it look like?

Psychologically: STRESSED OUT!!!!

- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Depression
- Low Self-Confidence

Behaviorally:

- Avoidance/procrastination
- Meltdowns
- Driven to succeed “or else”

Performance:

- Preoccupied with failure and/or perfection
- Constantly “moving the goalposts”

Settings



- A new environment
- Academic settings (especially prestigious or challenging)
- In the workplace
- Social interactions
- Relationships (platonic or romantic) – “I tricked you into liking me!”
- Therapy

Treatment Rejection

- People with impostor syndrome may see themselves as less sick (less depressed, less anxious) than their peers or other mentally ill people
- They cite their lack of severe symptoms as the indication of the absence of or a minor underlying issue.
- People with this mindset often do not seek help for their issues because they see their problems as not worthy of psychiatric attention





How to help

Types of interventions

- Cognitive training
- Emotional Awareness
- Self-Concept
- Context
- Concrete Action

NOTE: Impostor Syndrome is not an official psychological diagnosis, but its impact is very real



"Your fear of being publicly exposed as a fraud is a stress-related disorder called 'Imposter Syndrome.' It's common among people in high-profile authority positions, and, of course, in actual phonies, like you."

Steps to Take – Cognitive Retraining



Learn about “Impostor Syndrome” so you can name it for what it is when it manifests



Try to be “anti-perfect” – remind yourself that no one is perfect and that everyone struggles at times (especially with challenging tasks)

Getting something wrong doesn’t make you a fraud



Re-focus – are you looking at what you know or what you don’t?



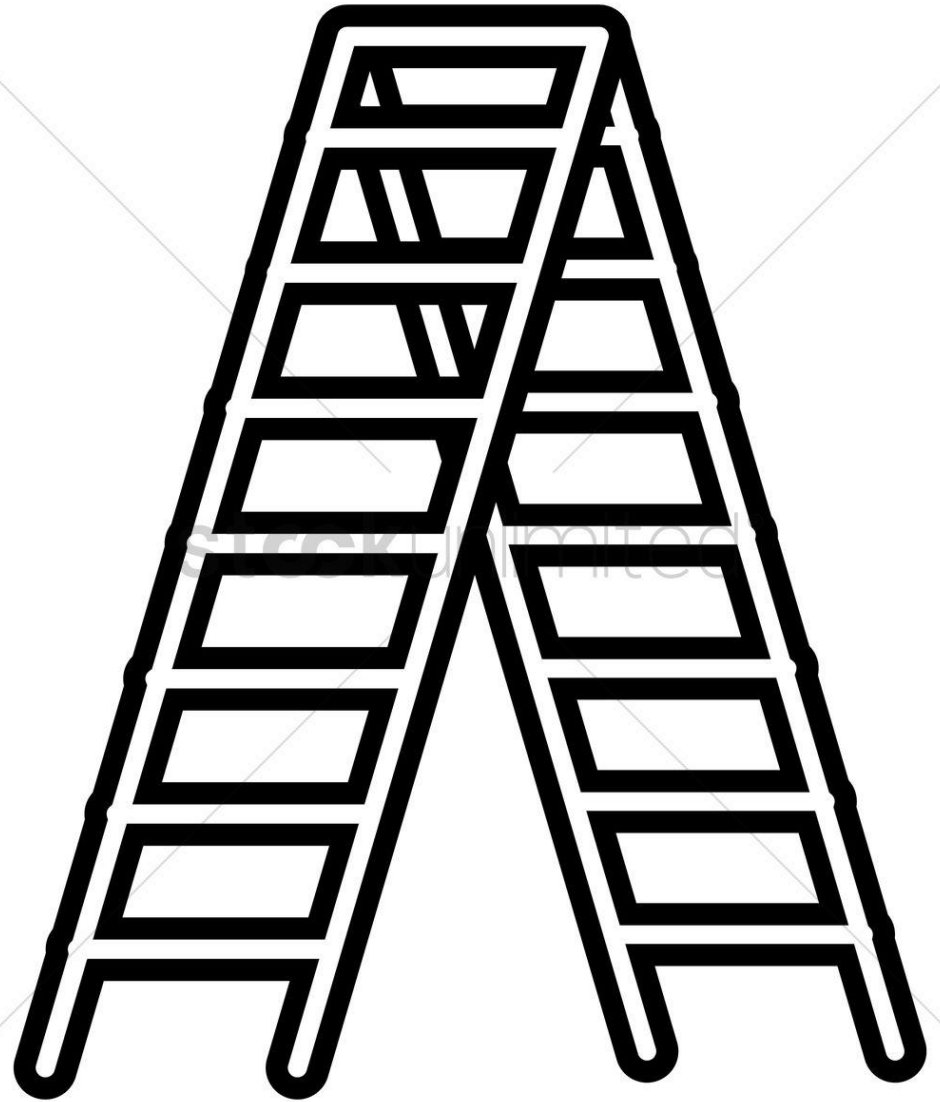
Reframe your rules – instead of “I must always know the answer,” practice intellectual humility

