

## Debbie & Jill Imposter Syndrome

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Who, and how do I want to be in the room, even though I'm having all this self doubt, you know, what does that look like? And even if the behavior might look the same to me, that piece about like, what is this in the service of and psychological flexibility. Feels like a really important one. And I think that's what we're lacking.

Okay that was me, your cohost, Jill Stoddard on psychologists off

**Diana Hill:** We are four clinical psychologists here to [00:01:00] bring you cutting edge and science-based ideas from psychology to help you flourish in your relationships work and health.

**Debbie Sorensen:** I'm Dr. Debbie Sorensen, practicing in Mile high Denver, Colorado

**Diana Hill:** I'm Dr. Diana Hill practicing in seaside, Santa Barbara, California.

**Yael Schonbrun:** From coast to coast. I'm Dr. Yael Schonbrun, a Boston-based clinical psychologist and assistant professor at Brown University.

**Jill Stoddard:** And from sunny San Diego, I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard author of Be Mighty and The Big Book Of Act Metaphors.

**Debbie Sorensen:** We hope you take what you learn here to build a rich and meaningful life.

**Diana Hill:** Thank you for listening to Psychologists Off the Clock.

**Diana Hill:** Psychologist off the clock is sponsored by online training and continuing education from Praxis continuing education. They offer multiple formats of high quality training, including live online courses, free webinars and on-demand courses.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Praxis gets some of the best names in the field. People who do really amazing trainings and you can do them so easily from home right now. I know I've really enjoyed some of the trainings that I've done in the past, and there's some great ones on the lineup coming [00:02:00] up.

**Diana Hill:** Yeah, just looking at it, the lineup. Well, you can always do act immersion with Steve Hayes. That's fantastic. If you want to take a deep dive into acceptance and commitment therapy, but I was also really excited to see. Jonathan Kanter Robyn Gobin and Daniel Rosen are doing a course from ally to anti-racist, which is a six week course using the

contextual behavioral model of racism to cultivate personal and professional anti-racist action

I was also excited to see Dennis Tirsch and Laura Silberstein. Doing a foundations of compassion focused therapy course for those that want to learn more about CFT.

**Debbie Sorensen:** you'll see some of our old podcast guests that we've had on the show doing Praxis training. So check it out and you'll want to go through our website [offtheclockpsych.com](http://offtheclockpsych.com) to register because you can get a \$25 off discount code for life training events.

**Diana Hill:** So make it a new intention in 2021. Check out practice CET. We're also affiliates with Dr. Rick Hanson's online Neurodharma program and his Foundations of Wellbeing programs, you can find out more about them [00:03:00] at our website [offtheclockpsych.com](http://offtheclockpsych.com) where you'll get a \$40 discount

**Debbie Sorensen:** Hey, this is Debbie and Jill here today. We're going to be talking to you about imposter syndrome, Jill and I discovered that we have had this shared experience of imposter syndrome in our own lives. And we were on a panel together last year about imposter syndrome at a conference. And Jill has since taken a really.

Deeper interest in this phenomenon and is even writing a book about imposter syndrome. She's working on that now. And so today we're going to be chatting with you sharing what we've learned about imposter syndrome, because what we've discovered Jill is that it's quite a common phenomenon. Isn't it?

**Jill Stoddard:** it is. And, and I think, you know, what really triggered my interest is after that panel that we did at ACBS last year, there were so many people that reached out to me. And I don't know if you had that experience too, but I could not believe that [00:04:00] overwhelming. Sort of like, Oh my gosh, me too. This has happened to me.

And, , the art of charm podcast reached out to me afterward to do an episode on imposter syndrome. And, you know, it's just such a common experience for people and seemed like there was a, there was a big interest in it. So I love that we're doing this and we can, we can talk more about it.

**Debbie Sorensen:** yeah, me too. I think it had a really strong impact on people because it is something that so many people experienced, but it isn't. Talked about that much. Maybe it's starting to be more now, but I think people really had this response that kind of shocked me of like, thank you for telling your story and for talking about this because I've been experiencing this and I didn't really realize it.

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah. Yeah. And when we put the panel together, , I wanted to have panelists who were all objectives really successful, you know, have a lot of accomplishments behind their name to demonstrate to [00:05:00] people that even those who you might look at and

perceive as someone who must not have imposter syndrome, because how else would they be so successful, you know, to see that even the most successful people struggle with this.

And in fact, it's positively correlated with success that the more successful, someone is the more prone they are to imposter syndrome. And I think that was kind of the resounding, spirit of the messages we got after that panel was, I couldn't believe those five people I was looking at up there had imposter syndrome and were succeeding despite that.

And so maybe I can too,

**Debbie Sorensen:** yes. Yeah. Right. Then you don't have to not have imposter syndrome to be able to do cool things in the world that you want to be doing while we're going to make this a conversation between the two of us, we're going to share some information and also. A little bit about our own experiences with imposter syndrome.

