

Episode 3: Impostor Syndrome and the Black Experience

Tue, 3/30 4:50PM • 36:15

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

impostor syndrome, experiences, Black, students, Tracie Lowe, Donte Bernard, college,

00:00 Dr. Keoshia Worthy

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All right, so welcome to the third episode of Invisible and On Stage. And today's topic is on Impostor Syndrome and the Black Experience and I am joined by Drs. Donte Bernard and Dr. Tracie Lowe. Thank you for being here, guys.

00:53 Dr. Tracie Lowe

Thank you for inviting us.

00:56 Dr. Donte Bernard

Thank you for having us. Really excited to be here.

00:57 Dr. Keoshia Worthy

Donte is a second year NIMH T32. What does that mean, T32?

01:04 Dr. Donte Bernard

It means that I'm funded by the National Institute of Health through a training grant. [Dr. Keoshia Worthy: Okay.] So the T just stands for training. That's all.

01:13 Dr. Keoshia Worthy (continues with biography)

Okay, postdoctoral fellow at the National Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center at the Medical University of South Carolina. His research aims to understand the psychological and behavioral health consequences of racism-related stress, for example, racial discrimination, among Black youth and emerging adults. The predominant goal of his research is to identify how and why racism-related stress leads to poor mental health outcomes, including trauma, so as to promote resilience and positive psychosocial adjustment in the face of racism-related adversity. Donte earned his PhD in Clinical Psychology from the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. Did I say that right? [Dr. Donte Bernard: Right on.] All right. So you're not a Duke fan? [laughs]

02:02 Dr. Donte Bernard

[laughs] No! I'm not going to say I'm not a Duke fan, but if I had to pick Tar Heels over the Blue Devils, I'm rolling with the Tar Heels.

02:06 Dr. Keoshia Worthy

Okay, okay. Tracie is the Assistant Director of Assessment for the Institute for Urban Policy Research and Analysis at the University of Texas at Austin. Her research focuses on Black students' experiences in higher education, with a particular focus of Black women graduate students. Additionally, her research interests include issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education. Tracie holds a doctorate in Educational Leadership and policy from the University of Texas at Austin.

So in 2018, our former First Lady Michelle Obama participated in a book tour for her memoir *Becoming*. While visiting a school in London, one student asked what it feels like to be a symbol of hope. And surprisingly, Mrs. Obama reported that she continues to struggle with impostor syndrome. In fact, her exact words were that it doesn't go away. That feeling that you shouldn't take me that seriously. Impostor syndrome is a term coined by psychologists Clance and Imes in the 1970s, who defined it as a feeling of not being good enough, like one does not belong, that they are a fraud, and that others will find out.

So usually on the podcast, the first two episodes were of people that I've known through like family or friends, and I just kind of was researching impostor syndrome and ran into this article authored by doctors, Bernard and Lowe, or we kind of went over this first name basis, Donte and Tracie [laughs]. And, you know, this was published in the Journal of Diverse Issues in Higher Education and the title of their article was "Impostor Syndrome: Black College Students and How Administrators Can Help." What are your thoughts about someone as esteemed as Michelle Obama who's married to our first Black president, right, who is still struggling with impostor syndrome? Are you guys surprised at all?

04:04 Dr. Donte Bernard

Nah, Tracie I'll go first, and then you can follow up. I will say not at all surprised. One of the things that we know about this impostor syndrome kind of experience is what people call like this private and internal battle that people, that folks are struggling with. No one really talks about it. So when we hear people who are in positions of power, people who are doing very well in their craft, like even Serena Williams is talking about this, about feeling good enough, it really catches us by surprise, because we're like, how can somebody like that feel like I am right now? And it's actually a really commonplace experience with some literature and data suggesting that roughly 70 to 80% of US population experience this is at least one time in your lifetime.

