The Impostor Syndrome and the graduate student teacher

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The Impostor Syndrome

- Perceived, but incorrect, intellectual fraudulence
- Convinced not as bright or capable as they need to or want to be
- Success due to luck
- Low confidence, self-esteem
- Failures stand out over successes
- Suffer quietly, secretly
Likely to affect …

- Successful high-achievers
- Time of transition, change, challenge
  - First jobs
  - New projects, jobs, roles
- First-generation professionals
- Women
Students

“Students tend to score higher on the Impostor Test than any other group.”

-- Pauline Clance
Impostor cycle

- Intense doubt, worry, anxiety, fear
- Procrastination or over-preparation
- Successful, completed project
- Cycle becomes fact of life (success legitimizes cycle)
- Student cannot accept or enjoy his or her own abilities and successes
Why and how?

- Clance: Family dynamics
  - First generation students/graduates
  - Lack of praise in family
  - ‘Superstar’ favorite child in family

- Harvey and Katz: Transient but serious experience with changes in responsibilities

- Mack: Working class students
“Anticipation of exclusion may provoke a proactive response of excluding oneself from the place of exclusion.”

-- Nancy Mack
One third of family medicine residents scored high on Impostor Test
- 41% women (37% depressed)
- 24% men (27% depressed)
Almost all agreed that training was adequate, but most impostors fear they are not prepared to practice after graduation
Research

Brems, Baldwin, Davis, Namyniuk

- Interaction between Impostor scores and Goal Instability affected their teaching evaluations
  - Level of encouragement of questions and ideas
  - Overall rating of instructor
  - As Impostor scores and Goal Instability decreased, evaluation scores increased

- High Impostor scores negatively related to self-reported comfort as role model, mentor

- Other interactions affect advising scores
Research

Gardner and Holley

- First generation doctoral students likely to …
  - Have overcome significant obstacles, ‘invisible barriers’
  - Learn the ‘rules’ of academia on their own
  - Be caught between ‘two worlds’
  - Have feelings of academic inadequacy and not ‘belonging’ in the academic community
Future research

- Longitudinal studies: Once an impostor, always an impostor?
- Opportunity for new research: Second career graduate/doctoral students caused by “Great Recession”
- Student transition to teaching, and mentorship
Overcoming the Impostor

- Get a good mentor
  - Oriel, et al.: Teachers “have a responsibility to assist these trainees to experience a smoother transition....”
  - Gardner and Holley: Counseling, support groups, faculty and administration awareness
Overcoming the Impostor

- Clance: Key first step is recognition
- Journal
- Change the script
- Learn from mistakes: Accept failure as well as success
- Visualize success
- Reward yourself
- ‘Fake it ‘til you make it’