And it's going to be kind of [00:06:00] me interviewing Jill because she has a lot of expertise in this area, but also a lot of back and forth between two co-hosts

so Jill, why don't you start us out with a basic definition? What is imposter syndrome? What does that even mean?

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah. , so it was first identified by two psychologists, Suzanne Imes, and Pauline Rose Clance.

, and I believe it was 1978. And is essentially an experience. They initially called it the impostor phenomena phenomenon, , which I really think is more apt than calling a syndrome is so pathologizing. And we'll talk about that later, but so this phenomenon is something that occurs where a person.

Doesn't believe in their own success or belongingness or accomplishments, , you know, essentially a feeling of inadequacy and this constant fear of being exposed as a fraud. So, you know, like, Oh gosh, I was invited [00:07:00] to co-host this podcast, but anytime now, Debbie and Diana and Yael are going to figure out, I don't know what the hell I'm doing.

You know, that, that kind of thing.

**Debbie Sorensen:** So that basic belief that you're a fraud and you're going to be exposed at any moment is kind of the, the definition. What are some of the ways could you just give some examples of how this might show up in terms of thoughts and emotions and that kind of thing what's going on for people who experienced this?

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah. I mean, well maybe what we could do is give a couple of our own examples and really bring it to life. Cause I'm sure you've had this experience too. Right.

**Debbie Sorensen:** What we both do, told our stories at the panel. Let's tell our own imposter syndrome stories.

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah. Yeah. And so, you know, I remember when I was going to, from my master's program to my doctoral program, I had a mentor who pulled me aside and said,

now, listen, you're going to get to Boston. And. Any minute now everybody's going to find out I [00:08:00] don't really belong here. And I looked at him like, Oh my God, how did you know?

I already feel like, and I had no idea. This was even a thing at that time. Right. , so that was maybe my first introduction, even to this concept before it had a name. But the way that it really blew up for me and the reason I had that feeling of, Oh my God. , any minute now, everybody's going to find out that I don't belong here is, , I applied to Boston university for my PhD program.

, and I'm from Boston. I was living in San Diego at the time, and I didn't tell my family that I was applying because I was afraid that they would pressure me to like come back home. Right. And also when I looked at the statistics, I was quite certain, there was no way I was going to get into the program because it was competitive.

And I didn't think that I was good enough. , in fact, I knew I wasn't like my numbers didn't match their numbers. So I was quite certain I wouldn't get in. Well, eventually the guilt of not telling my family [00:09:00] cut the better of me and I confessed to my dad and. When I said, Oh, I, you know, I applied to work with David Barlow at Boston university and he had this light bulb of recognition and he said, David Barlow the psychologist and you know, my dad knows nothing or anyone in the mental health field.

And I said, yeah, how do you know him? And he said, Oh, I've played golf with him. And they happen to belong to the same golf club and had played golf before. And so the next time my dad saw Dave at the golf course, he said, Oh, you know, my daughter's applying to your program. And Dave said, Oh great. You know, have her send me her credentials and.

What's really funny, but I don't think I've told this part of the story in the past is somehow I had no idea who he was like, as I learned later, he's all like this world famous anxiety expert,

**Debbie Sorensen:** Big for those who don't, who aren't familiar. He's big in the anxiety world. Yeah.

**Jill Stoddard:** if I, I own that, I think I just would like frozen and [00:10:00] fallen apart. Like really the imposter syndrome would have been high.

So I emailed him my. Credentials. And he wrote back and said, you know, very impressive credentials. I look forward to reviewing your application. And I, what I also didn't know at the time was that that would be very unusual that you would send your application materials to the person who's in charge of an entire doctoral program.

, anyway, long story short. I did get in and to this day, I mean, that was in the year 2000. So this was over 20 years ago. And to this day, I still wonder if the only reason I got into that program is because my dad knew Dave Barlow. And you know, of course the whole time I was there, I had massive imposter feelings because I thought everyone there was so much smarter and more deserving.

, And it was, you know, and, and something maybe we'll talk about in a little bit too, is I do think that there might be some [00:11:00] benefits to that and that it really made me work my butt off to prove myself. So what about you? What's your story?

**Debbie Sorensen:** okay. My story. So I grew up in Colorado and, you know, went to public school all the way. Middle-class family. You know, worked really hard in school my whole life. And so I did well in high school and college. And so then when I wanted to go to grad school in psychology, I just applied for, you know, a few places.

And at my very last application was to Harvard's PhD program and I kind of submitted it last on a whim thinking I won't get into Harvard. I didn't, I didn't think of myself as like Harvard material. You know, I think that. Harvard name just felt so like, not congruent with me, but I got in, I got into Harvard and so I went to Harvard for my PhD program and I think I was, you know, walking around the halls of Harvard [00:12:00] and.

