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## Imposter Syndrome in Academia

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# Imposter Syndrome in Higher Ed: Faculty & Students

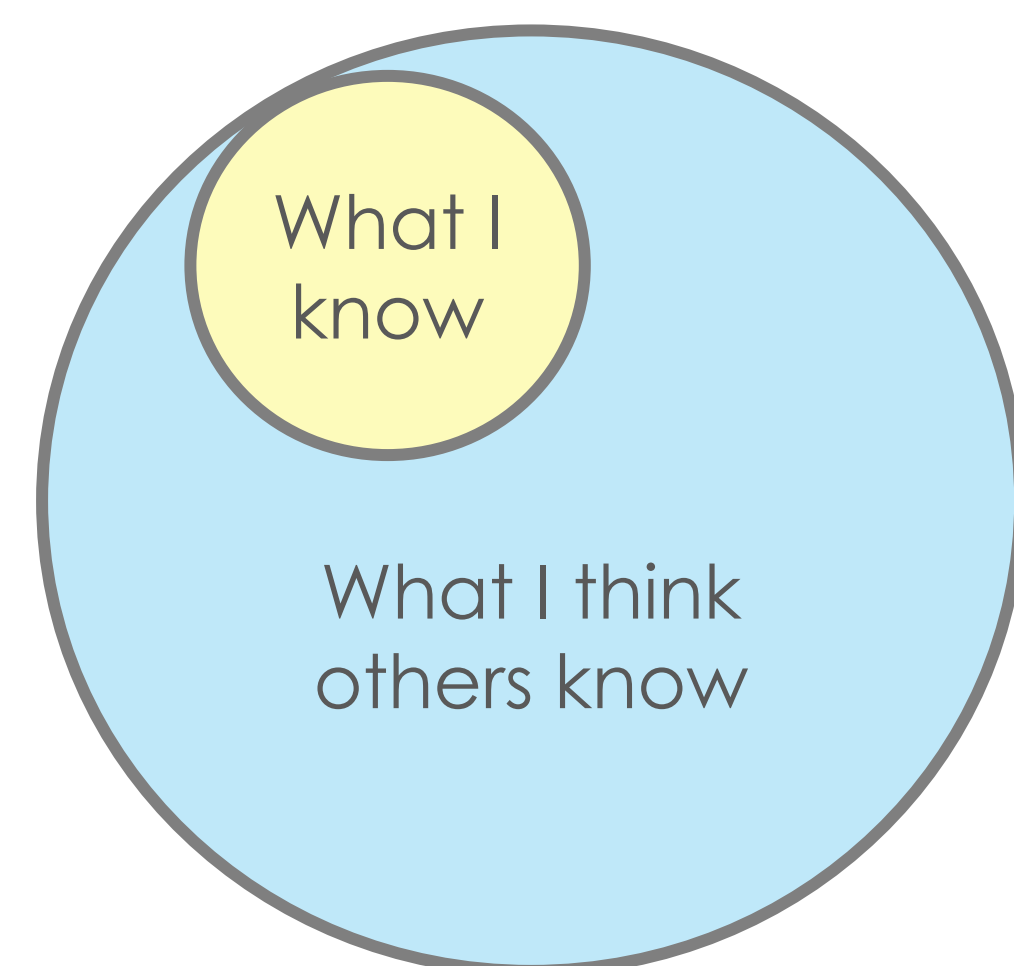
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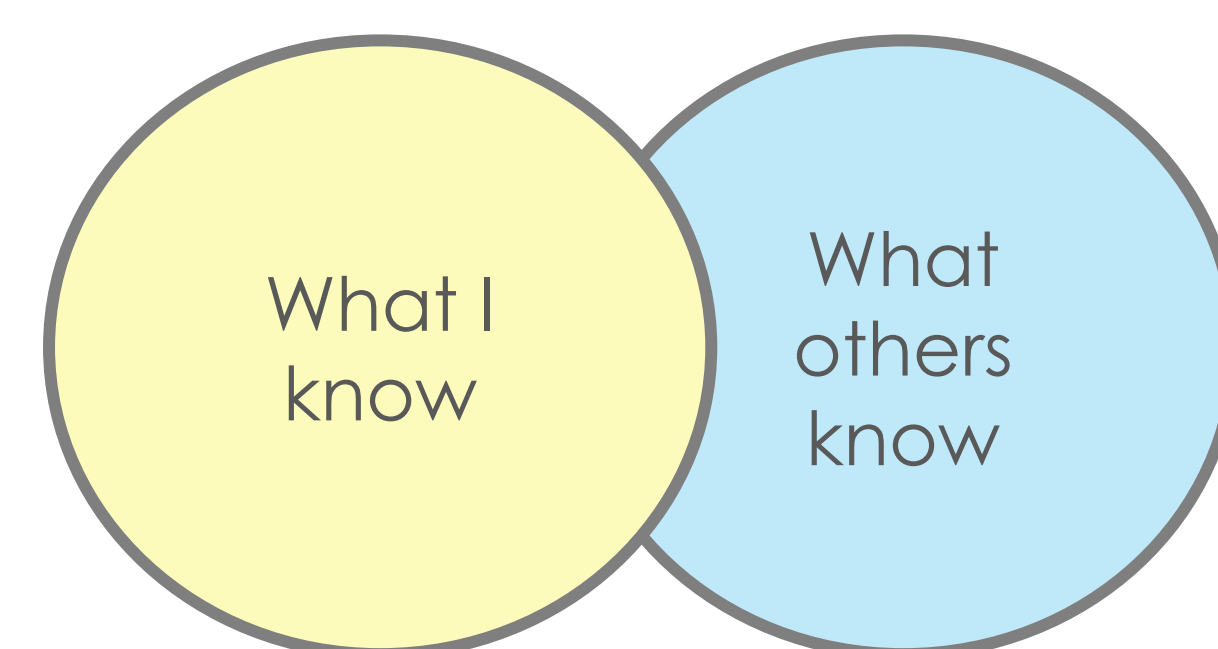
## Defining Imposter Syndrome