04:52 Dr. Tracie Lowe

Yeah. And I can appreciate the fact that you put this out to the forefront because, like Donte was saying, it's not something that people talk about. And, again, for people who may experience it's in high school or college, this is something that is continuous throughout life. So, they'll be definitely different phases of life where you may come into a situation where you're uncomfortable, you're in a position, maybe in space that's unfamiliar. And those feelings of impostorism, like if they will really hire me, like am I qualified for this, can I do this, they come up. So, in terms of her being at the level that she is, and still facing impostor syndrome every day, I feel like that is something that is pretty common. And again, I'm glad that she really kind of brought that to the forefront of conversation.

05:36 Dr. Keoshia Worthy

Thank you. Thank you. Donte, you mentioned that 70 to 80% of people struggle with impostor syndrome? So, I'm assuming that both of you struggle with it. Do you mind sharing, you know, maybe at different points in your life, how it came up for you?

05:49 Dr. Tracie Lowe

Yeah. For me, I would say it probably started in school for the awareness of maybe feelings of impostorism and still not being able to label it until later on in life. But those types of feelings came about in high school because I was in a science and engineering magnet that was full of men. And I, it was, I won't say it was a predominantly white space, so that experience was more diverse. But math, science, like those STEM, particularly STEM classes and STEM focus still, I'd been accepted into the high school, but I always was just like, "Am I really supposed to be here?" Because these are brilliant people. They can get calculus in two seconds and I'm going to tutoring every day. So definitely feel it like I don't really belong here in certain spaces and certain classrooms and just kind of still trudging forward. But then you get to a predominantly white institution, such as Texas A&M University. and you're pretty much one of few, or I was one of few Black people so in that particular space, I think there are some racial ethnic identity pieces that kind of factored into that impostorism. And that feeling of, do you really belong on campus?

07:08 Dr. Donte Bernard

For me, I'm a first gen college student, right? So, my families don't really understand what's happening when I tell them about what's going on the different, you know, trials and tribulations of going to college and in grad school, and pursuing a higher degree. But I think across each one of those stages, I'm coming from predominantly white institution, UNC, MUSC, my undergrad was at Kansas State University. So here is this brown man walking into these white spaces. And folks are like what are you doing here? Like, what, what's going on? And I think for me, one of the biggest challenges was trying to understand how I got to this place where other folks have a long lineage of being. So being in classes when like, I don't know up from down and folks are like, "Oh, yeah, well, my dad's coming in, and he's done X, Y, and Z, and he's talked to this person already he's got me linked in here." And I'm thinking, How do I how did I get here, and when somebody's gonna find out that I just don't belong here?

And I think as I've transitioned through each one of these different phases, the work that I have done has been recognized by folks. But I'm not used to that. Right? So, I'm still waiting for someone to say, that's a little off, right? That's not quite right. You don't belong in these spaces in these places, right. And then within a clinical context, now you got me doing healthcare stuff, I'm like hold on, timeout, right. Like what's going on, when is somebody gonna recognize that I, that I'm not there. So I think Tracie's right on, there's this intersection between space, place, and also family dynamics that all kind of come together to intersect to inform these feelings that we're that we're going through, that we're talking about today.

08:42 Dr. Keoshia Worthy

Thank you, I, I like the fact that both of you really focused on what it means to be Black, and how that can exacerbate that feeling of being an impostor in these white spaces. Students at Columbia, which is a PWI, also mention that even from the graduate level. And so, Tracie, I want to throw this over to you – what are your thoughts about or what are some of the things that you've heard about graduate students who experienced this, particularly Black graduate students?

