

# IMPOSTER SYNDROME

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# Why should you care about imposter syndrome while in grad school?

- Because grad school will challenge you in new ways
  - Because grad school will not be your only invitation to experience imposter syndrome
  - Because if you learn these skills now you get to have a different future
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# What is imposter syndrome

- The term was coined by Dr. Pauline Clance and Dr. Suzanne Imes in 1978 in their book "The impostor Phenomenon in High Achieving Women: Dynamics and Therapeutic Intervention."
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# What is imposter syndrome (Cont.)

- Clance and Imes (1978) define it as "an internal experience of intellectual phoniness" (pg. 241)
  - And that those who "experience the impostor phenomenon persist in believing that they are really not bright and have fooled anyone who thinks otherwise. Numerous achievements, which one might expect to provide ample objective evidence of superior intellectual functioning, do not appear to affect the impostor belief." (pg. 241)
  - Clance, P. R., & Imes, S. A. (1978). The imposter phenomenon in high achieving women: Dynamics and therapeutic intervention. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research & Practice*, 15(3), 241–247.
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## An informal definition of an imposter

- An imposter is, a person who is impersonating someone else under the assumption that there is *an ideal version* for a role. However, an ideal version for a role does not exist.
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# Reasons you are here

- What are the current roles where you are currently encountering imposter syndrome right now?
  - *(Please provide your name, area of study or roles in your personal life where Imposter Syndrome comes up)*
  - What do you hope to get out of this presentation?
  - *(Connecting with similar others leads to "normalization" of any experience so debriefing connecting is very important)*
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# Challenging our implicit assumptions

- What are examples of roles we all play?  
(the parent, the student, the worker etc.)
  - Do you believe these roles have an ideal?
  - What attributes does the ideal have?
  - Are these attributes realistic or fair to anyone?
  - *Spoiler Alert: Idealized versions of anything do not exist*
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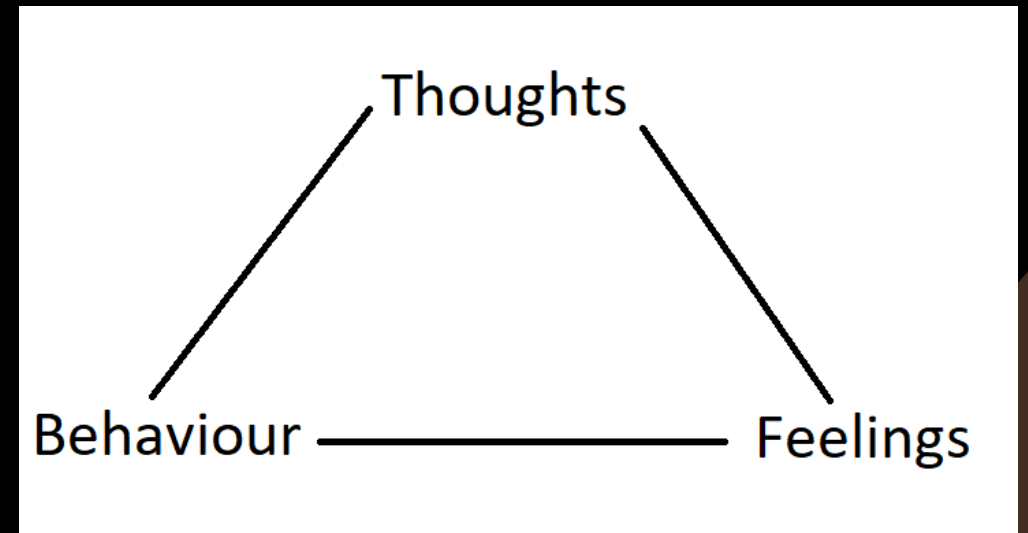
What are the coping tools we will use as we go on this journey together?

- Name-it-to-tame-it
  - Perspective taking
  - Purposeful coping
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# What areas affected by imposter syndrome?

- Our thoughts impact feelings which impact our behaviour



# What areas affected by imposter syndrome?

- Our self-concept
  - Our perception of the situation
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Purposeful coping

- Manage our thoughts



# Managing our thoughts

- Resolve cognitive dissonance – a discrepancy between what you are saying about a situation, and you are doing about a situation – *adjust it through self-talk*
  - Paralysis by analysis - *analyze something just enough to act*
  - Looking for a cost-free option – *Don't bother they do not exist, all endeavors/choices have costs and benefits*
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# Managing our thoughts (Cont.)