It’s OK to ask for help

Everyone Googles

I can learn more when I collaborate with others

The Ladder Metaphor



Steps to Take – Emotional Awareness



Learn – what does shame feel like for you? Embarrassment? Self-loathing? The more you know about your feelings, the easier it will be to name them and activate re-regulation



Separate feelings from fact – just because you feel (or think) something doesn't make it true



Identify your triggers – what makes you feel like more of an Impostor? Once you know, you can plan



Reward yourself! When you get something done, you get a reward.

Steps to Take: Self-Concept



AND not BUT – everyone has strengths and weaknesses. A person's weaknesses will improve with work and they do not undo a person's strengths or accomplishments



Practice accepting praise – where do you feel comfortable accepting praise? Who can give you praise?



93/7 rule – if you want to focus on the 7% you don't know, you must first acknowledge that you know 93% of the topic.



Make perfectionism work FOR you not AGAINST you



Are you pumping yourself up too much?

Steps to Take – Concrete Action



Practice vulnerability (with self and others)



Write freely on as many topics as possible



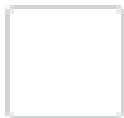
Show up for other people



Create a folder of compliments that people have said about you



Practice vulnerability (with self and others)



It's like Jimmy Fallon went to grad school and became a psychologist.

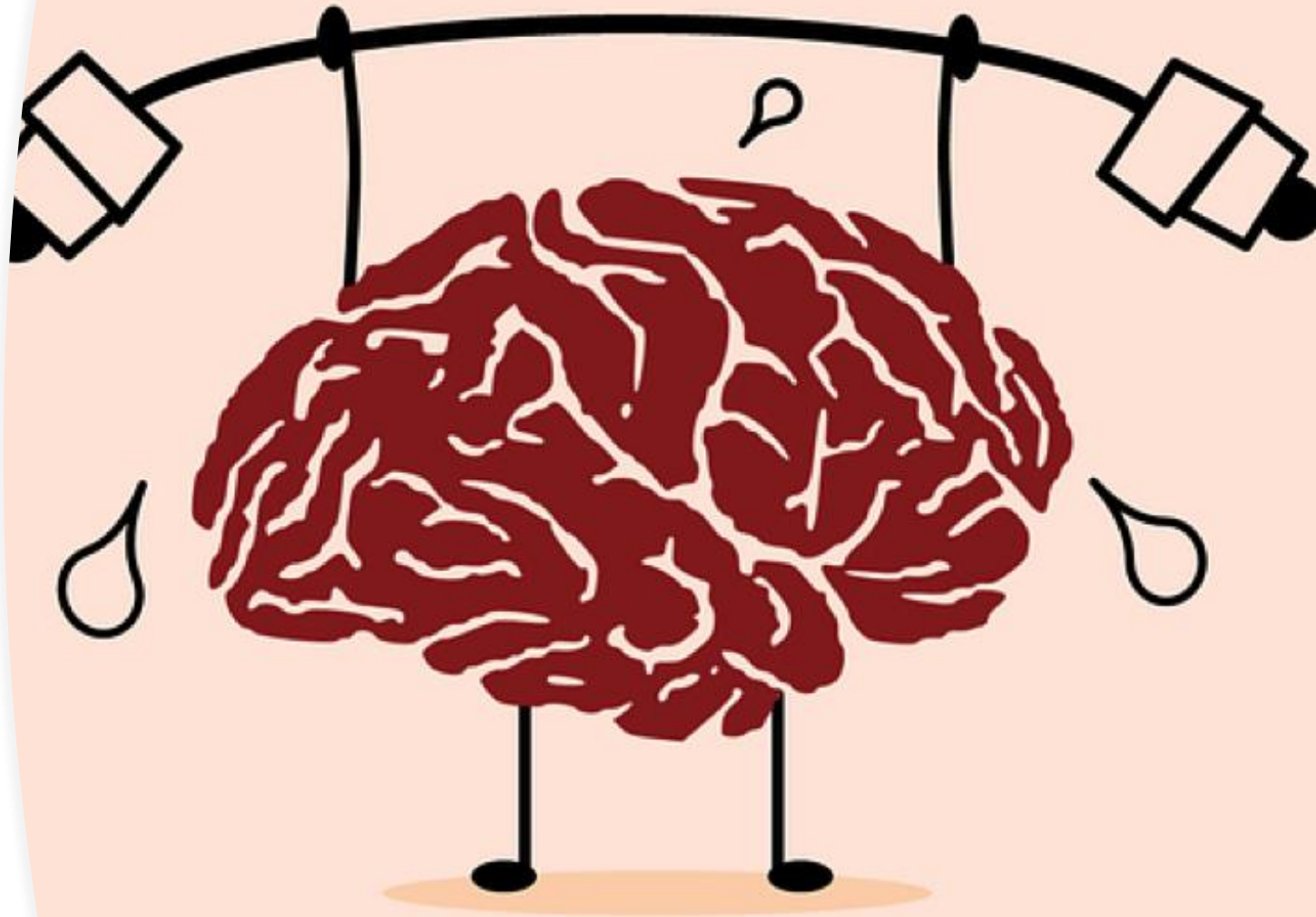
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Create a folder of compliments that people have said about you