09:08 Dr. Tracie Lowe

The biggest thing that I hear from Black graduate students is not knowing about this thing called the hidden curriculum. So why are there other students who are getting these opportunities? And then it comes back to them (referring to Black students) on, “Am I not qualified enough? Like, am I really supposed to be here?” Because I see all of these people getting these opportunities for research. I see them being in these spaces where they can get publications or conference presentations, and even down to funding, and I feel like the conversation kind of kind of turns on a point of, A, not knowing, and a lot of them being first generation students, but then also feeling, you know, do I really belong in this space because I am left out of this space, and people are gonna find out that I'm a fraud because I'm sitting in class. It seems like everybody else knows all of these big words and this language that people are using to discuss these articles. And not knowing that some of this is not necessarily that they know, it's just that they have other mentors, other people who help them kind of navigate that system. And so again, at the graduate level I feel like that that is a really vulnerable space for Black students as they kind of they kind of walk this fine line of, when do I, if there is something that's happening that I'm not invited to this space, how do I speak up but also not threaten potentially future opportunity.

10:27 Dr. Keoshia Worthy

Yeah thank you, I like that “hidden curriculum” that many of us aren't aware of. I attended Seton Hall University and I'm from the South you know originally from like a really rural area but also once I moved to another place it was mainly like, especially my high school was predominantly Black, and I went to an HBCU. And so once I got to college I felt so out of place and I really related to what you said, Tracie, was like are these I don't know these words like what are they even saying like these are SAT, GRE words how do I find my, you know, my voice in these spaces, and I think that was the

hardest part for me was just like, how can I represent myself in the best way without feeling like a fraud and feeling undeserving of this, like position that I'm in.

11:13 Dr. Tracie Lowe

Yeah, I like the way you said that, how do you find your voice. And I think that encapsulates what a lot of them are trying to figure out is how do they find their voice in these spaces like you said without feeling like a fraud, so I appreciate you specifically kind of like saying that.

11:26 Dr. Donte Bernard

I think one thing that I really resonate here with is this idea of finding your voice. But I think even more than that, not only finding your voice, but valuing the voice that you have in these spaces. I think the inherent message that is conveyed to a lot of folks of color is that your perspective, your culture, your experiences, are non-normative therefore not important, right? Or the way that you approach these topics are cool, but that's not how we do it as a field right, that's not what we do in here. I think it's a real important struggle of trying to find one's voice but also the importance behind one's voice because what we bring in, the unique aspects that we're bringing in, hold value and once I think those two can be merged together the value in one's voice, I think the power behind that is pretty significant.

12:14 Dr. Keoshia Worthy

Thanks for sharing that. I'm wondering you know your research interest is understanding psychological and behavioral health, right? How does this intersect or does this intersect in any way with impostor syndrome?

12:27 Dr. Donte Bernard

Yeah, absolutely. So, I tell folks that the best research is me-search. So, the research you can personally relate to, right. So, I tell folks from the jump like I feel like one of the biggest impostors you'll ever meet because I'm always questioning, like is this good enough, is this there? But one of the things that we find, is that this pattern of questioning: "Is this good enough? When somebody's gonna find out that I don't belong?" is that it actually increases feelings of anxiety, increases feelings of depression, and also this idea of interpersonal sensitivity, which is a fancy term of saying I feel more sensitive in interpersonal interactions. Like somebody's gonna call me out, somebody is gonna, you know, criticize me, right. We also know that these experiences come at a cost of one's self esteem as well and also increase these tendencies that feel like I need to be perfect at all times. And we know that these are all risk factors for a lot of things that you and I see in the clinical context and clinical work, right. So, folks who are anxious about school performance or about peer interactions or about you know being able to perform on tests or ACTs or GREs or whatever, whatever. We find that these experiences of impostor are predictive of these things that can actually come into detriment.

13:36 Dr. Keoshia Worthy

I'm sure you've done all the research, you know. [both Donte and Keoshia laugh] I'm gonna toot your horn even if you're not tooting it yourselves, for the both of you. [Donte laughs and replies, Thank you.] But I'm wondering if you notice any gender differences in any way?