Doing my work. And the whole time, I honestly believed that I, they just didn't look that closely at my application or I got in, on a fluke or something like that. And I really, you know, sometimes it was not really something I was paying much attention to. It was always sort of there, but other times I really felt sure that this was the case that I was just.

They're on a fluke kind of thing, but that I didn't really belong. And I went through years and I did fine really. I mean, I worked hard. I did the work in the end. I, I finished my PhD there, but toward the end of my PhD program, I saw signs up all over campus for a talk on imposter syndrome. And I don't even, I mean, this was so long ago.

I don't even remember who was giving this talk because this was thinking the early years. This was also, you know, probably close to 20 years ago at this point. , maybe in the mid, probably around 2004, something like [00:13:00] that. Anyway. So I, I was like, huh, that's interesting. What is it? And so I went to this giant lecture hall at Harvard, and sure enough, this, this woman who was presenting was talking about this exact feeling among high achieving people that they feel like.

They're an imposter. They don't belong there that, you know, they're fooling everybody. But the most striking thing to me was that this lecture hall was packed. I mean, I feel like there were probably people who couldn't even get in the door. Right. It was like so many people were there. And that was my aha moment when I realized.

This is a thing. This isn't like the truth about me, which I had believed. It was not only that, that there were other people at Harvard who felt the same way, because I always felt like I was the only one who didn't belong. And that just totally changed my perspective on the whole thing, where I was able to see it for what it was.

**Jill Stoddard:** I bet you, that was Valerie young. Who gave that

**Debbie Sorensen:** I think it might've been, [00:14:00] I bet it was too. I just don't remember. So it can't be sure, but I bet it was.

**Jill Stoddard:** She wrote a book on imposter syndrome, the secret thoughts of successful women. , and she tells a story about, I mean, she does, these talks all over too many places, but I'm pretty sure one of the specific examples she gives is how she went to give a talk at Harvard and the auditorium was packed. So I'll have to look back and

**Debbie Sorensen:** gosh. That's so cool.

**Jill Stoddard:** line up.

I think you might've been there. Do you ever still. Feel that way, like when you tell people, if people are asking or reading your bio and it comes up that you got your PhD at Harvard, do you ever have that feeling that people are like, really? You like, does it still show up?

**Debbie Sorensen:** You know, I mean, okay. Imposter syndrome does still show up in my life sometimes. But it's not in that way. That's interesting you say that because at this point I kind of feel like I can own it. Like I worked super hard. I finished my PhD. I do have, I feel like people have a reaction to the word Harvard [00:15:00] though.

And so I sometimes, like I knew someone and was pretty good friends with her for years before she found out I got my PhD at Harvard. And I think she was kind of like what? Just because I think I sometimes I'm a little shy about it. Cause it feels like I don't know anyway, but it does show up for me still.

**Jill Stoddard:** I was recently talking to my dad, telling my dad about the panel and about writing the book. And, , interestingly, he had no clue what I was talking about and, and I, he hadn't heard the words imposter syndrome, but then when I explained what it was, I thought he would recognize the phenomenon if not the name.

And he. Had no clue whatsoever. And so I want to talk about that in a second, but, , when I explained where mine, when I told them the story about Dave Barlow and hit them, knowing each other. He never said, Oh, don't be ridiculous. Of course, that's not how you got in. So even fairly recently, I had this inner thought of like, why isn't he objecting?

Did he pay him off? Like, did he, I mean it, [00:16:00] and then I, I didn't ask him specifically because then I got afraid that like, what if that was. True. I mean, I just find it so interesting that all these years later, and I can look at many objective markers that I've done just fine in my career. And I still have that voice that says like, Ooh, but maybe you really.

Didn't deserve it. And in a way, when you think about it, it's sort of insulting to Dave Barlow to think that like he would have that of the 12 people he led into the program, he would take a bribe and let some, you know, dummy take

**Debbie Sorensen:** He's corrupted enough to just let people buy their way in the eye. I highly doubted Jill for whatever that's worth. Well, let me ask you this. What, how does it show up for you now? I'm curious.

**Jill Stoddard:** well, it still shows up for me now like this, and even, you know, telling that story. This is now only the third time I've ever really told that story, like in [00:17:00] any kind

of public setting. And now I think everyone listening is like, I knew it. I knew or, you know, people I went to grad school with are going, I knew it.

I knew she didn't really belong in our program that she wasn't as good as us. So it still shows up in that way. , and then it shows up like any time I do something that feels like, kind of like a bold move. So like on the podcast, for example, I'll think about guests too. I get really lit up about, you know, like, Ooh, I really want to talk to, , Alicia Menendez, you know, or Eve Rodsky and, and then I think.