A Rule to Live By

- Impostor Syndrome lives in abstraction.
- It is impossible for it to survive when you're taking action.
- Taking action *proves* that you're not a fraud. It tests your mettle in the real world.





Leveraging our
heroes to help
us, not hurt us

Who are relevant mentors for our students?

It's not about: "See, they're crazy too!" – it's about...

- Empathizing
- Proof that these feelings can be overcome
- Feeling not alone

Some examples

- | | |
|------------------|-------------------|
| • Maya Angelou | Michelle Pfeiffer |
| • Michelle Obama | Neil Gaiman |
| • Tom Hanks | Chuck Lorre |
| • Emma Watson | Sonia Sotomayor |

"I have 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



“There are an awful lot of people out there who think I’m an expert. How do these people believe all this about me? I’m so much aware of all the things I don’t know.” Dr. Margaret Chan, Former Chief of the World Health Organization





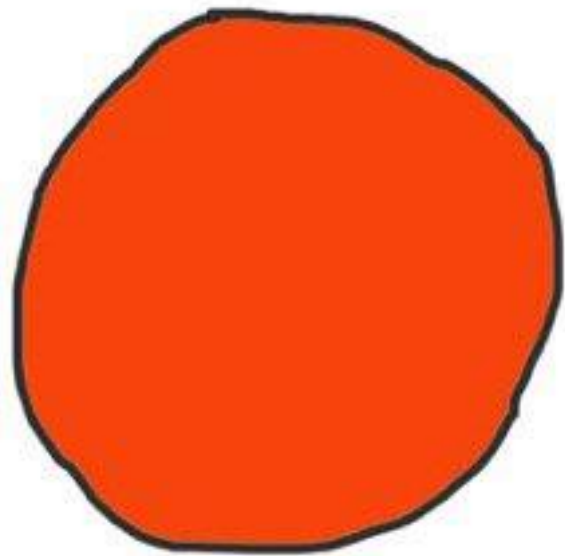
<https://qz.com/984070/neil-gaiman-has-the-perfect-anecdote-for-anyone-with-impostors-syndrome/>

Impostor Syndrome Quiz

Scoring

- Remember: this is a highly individualized process
- After taking the Impostor Test, add together the numbers of the responses to each statement.
 - If the total score is 40 or less, the respondent has few Impostor characteristics
 - If the score is between 41 and 60, the respondent has moderate IP experiences
 - If the score is between 61 and 80 means the respondent frequently has Impostor feelings
 - A score higher than 80 means the respondent often has intense IP experiences.
- <http://paulineroseclance.com/pdf/IPTestandscoreing.pdf>

TYPES OF PEOPLE WHO CAN HAVE IMPOSTOR SYNDROME:



- ALL THE SMART, SUCCESSFUL
PEOPLE THAT YOU THINK
HAVE THEIR SHIT TOGETHER

Questions?