13:46 Dr. Donte Bernard

Yeah, absolutely. So similar to your quote at the beginning with Michelle Obama, it falls, I wouldn't say clearly along those lines, but we do find in most of the research that females are reporting increased rates of impostor cognitions relative to that of males. There's a lot of different reasons that can be right we have you know societal expectations and gender norms about, you know, who's qualified quote unquote for what. Like Tracie was mentioning the STEM fields and who belongs in what places. CEOs, right, who's supposed to be in these places and who's not and other positions of power similar to what Michelle Obama had talked about. As an extra layer we find that Black women in particular are particularly susceptible to these feelings, right. If we talk about the intersection between gender and race, one holding these two marginalized statuses right, that come with their own unique experiences of discrimination or prejudice or what have you. Those increase one's likelihood to have these thoughts, like do I really belong here, because something's not right.

14:50 Dr. Tracie Lowe

I agree. Me and Donte do a presentation of this, so my section is specifically thinking about it from that racialized and gendered lens. And sometimes I talk to students about like that Superwoman syndrome in terms of feeling like you have to be the Superwoman that's perfect and does everything. And like you said, all of that adds to anxiety, it adds to stress, it adds to depression, it adds to all these risk factors in terms of our mental and physical health. And so for a Black woman in particular spaces, even thinking about like, intra, interracial spaces, and I think intra, interracial spaces, and how, how it feels to just sit in these spaces and just to be a woman in a particular space. And then you add the concept of race, and gender on top of that, but I do agree with all of those things. Like I said, in my examples, particularly in STEM fields, like I had other Black women, who were also in the same classes as me. And we would kind of carry our groups of, you know, study groups, and different things like that, because it's where we felt safe. So, I think those safe spaces are very much needed in order for us to kind of navigate these pillars of impostorism, mentors, and just people who can support us and help us to kind of work through those feelings.

16:10 Dr. Keoshia Worthy

I'm wondering how it could be reinforced, like this idea of being an impostor, not only in the workplace, but also in society?

16:19 Dr. Donte Bernard

Yeah, absolutely. I think, you know, one of that's one of the core pieces of my research that I really look at is this idea of how experiences with discrimination intensify these feelings that we're talking about here. And I think one of the things you're alluding to is how the things happen, happening around us

right, in our society reinforce these feelings and make them worse, right. And the list goes on and on and how this occurs, right? We see the messages in the media, regarding the intellect, the capacities of Black folks, we see it in now political realms, and political domains are talking about folks talking about how quote unquote, not smart folks of color are, disparately position us within positions that you know, are not as doctors or not as scientist or not as whatever, whatever. So, when our success goes beyond those realms, or kind of exceeds what folks have kind of put us in that box for, I think that's when we start to feel that our feelings like oh, I'm not, I'm actually disproving a lot of the stereotypes that folks had for me, right? Or I'm actually doing things that go against societal perceptions of what Black folks should be doing.

17:28 Dr. Keoshia Worthy

What about in the workplace? How can work reinforce or just our, the systems reinforce this feeling of being an impostor?

17:36 Dr. Tracie Lowe

I was, and I forget which one of you talked about the CEO, but I think we just got our first Black woman CEO of like a Fortune 500 company, I believe we just got one. So, all these years, you know, not seeing representation. And I think in the workplace, that representation feeds, in terms of, and I'll use higher education. And just these are just my observations, there is no research behind this in particularly. I'm thinking of observations. But in terms of observations of like, who say staff, mid-manage level, who's represented there. And then when we get higher to say to the Vice President, the President, colleges and universities, what does that representation look like? So, I think that in the workplace, it can be reinforced through just the lack of representation. So, feeling like, well, maybe I'm not good enough for these spaces, because I don't see people like me. And then when I do get into this space, there's this kind of this level of either microaggressions, or just other kinds of little things that are done to kind of just reinforce the fact that you're, you don't belong. So, you're supposed to be the secretary. And if you're not the secretary or if you're my boss, do I really have to respect you?