Well, who do you think you are? You can't reach out to those people. book was a Reese Witherspoon book and Alicia Menendez is an MSNBC anchor. Like you're not big enough to reach out to those people. Like you're nobody, you know, it's, it's that kind of thing. Feeling like an imposter, like I can't hang in that sort of elite [00:18:00] group.

, yeah, I mean, so I would say that's probably the best example of how it plays out now. What about for you?

**Debbie Sorensen:** Well, I think the situation where I see it most strongly, it's a very specific situation for a psychologist or, you know, professionals like me that do training in therapy is role-play. So I train clinicians sometimes in acceptance and commitment therapy. And I hate doing role plays because I feel like if people, actually, people who are in the field see me doing.

The therapy I'm supposed to know enough about to train people that they'll see that I don't really know what I'm doing, or even I've had therapists as clients before. And I've had that same worry or other times too. I think if I'm, if I'm writing something or I don't know, there's, it shows up in a lot of different

ways I'd say still.

And it really,

**Jill Stoddard:** to that even, even when I'm in a therapy [00:19:00] session, sometimes I'll be having this meta thought of, thank God. I'm not on camera right now. Because if people saw me doing therapy, they would be like, what? Why are you doing this? You're not good at it.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah. I mean, don't probably, most therapists have moments where we think I'm not really sure if I know what I'm doing here.

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah. and I agree like the other place it shows up for me. Heavily is in writing. . So the book that I'm writing about imposter syndrome is specifically for writers or people who want to write. , and part of the reason for that is because it shows up so loud for me in that area.

And, you know, I was, when my book be mighty was coming out, I was setting up a Twitter account. Cause you know, you need to have a platform when you, when you write, , As you and Diana I'm. Sure know, cause you have your book coming out soon too. And I'm setting up my Twitter bio and I thought to myself, well, you need to put author.

And then immediately was like, you can't put author, you're not an [00:20:00] author. Like who do you think you are? That you can call yourself an author. But I was setting up a Twitter bio because I was getting ready for a book launch for my second book. Right. So like how many books does someone have to write?

Before they can call themselves an author. And to me, apparently it was more than two. And I went to a writing workshop with Danny Shapiro who wrote the book inheritance and a number of other books. She's amazing. And there's maybe like 300 of us in the room and she asks us, it's a writing retreat. Right.

She asks us how many of you are writers? And I swear, there were only like, I don't know, five or six hands that went up. And then she said, how many of you? Right. And every single person raised their hand. And that was another aha moment I had where I was like, Oh, they're the same as me. And, you know, we did a lot of, um, uh, kind of like writing to prompts and things like that.

And we would share our writing and, you know, they were [00:21:00] all super talented, but they, they couldn't call themselves writers.

**Diana Hill:** We've had a number of guests on the show that we've been inspired by, and that are offering you our listeners discounts on their programs.

If you go to our website [offtheclockpsych.com](http://offtheclockpsych.com), you'll be able to find coupon codes for the programs of Dr. Judson Brewer, Dr. Rick Hanson and Jen Lumenlun. So go check it out at, [offtheclockpsych.com](http://offtheclockpsych.com) and start learning today.

**Debbie Sorensen:** You know, I think this really speaks to the sense of like how we identify ourselves in some times. We're actually doing something, but we don't even think of ourselves in that way. Maybe that's part of what contributes to it's like, Oh, I don't belong at Harvard. I'm not a writer. I, one thing this showed up for me one time, Jill, you introduced me as an entrepreneur.

And I was like me. And then I thought, wait a minute. I own a private practice. I am out there, you know, marketing and I have a webpage and I. Filed taxes and all [00:22:00] the things that entrepreneurs do. And I'm like, Oh, but I just didn't think of myself in that way. It's just, it's almost like this sense of self and belief around who we are that feeds

**Jill Stoddard:** And how and how we define, you know, when I look at. A writer. I see Danny Shapiro or, or Stephen King. And I am so not even close to looking anything like them, that I couldn't possibly be a real writer. And so the same is probably true for you for entrepreneurs.



When you think of what an example of an entrepreneur is, maybe it's, you know, Bill Gates or something.

I don't know, but you know, someone who probably. The reason they come to mind as an example is because we're familiar with their work because they're big in their field. But that doesn't mean that's the only way to be a real entrepreneur or a real writer. And so much of that social comparison, I think, is what fuels this.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah, there's this, this [00:23:00] line of work in the business world about authentic leadership and how, if you picture a leader, if you think of. If you were going to draw a picture of a leader on a piece of paper, and what does that leader look like? I think sometimes it's like we've internalized some sort of stereotypes around some of this and to think of yourself as you are authentic you in the role of a leader, like that's a possibility, but sometimes we just have trouble thinking of ourself in that way.

And I think that's sort of built into some. You know, sexism and I don't know, as a woman, I feel like sometimes you think of this leader, the stereotypical sort of like white male CEO executive type or something, because that's, what's been ingrained in us all these years. And you think there are many, many, many amazing leaders who don't fit that category.

