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THE DREW LAB AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

ECOLOGY, EVOLUTION AND CONSERVATION OF CORAL REEFS

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Impostor Syndrom lecture

I teach a class for first year MA students, entitled “[MA Thesis Development Seminar](#)” in which I focus on helping students succeed in their time here. I not only focus on them doing good science, but also on the process by which one does science. That means that I need to talk about mental health.

Today I gave my lecture on the Impostor Syndrome. This is a pernicious aspect of doing graduate work (and beyond) that can impact my students’ ability to do good science by limiting their willingness to secure funding, reducing their networking and professional involvement and ultimately by having them sell themselves short.

One of the most insidious aspects of the Impostor Syndrome is the fact that while almost everyone feels it, so few of us go on record about having those feelings of self doubt. I wanted to show just how omnipresent it was so I sent out a tweet asking people to talk about it. Within 15 min I had an entire lecture’s worth of testimonials.

I also wanted to link this conversation in with the broader Ripples of Doubt conversation (expertly curated by my friend [Dr. Karen James here](#). While the impacts of sexual harassment were not the goal of this talk (that’s a different lecture), I wanted to highlight how so many women, who are successful by almost any objective measure of success, are now questioning that success. It’s sickening and makes me worry about what my own students’ future.

The point I really want to get across with this lecture is that everyone feels it. Talking about and recognizing the symptoms of the Impostor Syndrome is the first step towards resolution. In my lecture I focus on tools to help navigate grad school. These include **1) setting oneself up for success, 2) not relying on exogenous systems of valuation 3) careful time management and 4) relying on one’s community for strength.**

To reach out to the broader community I am posting my notes on figshare [here](#). These are free for anyone to use, and I encourage you to share them widely. I’m more than happy to talk to people about this, so if you are in New York want me to come and give this lecture please let me know. If you’re not in NYC but want talk to you about how you can work with your community to navigate the Impostor Syndrome on this please get in touch with me.

Graduate school is tough, there will be many legitimate obstacles put up in your way. I want to help ensure that my students are well equipped to deal with these obstacles and that they have the mental and institutional resources available to be the successful, resilient and impressive scholars that they are.

[About the talk](#)

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