18:54 Dr. Keoshia Worthy

I think you hit it spot on with just kind of the representation. When we don't see us how can we feel confident in our own abilities, right, if we don't see other people who look like us, but I was reading something. And one of the things that I saw was just kind of looking at the impostor syndrome, even outside of performance, it was kind of alluding to the fact that people can also feel like an impostor in their race and their sexual orientation and things like that.

19:20 Dr. Donte Bernard

Yeah you know, you know, one of the things that we've talked about a lot here is impostor within predominately white spaces. But we don't talk about it much within historically Black context, right, what that looks like. And that's actually some of the things that my dissertation focused on is like the differences in how folks talk about impostor within predominantly white spaces and historically Black

colleges or spaces like that. And what we find kind of alluding to what Tracie was talking about was within historically Black spaces, folks aren't talking about race as much as feeling as an impostor. But more so just not I'm sorry, not racial mistreatment, right but like, Am I Black enough? Am I quote unquote, woke enough for these spaces, right? What does it look like to be Black, what does it mean to be Black? And how does my level map on to the folks around me? And outside of that? How does my success then map onto the folks around me? Right? Am I doing as well as my Black peers? And if not, why? Why don't I have the connections that they do? Why am I not in these groups or places? So, we find within these Black spaces that folks are talking about this experience for different reasons than that of when they're in white spaces, which is a really interesting question to think about.

20:28 Dr. Keoshia Worthy

No, I totally agree. I, you know, I'm always kind of, as you said, like, the best type of research is me-search. And so as you were, as both of you speak, I can't help but think about myself. And think about just kind of what you were describing. I know, for me, you know, most of my peers from back home, don't have the high the highest level of education that I do. And I always just like, Do I seem cool enough? Do I, you know, am I too, am I acting like I'm in college? Am I using the right language?

20:58 Dr. Tracie Lowe

Definitely those discussions of who's Black enough? Social media. I hear conversations about this all the time in terms of, who's too Black, who's Black enough? Who's not representing us? Do I fit in? And I hip enough? Am I cool enough?

21:14 Dr. Donte Bernard

Yeah. And I know, for me, you know, whenever I go back home, I do find I struggle, right in terms of what topics can I talk about here that my family finds interesting, right? I remember when I defended my masters. My family was like, congrats on being done with grad school, you defended your dissertation. And I was like, Nah, I'm not done. I actually have like, several more years to go. And like, they just don't know that, that's not on them. Right? Why would they know? So, I absolutely find myself struggling with this question of why like, did I lose it? Whatever that quote, unquote, "it" is right. Which is a really interesting thing to think about. As I really think about this idea of code switching, you know, do I, when I go back home, do I find myself trying to change my language a bit to fit with my family's language right, such that I am able to connect more. Seemed like I'm whatever that whatever that means, right? And then when I jump back in more academic spaces, then I start throwing out these fancy or big words again. So, I found that over the course of my career, I've had, you know, a personal identity and a professional identity. But as I've grown older, those two have actually become one and the same where I'm not trying to do that as much. But I think as you start to get more educated, if you will, within academia, specifically, you do start to see yourself almost turning into these two different people. So, you have to be really intentional, at least I have to be really intentional about trying to bring those back together. So that I'm not trying to live these two separate lives, if you will.

22:42 Dr. Keoshia Worthy

And I'm curious, how did you bring those two parts of yourself together?