And yet, sometimes we kind of default to that assumption.

[00:24:00] **Jill Stoddard:** a hundred percent and you know, that's what I was going to say. When I said we'll get back to my dad, not having any clue about this imposter syndrome thing, because he is a white heterosexual. Cis-gendered. Educated male of privilege or what? Janet Helms calls a wimp, w H M P white heterosexual, male of privilege.

And. So it appears to be less common in that group, because if you think about cultural messages that, you know, like white CIS straight able-bodied boys have received their entire lives in a patriarchal culture, it's that you can do and be anything and you belong at all the tables. Right. But if you think about the fact that say for example, like women couldn't even get their own bank accounts and credit cards.

As recently as the early seventies, like the year I was born, I believe is the year women were finally allowed to not have a co-signer financially, , [00:25:00] or segregation, you know, Brown vs the board of education. Wasn't till what, 1954, when schools were desegregated and then Jim Crow laws. So when you look at certain.

Marginalized groups. They have quite literally been told, like black people do not belong in white spaces. Women do not belong in men's spaces. Right. And so on and so forth. So when that is a message that you have received over and over and over for a good portion of your life. Well then of course it makes sense.

That that would contribute to the development of those imposter feelings. And so it doesn't mean that like white males can't have it. They certainly can like, so if you were an older guy who got a job at a super young tech company, you might have imposter syndrome. , it's really like.

Any space a person is in where there's a message overt or covert that maybe they don't totally belong. They can have it, but it seems to [00:26:00] be more prevalent in women and you know, people from other marginalized groups. And that makes sense, right.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Important to acknowledge that context in which it. It comes from, and there's different versions of imposter syndrome. And certainly I think it's a key point that you made that white males are not immune from it. But I do think that when you've been given that message and when that's been the, message you've received your whole life, it makes a lot of sense contextually that, that, that would show up for you.

**Jill Stoddard:** right, right.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Do you know, is there research about that? Are women or people of color at higher risk for imposter syndrome? I don't know if that's been studied.

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah. So I've been looking into that and you'll see a lot about imposter syndrome in pop culture, but there's not a ton of academic science. , there's some but not a ton. , most studies do show that it's more prevalent in women than men. What's interesting is one study.

I found where there were no differences. It was in [00:27:00] academia. So like professors and things like that where men tend to have it equally to women. And. You know, it's such a competitive environment, right. Where like, you're, you're sort of like trained to feel like you don't belong

**Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah. One feels like they belong there because it's so yeah, the standards are so high.

**Jill Stoddard:** So what you said, like that context is really important. But, like definitely, I think there needs to be. More research done on it. , interestingly, I just came across a woman who is at, , MIT, whose name is Bessima Toufic and this is something that she's done some work around.

, and what she's really focused on is like, what I was saying in the beginning was like, should this really be called a syndrome? Like that's so pathologizing and. Is this all bad. And you know, one of the reasons I wanted to write this book is when you look at the books that are out there, they're all focused [00:28:00] on and like teaching you not to think of yourself as an imposter and trying to make you have more confidence.

And you know, of course this act practitioners, we don't really buy into those control strategies. We look at looking at this in a different way and. What the Bessima Toufic talks about is how, , in, in the way that we know that the imposter phenomenon and success are positively correlated is, you know, she talks about how there are some benefits to having these kinds of thoughts that, , you know, in some ways it essentially makes us kind of overcompensate like, Ooh, if I feel like I'm not smart enough, or I don't belong, then I better work doubly hard and be twice as good.

And what that makes me think about is from an act standpoint, like what I would like to see is. That we get more conscious about what are our choices and actions in the service of. So if I'm constantly trying to prove myself and overcompensate and it's coming from [00:29:00] a place of avoidance, like maybe that's not so healthy, but if instead I'm focusing on.

Who, and how do I want to be in the room, even though I'm having all this self doubt, you know, what does that look like? And even if the behavior might look the same to me, that piece about like, what is this in the service of and psychological flexibility. Feels like a really important one. And I think that's what we're lacking.

I think right now people are just on autopilot and they're either avoiding opportunity because they have imposter syndrome or they're going for it, but they're like really overcompensating and running themselves ragged to try to prove that they're good enough. And I think there's something in the middle. That's like a healthier way to manage when these thoughts show up.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah. So sort of stepping on that, like just bulldozing through trying to accomplish everything, but instead showing up and working hard and doing the thing you care about, even when that's the case. Yeah.

[00:30:00] **Jill Stoddard:** but for like values driven reasons, rather than I'm trying so hard, not to feel like an imposter that I'm just going to keep achieving to try to make it go away. And what we know is like that doesn't work.