- Despite evidence, fears being exposed as not having the expertise expected in your role.
- Despite evidence, feels like a fraud.
- Attributes success to luck, masking skills, or the work of other people.
- Internalizes failure and over-focus on mistakes.
- Over-estimates abilities of others, underestimates amount of work those individuals put in.

### Assumption



### Reality



## What The Literature Says

- **Experienced by 70% of people, higher in fields with peer review** (1, 2).
- More prevalent in certain sub-groups (1, 2, 3):
  - high achievers/perfectionists
  - advanced degrees
  - racial, ethnic, religious minorities
- Impacts institution's ability to retain students, faculty and staff (2).
- Faculty: Workaholic behaviors lead to burnout and lower work satisfaction (2).
- Students (2):
  - positively correlates to anxiety & depression
  - negatively correlates to self-esteem & self-efficacy

(1) Sakulku, J. (2011) The Imposter Phenomenon. *The Journal of Behavioral Science*, 6(1), 75 – 97.  
 (2) Parkman, A. (2016) The Imposter Phenomenon in Higher Education: Incidence and Impact. *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice*, 16(1).  
 (3) Chrousos, G.P. & Mentis, A.F.A. (2020) Imposter Syndrome Threatens Diversity. *Science*, 367(6479), 749-750.

## Triggers

### Faculty

- Rejection in “publish or perish” culture
- Constant performance review with high growth and performance expectations
- Aggressive competitiveness
- Scholarly isolation and institutional silos

### Students

- New class or project in competitive environment
- Constant assessment
- Push for continued growth in content knowledge and transferable skills



## Recommendations

### Be Impeccable With Your Word

- Feelings are not facts. Mind your self-talk. You're listening.
- Reframe failure to use it for growth and learning.

### Don't Take Anything Personally

- Learn how to accept critical feedback without internalizing failures.

### The Four Agreements

### Don't Make Assumptions

- Maintain a growth mindset. Revisit successes to see yourself in context.
- “I have not failed. I've found 10,000 ways that won't work” ~Thomas Edison

### Always Do Your Best

- Be realistic about failure potential. Set realistic expectations of yourself.

## Institutional Supports

### Students

- Mental health coaching and mentoring
- Open discussions: name it, debunk myths, and normalize
- Faculty as models of resilience

### Faculty

- Group peer mentoring
- Mentor training in recognizing imposter syndrome
- Identification of organizational expectations with appropriate boundaries
- *The Empress Has No Clothes* or *The Secret Thoughts of Successful Women*



**Recognizing Imposter Syndrome in yourself may allow you to recognize it in your peers and students**