22:45 Dr. Donte Bernard

Yeah, I found when, when I couldn't keep them separate anymore. Right? Meaning that when issues of race started to bleed into the work that I was doing. I found that I was talking about me, right? I wasn't talking about, you know, just this foreign concept of impostor like, and I'm talking about my experiences, and the experiences of folks who look like me, right? We're dealing with this, therefore, it's important that we talk about this at the forefront, right? We had, you know, the death of Mike Brown and Walter Scott, I can go down and down and down the list, right? Like, we can't not talk about these things within these spaces, which is why my research has evolved looking at you know, this idea of racial trauma. We can't not think about these traumatic events or these experiences without acknowledging the lived experiences of Black and brown folks in this country. So, I think at one point in time, I tried to keep those things disconnected. Like, we don't want to talk about this that much. But the more I did this stuff, I'm realizing like we can't not talk about this stuff. If we want to support students, especially students of color, we have to validate their experiences, our experiences,

23:48 Dr. Keoshia Worthy

Exactly. You both just kind of mentioned, you know, being connected to the community, like how can you still remain connected? And Donte, you spoke a little bit about just kind of bringing those two parts of yourself together. And Tracie, I'm wondering, how do you manage to stay connected to the Black community?

24:06 Dr. Tracie Lowe

Um, I'm lucky that my job requires, it requires it and because I love community work so much. I specifically look for or try to be very intentional, and not everyone can do this but, the spaces that I put myself in, in terms of career, are they equity focused, will they be looking at issues related to Black people. So, the Institute for Urban Policy Research and Analysis, we do policy work, specifically just around Black communities in Texas. And so I've been fortunate to have the opportunity to just remain connected through all of the work that I'm doing in Texas that specifically focuses on Black communities. And even outside of work, just thinking about the spaces in the community that I work with, thinking about the ways that I can reach back and mentor other Black graduate students who are going through the process of dissertating, and like all the unknowns and all of those things. Even just in my own family, I have a lot of people who are coming up and trying to figure out undergrad and graduate school and things like that. So, I think that there are ways that even if you can't necessarily in your career do those things that you would like to do to stay connected, there are outside organizations and spaces that you frequent, such as safe based spaces, volunteer spaces, and those are the ways that people can keep connected and that I keep connected and to kind of keep myself grounded because without that I just, I feel like, it would, life wouldn't be the same. And so again being very intentional to bring my full self into spaces, even if they are predominantly white spaces because if I don't then, the

value of your voice, understanding the value of your voice in all these spaces. I would say understand the value of my voice in these spaces. So, I try to stay connected everywhere.

25:51 Dr. Keoshia Worthy

Thank you. How do you know if you really are an impostor?

25:54 Dr. Donte Bernard

You know this is an interesting question because I think about what does it mean to be an impostor right. Does it mean you don't belong in a space? Does it mean that you have cheated on everybody else's exam? And that's how you got in these spaces or places right. Like how do we define this, this feeling. And to be real, like I think we are all feeling this way in some way shape or form regardless of folks want to talk about it or not right. But I think what's important about this idea of impostor syndrome is to recognize that it's a normal experience right. Like it's okay to feel this way it doesn't mean that you are an impostor it just means that you're a little uncomfortable in these spaces. But give it some time right, and the next time you have something new you'll probably feel this thing all over again. And one of the things that we find that reduces impostor experiences is time, social support, right and having folks that have been through this to kind of normalize that experience, and also to equip you with the skills needed to go through this, recognize that, okay here that voice is again, that doesn't mean it's real it just means, I feel a little uncomfortable now let's find out why.

27:08 Dr. Tracie Lowe

I was thinking about this and I think that's gonna determine on an individual, personal basis if you are really an impostor. Because some people may be in a dance space, where they're just like "I got this," and some people are like, "I got two left feet, why did they pick me for dance class?" So, a lot I agree with everything Donte has said. I think everybody has this feeling, sometimes I think it's just an awareness of this language and this term exists and that's probably there's probably a moment when people realize somebody is talking about this, that is me. I feel like that's when people can really start to interrogate whether they are and they feel like they're an impostor. But, I do think that people have these feelings, that they feel in terms of if they belong, if they're confident enough, if they're smart enough, I think everybody kind of shares them and again like Donte said, time.