**Debbie Sorensen:** That's a big difference. Yes. Values driven versus like, I hate feeling this way. So I've got to bend over backwards to feel adequacy. Yeah. Can you speak a little bit about the prevalence and who's prone to imposter syndrome? Because I understand it's more common than people.

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah. So up until today, actually the statistic I kept coming across, but again, there's not a ton of research, but the statistic I kept coming across with 70% of people will experience it at some point in their lives. , but when I was looking at Bessima Toufic's research, she actually said two and five.

So that's only 40%. So it's somewhere in between in between those numbers [00:31:00] probably.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Okay. Still substantial, right?

**Jill Stoddard:** it's substantial. It's substantial. , and then in terms, terms of who's prone to it, it's this, I think that, , anyone who's been part of a marginalized group, People who are high achieving, but this is a little bit of a chicken and an egg, as we were just talking about like, am I high achieving?

Cause I'm trying to outrun my imposter syndrome or like what's going on with this correlation. Right? Cause it's not cause and effect. But I think if we look at other factors, we just talked about cultural factors that can dictate this. But when you also look at someone's

learning history, right? So like if you grew up with highly critical parents who, you know, you might develop, like kids have to make meaning of their environment.

And if your parents are highly critical, then that's going to turn into some version of an I'm not good enough story. And so that feeling of like at any time now people are going to find out I'm a fraud can kind of go hand in hand with that. But [00:32:00] interestingly, the opposite can also be true. So like, if you think about, , instead of highly critical parents, if you have parents who, you know, think that you are the greatest thing since sliced bread and they're cheering every time you go down the slide at the playground, and you know, you, you, the kid finger paints the toilet and you're like, I'm not even mad.

You're like Picasso, you know, those like overly doting, everything you do is amazing. And everyone gets a participation trophy. Even if you didn't deserve it. That , people as you grow up, even if you were little, there's like a part of you that knew you didn't really deserve all those accolades.

And so now, like you might get the promotion or win the award. And there's that voice that says like pick, did I really deserve it? Like maybe I didn't really earn it. , so I think those kinds of. Learning history, parental, , you know, like most things we can understand how they develop based on cultural [00:33:00] influences, personal learning history, like with family influences.

And then certainly I think there's even an evolutionary piece to this, right? Where, like, if you think about. Early humans. You know, we didn't have claws and fangs. We had each other and humans who hunted and gathered and traveled together had a survival advantage. , So early humans would by necessity have to constantly be checking their standing in the tribe. Like, am I doing my part? Am I valued? Am I at risk of getting kicked out? Because if you got kicked out, you were dead. So our tendency to compare ourselves to others has really been like evolutionarily programmed.

So I think that really relates to imposter syndrome too. Because there's so much of comparing that. That is part of it.

**Debbie Sorensen:** You know, I have two thoughts piggybacking on what you're saying here. The first is, you know, in terms of who has imposter syndrome, some, [00:34:00] sometimes clients that I'm working with will express some of this. And it's a great thing I think to talk about in therapy. And sometimes I'm shocked by who is talking to me about imposter syndrome, because sometimes it is.

They really are. It's like you were saying earlier, they are usually people who on the surface, just so look like they have it all together, you know, successful high-achieving people who work hard and are educated and have good careers and all that stuff. And so I'm always like, it's just amazing to me how it is happening inside, but we don't usually show it on the outside or it might surprise you who's experiencing this.

And the other thing, and this idea actually came from our mutual friend Miranda Morris, who was on our original panel, is that work. Isn't the only place where this shows up, you know, just speaking to that idea of the group and comparison. And I think sometimes in

other roles, like for instance, parenting, there can be a similar [00:35:00] version of this too, right.

Of like, Believing that everybody else is better at this than me. If they could only see how I'm really parenting behind closed doors, they might know that I don't really know what I'm doing there. And it was Miranda was talking about this on our last panel. And I was thinking, I think of it more as a work-related phenomenon, but that it can really happen in a lot of different ways for people.

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah. I think anywhere that there is, , you know, uh, a group essentially like that, there's like, Oh, the moms at school, they're like you said, parents, or coworkers or athletes, you know, I had a client who was a professional athlete and he struggled with it. Right. Because he was comparing himself to these other, you know, like high level, top the world's best athletes.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah. Any role that's meaningful to you? It feels like it's possible that you could feel this way.

**Jill Stoddard:** I think that's right on.

**Debbie Sorensen:** So there have [00:36:00] been some subtypes of in's posture syndrome identified, and Jill, you have this fantastic quiz, first of all, tell people where they can take your quiz. Because I think people after they hear about this, they'll want to know.

What their imposter syndrome subtype is.

**Jill Stoddard:** okay. So this is, this is also Valerie Young's work and she identified five subtypes. And so you, if you go to my website, which is [jillstoddard.com](http://jillstoddard.com) and just click on the menu, it'll say, take the quiz so you can go. Oh, there it take the quiz. And it'll tell you which of the five subtypes you are. So I'm the expert.