Email me at
drmatt@theneurodiversitycollective.com

Follow me on
www.facebook.com/mattzakreski

My website: www.drmattzakreski.com



Give feedback to Dr. Matt

Scan this QR code



Or go to

<https://talk.ac/drmattzakreski>

and enter this code when prompted

IMPOSTER

If you'd like to explore this more...

<https://time.com/5312483/how-to-deal-with-impostor-syndrome/>

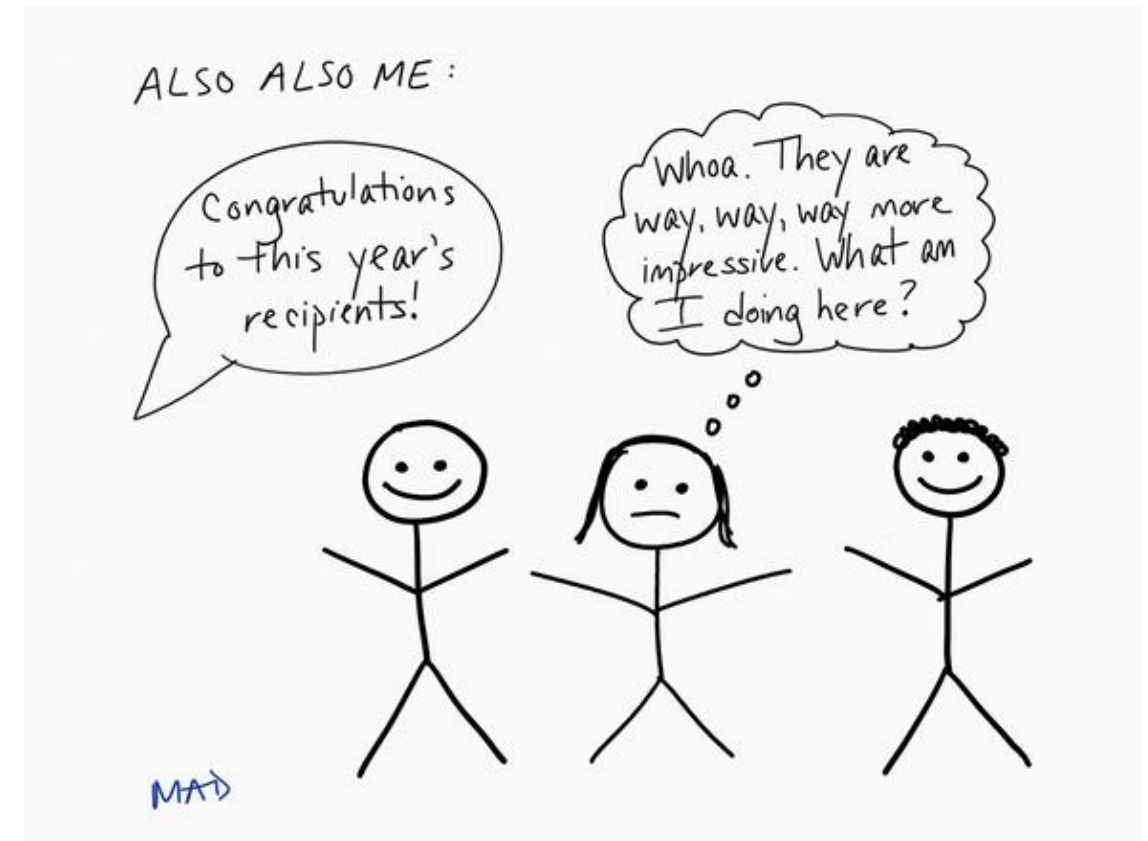
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/i-hear-you/201908/how-cope-impostor-syndrome>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/real-women/201809/the-reality-imposter-syndrome>

I'd also suggest these two TED Talks

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ewv_47rhcQI

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=whyUPLJZlJE>



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