27:52 Dr. Donte Bernard

I also want to make sure that I reiterate something Tracie said at the beginning. It doesn't go away, right. It's not going to be completely zero. You can talk to folks who are super experienced in their field, you can talk to Michelle Obama and she's still like yeah, I feel this way, right. So, it's not that the the feeling itself goes away, but I think the intensity of it goes away and the attribution of why you're feeling that way changes. I don't feel this way because I'm a fraud, I feel this way because I know how people think about Black folks.

28:22 Dr. Keoshia Worthy

So, acknowledging the feeling, knowing that it's going to be there right, and also validating this emotional experience, while being curious of why is there.

“Flash from the Past” [piano notes] ... This is a segment of the podcast where the listeners can learn more about you outside of your profession. I would like for you to embrace your younger college self and think about your preferences at that time.

When you were in college did you prefer exams or essays?

28:53 Dr. Tracie Lowe

Ooh! I'm going to say essays

28:56 Dr. Donte Bernard

Yeah! I'm gonna go with essays as well on this one.

28:58 Dr. Keoshia Worthy

All right, individual or group projects?

29:01 Dr. Donte Bernard

I started off as a group project person, but I've now changed to individual project person. I just, I can just get it done myself, as opposed to waiting on somebody.

29:11 Dr. Tracie Lowe

Ooh! Back in the day I liked those group projects, but then once people stopped pulling their weight, that's when I was just like I don't appreciate this anymore, y'all ain't doing nothing.

29:21 Dr. Keoshia Worthy

Did you go out on Friday nights or stay in?

29:25 Dr. Tracie Lowe

Kind of both. Because they had these things on campus that they did. So, if you asked me if I went off campus very much, probably not.

29:32 Dr. Donte Bernard

I can probably count on my hand the number of times I went out on Friday night back in the day, it was not a lot.

29:37 Dr. Keoshia Worthy

Ashanti's "Foolish" on that Biggie beat or Beyonce's "Crazy in Love?"

29:43 Dr. Donte Bernard

I gotta go with Beyonce there. The beat on that Beyonce track just gets me every time.

29:48 Dr. Tracie Lowe

Yea, and especially when it opens up on her Homecoming album. It's just like okay we're getting ready to do something.

29:55 Dr. Keoshia Worthy

The Fresh Prince of Bel Air or Family Matters?

29:58

I'm watching Fresh Prince right. So, all over HBO, shout out, like so I gotta go back with Fresh Prince. That's, that's it.

30:06 Dr. Tracie Lowe

I'm gonna say Fresh Prince too, I like Family Matters, but I watch Fresh Prince more now.

30:11 Dr. Keoshia Worthy

Now I want you to think about what you would tell your college self. I'm going to start a sentence and I want you to finish.

Always keep...

30:18 Dr. Tracie Lowe

A planner.

30:18 Dr. Donte Bernard

Always keep, your priorities straight.

30:21 Dr. Keoshia Worthy

And the last one, be open to...

30:23 Dr. Donte Bernard

Uncertainty.

Dr. Tracie Lowe

Being uncomfortable.

30:28 Dr. Keoshia Worthy

At the end of each podcast, I offer some skills and tips to students, but you guys are the experts here. So, I'm just gonna sit back and listen to you know, if you have two or three strategies that you think could be helpful, even if it pertains to like if the person themselves are dealing with impostor syndrome, or even how to support people from an institutional level, which I know that's one thing that I read about what you guys wrote in your article, or how do you support a friend or colleague with impostor syndrome?

30:57 Dr. Donte Bernard

All right, I'll go first. So, I won't take the institutional stuff. I'll let Tracie take that because I know that's your jam. At the personal level, I'll say a couple of things. So first, coming from a therapy lens, at the end of the day impostor represents a form that represents a form of cognitive distortion, right? Or a distorted way of thinking about yourself, your abilities, right? Or what you're able to produce, whether that be a function is from what other folks have told you, or the internalization of other messages. So, it's really important that we keep track of what thoughts we're telling ourselves when we feel uncomfortable, when we feel like we're in these situations when we can't succeed. And how can we interrogate those thoughts to really identify how truthful they are? Because I think once we start to understand, I'm never going to be successful, like, well, that's not true. How many times have we actually never been successful in the past, right? Or someone's gonna find out, I'm a failure. And if you think you're gonna fail, tell me about how your past success predicts your future failure. Like that doesn't make but that doesn't, that doesn't equate.