What were you Debbie? I don't remember.

**Debbie Sorensen:** I think, I think it was a combination of two, but one of them is the one that feels like. You have to do, you can't ask for help and you have to do everything yourself, the soloist that's what it was. Yeah.

**Jill Stoddard:** So that's a good point. When you say you were the combination of two. So if you read all the descriptions, you'll see yourself in more than one typically, but [00:37:00] everyone kind of has one that's their like go-to so I'll, I'll describe what they are. So the soloist is exactly what you said, where, , It only counts.

Like I only get credit for being competent if I did it myself. And if I have to ask for help, like, this is proof that I'm a fraud. That's the soloist, I'm the expert. The expert is the person who, , That your competence is based on how much knowledge, skills experience expertise you have, and you never feel like you have enough.

So experts are the ones who are like always taking another class, always reading another book, you know, trying to pursue that moment where you go, okay. Now I know enough to

not feel like a fraud. , there's also the natural genius and that's the person who feels like, you know, proof of competence comes from knowing things naturally.

So, , if it takes me a long time to learn something, that's proof that I'm a fraud, you know, I should be able [00:38:00] to read something once and get it. You know, I should be able to be taught something once and be able to nail it the next time I do it because it's a belief that it's this internal, natural ability.

, then there is the perfectionist, so that's pretty self-explanatory, , you know, very high standards. Everything has to be done at that perfect level. And when it's not, which inevitably there's always something that could, it could always be better. Right. So then that proves competence and of course proves is in, uh, air quotes, right?

It's like, this is the belief we have that proves I'm incompetent. And then the last one. Is the superhuman. . And so this is the person who has perfectionism, but also feels like they should be able to do.

All the things all the time, like juggling every ball on fire, never letting one drop and that they should always be able to take on more. And, you know, ultimately one of those balls will get dropped and then that's proof up. See, I knew what I was afraid after all. So [00:39:00] if you're curious which one you are, you can take the quiz and it's,

**Debbie Sorensen:** I feel like I, as you're talking, I'm like, I see a little bit of each of those in like, I can kind of relate to each one of those a little bit.

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah. Yeah. And that's pretty, that's pretty typical. That's pretty typical. I think I'm pretty squarely in that expert. Place for sure. I, so it just resonates with me so much. I even talk in my book, I confess, like I went back, I was doing a little research on myself, I guess you would say. And I look to see like how many writing podcasts do I subscribe to?

How many newsletters, how many books about writing? Have I written, how many writing classes have I taken? How many consultants? And I added it up, you know, a lot of those things I mentioned are free, but when I added up over the last, however many years, It's about a decade. I've spent like \$20,000 over a decade on like trying to [00:40:00] make myself feel like I have enough knowledge and expertise about writing to consider myself a real writer.

And you know what the title of the book is. Not a real writer, because guess what? I still don't feel like I'm a real writer. And I talked to so Janina, Scarlet, who we know who's been on the podcast and she was also on our panel. She's on her 10th book. And do you think she feels like a real writer? She does not.

**Debbie Sorensen:** yet.

**Jill Stoddard:** And there was a woman I was interacting with on Twitter. Who post? I forget what she posted. I think she was publishing a book and I saw she had all her books that she had written in her bookcase behind her and accounted them. And there were 27 and I

tweeted her to say, was it your 27th book that made you feel like you finally weren't an imposter as a writer anymore?

And she was like, Nope, hasn't happened yet.

**Debbie Sorensen:** That's the thing about an imposter phenomenon, right? Is that you'll never. Get there. Like if you're trying to cure it by [00:41:00] accomplishing certain things, that's not really going to do the trick. It's still persists. Even when you do all of these things.

**Jill Stoddard:** And I think part of the reason for that is because the higher you go, the more you think other people expect you to know, like if I've never written a book, nobody expects me to know anything about writing a book, but once I've written a couple, like now I'm supposed to know something about this, but I still don't feel like I know what not.

So maybe I need to write another one and another one in it. Right?

**Debbie Sorensen:** I that expert thing. I I've talked about this on the podcast. In the past one time I was writing a talk and I was like searching all these books on my shelf, trying to, I had a point I wanted to make something I wanted to say, but I was like, I felt like I needed to back it up with the words of an expert.

And then all of a sudden I was like, I am an expert. Like I'm getting. Invited here to give a talk on this matter. I can just say it. And it was like this aha moment of like, Oh, I know something about this, but I almost [00:42:00] felt like these other people that are all experts, not me. And there's this never ending desire to synthesize all that information and take another class and read another book.

And yeah, you could read every book on the planet and still feel that way.

. So we've pretty much identified that most of us, or at least a lot of us are experiencing some version of this. So Jill, based on your expertise, what would you recommend for someone who's struggling with imposter syndrome? How, what can they do about this?