- Are you experiencing negative thoughts or cognitive distortions?
  - Cognitive distortions exercise:
  - <https://psychcentral.com/lib/cognitive-distortions-negative-thinking>
  - (Instructions in the next slide)
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# Managing our thoughts (Cont.)

- Type "15 cognitive distortions" into Google
  - Go to the psych central page
  - Read the page until the end of the section: "15 common cognitive distortions and examples of each"
  - Write down the ones that resonate for you
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# Managing our thoughts (Cont.)

- Please do not judge yourself over the number that you identify with
  - Please keep in mind that we all experience all of them but each of us has a greater tendency towards some cognitive distortions more than others
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# Managing our thoughts (Cont.)

- Once you have your list read the second part of the page from: "How to stop cognitive distortions and negative thinking"
  - Which of these do you think you could use to challenge your negative thoughts going forward?
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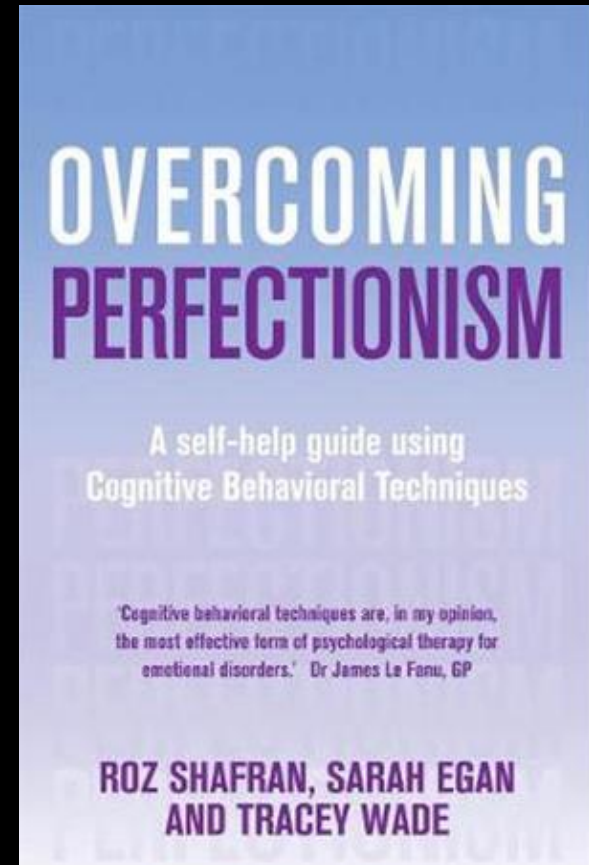


# Managing our Self-concept

- Are you putting too much pressure on self?
  - The antidote is self-compassion - accepting yourself unconditionally with all your flaws and gifts.
  - To learn more, look up self-compassion and Kristin Neff or Tara Brach on YouTube, take workshops on this topic through Student Wellness or The Recovery College (CMHA)
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# Managing our Self-concept

- Are you aiming to be perfect in all you do?
- If yes... pursuing perfection is pursuing the wrong goal. Most tasks in grad school just need to get done, they don't need to be perfect.
- Validate progress and not perfection



# Managing our Self-concept

- Are you aiming to be at expert level at the beginning?
  - No matter what you are doing, someone or something will need to your first
  - Your first lab experiment, your first thesis/dissertation, your first partner etc.
  - *Keep a beginner's mind – a position of constant learning and progressive improvement*
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# Managing your behaviour

- Are you aiming for people pleasing?
- If yes, are you relying on others to validate your worth?
- Do you need to learn to validate yourself?
- If yes, give yourself credit for your accomplishments
- Write down a list of highlights/positive feedback you receive, read that list on those difficult days.
- *I am not a little gold coin to be liked by everyone – Spanish saying*

## Managing your behaviour (cont.)

- *Learn to give yourself credit for your accomplishments*
  - Do not minimize your accomplishments by assuming you "got lucky" when you do well
  - Internalize success and externalize failure
  - Be accurate and not conceited
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## Manage your behaviour (cont.)

- Avoid a comparative frame of reference
  - When we compare, we make the other person the standard to be met ... you have already lost.
  - When we compare, we compare up or down
  - Ideally, we never compare but if you must compare,
  - always compare down, to land at gratitude
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Discussion time

Now the floor is open for any  
questions and discussion.

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