We also talk about the impostor syndrome, we usually qualify this by saying it's experienced by high-achieving individuals, right? I don't like that phrase of "high-achieving", because it suggests that some folks can experience it while others don't. If you got into college, if you got a job, if you're, you know, if you're doing these things, you are high-achieving in itself, right? So, by proxy of you feeling this thing, you are important, you belong, in your experiences, right, are, are not that of some, right, you're not gonna get called out because you don't belong here. Because of the like, the things that you're doing.

Lastly, I'll say that it's important to recognize that you aren't alone in this experience, right? This is not something where you're walking around having a thought, like, am I crazy, like, does somebody feel like I don't belong? Now, I think it's important to note that folks might tell you, you don't belong. But that's not because of what you're doing. That might be because of their own biases, or preconceived notions about what you look like on the place or the topics that you're talking through. So, I think it's really important to have spaces and places that you can be open, transparent and authentic about what you're thinking about, what you're struggling with, and what you are going through. Because once you have folks normalize those thoughts, or challenge those thoughts, or even hold you accountable to really interrogating those thoughts, I think we see completely different trajectories of success, outcomes and adjustment.

33:19 Dr. Tracie Lowe

I would say, from thinking about it from like a personal and institutional level. So personally, I think self-affirmations and again, like Donte was talking about, having these conversations with yourself and really interrogating feelings that are coming up for you. Institutions creating spaces, creating recommendation for people to, A, wants to access these spaces and not feel they're not able to take the challenges that they have, and be able to speak to someone who they can relate to. So, for me, I think feeling, dealing with impostorism at an institutional level means changing some things within these counseling spaces. Also, bringing these conversations through the pipeline. So, starting with your elementary, middle, high schools, and making sure that they're always spaces for kids and students to talk about what impostorism look like, specifically for Black students who are dealing with these extra intersectional identities that are definitely going to create extra pressures to be perfect. To not feed into the stereotype, kind of just to not be what other people see them as. So, these conversations should always be happening, whether it be through mentors, whether it be through programs, like that's a part of normalization that Donte was talking about. So, institutions having to take accountability for the fact that it exists and then bring it to the forefront for students because I think it does, it does affect the outcomes, academic outcomes of a lot of students. So, again, institutions, all this takes funding, so just making sure that we're prioritizing funding the right spaces that can help students be successful. And they can help have these conversations.

35:05 Dr. Donte Bernard

As a psychologist, right, I always got to advocate for, you know, mental health care and mental wellness. But I think one of the things you were alluding to and please correct me if I'm wrong here is representation in the spaces where we're doing things that are to recognize the experiences of folks of color, so.

35:20 Dr. Tracie Lowe

Yeah, and I was encouraging students to get counseling, but representation is important. So, I'm always a big proponent of getting more people like you, Dr. Bernard and Dr. Worthy in those spaces.

35:31 Dr. Keoshia Worthy

Thank you so much, guys. I really appreciate you both for joining me, LinkedIn is real, you guys. This is how I found these both of these beautiful people, reached out to both of them on LinkedIn. And thank you so much for responding and being a part of this.

35:47 Dr. Donte Bernard

Thank you so much for having me.

35:48 Dr. Tracie Lowe

Thank you.

35:50 Dr. Keoshia Worthy

Thank you so much for offering up your time and spending it with me. If you are a Columbia University student on Morningside campus, and today's episode left you feeling like you could benefit from talking more about this topic with an expert, please do not hesitate to call CPS at 212-854-2878.