**Jill Stoddard:** well, I think first and foremost is recognizing that. This is a natural way to feel when you care about something. You know, as I said, like this has sort of been programmed. It was programmed a long time ago by evolution, by learning experience, by cultural variables. And I don't think that there's like a magic wand that can make us suddenly not feel like imposters.

And in fact, When you look at some of the people [00:43:00] who don't have this, like, you know, the Dunning Kruger effect, which is the cognitive bias where people overestimate their knowledge or competence. And then they also are unable to recognize. So they have confidence, but not competence, and they don't recognize that they don't have competence.

**Debbie Sorensen:** ,

Yeah. Isn't that, that that's the phenomenon where people who are experts at something kind of underestimate their confidence and then people who are novices and don't know anything about it. They think they know more than they actually do.

**Jill Stoddard:** that's exactly right. So people who know nothing generally know they know nothing, right? Like I would never think that I know everything about being an NBA basketball player, but it's like the people who have a little bit of knowledge way overestimate, how much they actually. No. And then they fail to recognize that they're overestimating what they actually know.

And this isn't a great cognitive bias to find yourself in, [00:44:00] to have confidence about your competence, but not have the competence. Right. And those people don't have imposter syndrome. And, you know, so, so partly recognizing that this is something that I can use to my advantage because it's telling me, well, this thing must matter to me.

Cause I wouldn't care so much about being found out if I didn't care about this thing. So maybe it's teaching me what I need to move toward. , so I don't need to change it. I don't need to wait until I feel more confident or certain that I belong before I move forward with this thing that matters to me.

, and of course, you know, like my personal bias is that we build psychological flexibility and use act skills. So can I be aware that I'm having these thoughts and feelings? Can I be clear on. What matters to me, like maybe what are these thoughts pointing toward that matters? Can I observe all of that and make space for it and move forward with these [00:45:00] things that matter?

Anyway, and as I was saying in the beginning, I think being more conscious and deliberate about not just pursuing achievements as a way to try to feel better, to feel less like a fraud, but doing it because it's something that's important, even if I still feel this way.

**Debbie Sorensen:** That's great advice. Yeah. So continuing to do all those things you care about and not buying too much into those beliefs to slow you down, but also not feeling like you have to overcompensate for them. Yeah. I mean, I, one thing I want to add that I think is really important, and this is where that, you know, that packed lecture hall at Harvard is so, was so striking to me is just the sense of recognizing that you're not alone and belonging and actually having conversations like the one we're having today.

I think there's something that matters a lot about being able to get support and share with other people about the experience. And [00:46:00] so I think if you're in a situation where you're, I don't know. You're in school or in a high achieving job or something like that. And you're feeling some of this is to find people, you feel safe talking to about it and just acknowledge it and share.

And I think that you'll find that you're not alone and that there's actually something really helpful about acknowledging it.

**Jill Stoddard:** I think that's absolutely true and so powerful. And that's really what we found by doing that initial panel. It brought everyone out of the woodwork saying, yeah, I struggle with this too. And knowing that you struggle with it makes me feel less. I had about it. Right. I mean, I think there's so much power in that, in that common humanity.



And especially seeing examples of people who say, Hey, I struggle with this and I haven't let it stop me. You know, I think can be a good model for other people to say, Oh, right. Like I could go for it. Even if I feel this way too.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Well, and I think it feels a little vulnerable sometimes to acknowledge these things like you [00:47:00] were saying, even telling the, the golf David Barlow story out loud, there's a part of you that feels a little funny about. Putting that out into the world, but then it also feels a little bit liberating, I think, to just, you know, instead of holding it inside.

**Jill Stoddard:** Yes. And now that I've told the story, like three times it was easier to tell it today, then the very first time I confessed it and now I kind of want to keep telling it because I noticed, I mean, that's, uh, that's diffusion, right? It's like, and just secrets in general. When you, when you start talking more openly about these things, it really takes the power away from the story, because at the end of the day, it's true.

Just a story.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Well, thank you, Joel, for those thoughts, I think this is really, I've learned a lot from you about this, and I just love that we have this shared connection around our personal experience, and I'm hoping that listeners will find it helpful as well, because I'm sure many people have experience with this themselves.

**Jill Stoddard:** I'm sure. And I hope people will reach out. We [00:48:00] would love to hear from you guys. If you want to comment on our social media posts or even shoot us an email, you can always contact me. My email is J a S at dot com or you can contact the podcast at, off the clock psych@gmail.com and we would love to hear your stories.

And I think it will be. Helpful for you guys to share in the same way that it's been helpful for us.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah. So all you frauds and imposters out there. Please reach out

**Jill Stoddard:** thanks, Debbie. This was

**Debbie Sorensen:** Thanks, Joe.

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