"Should I really be doing this?!" Experiences of Imposter Phenomenon as an Emerging Music Therapist

[« Suis-je vraiment à ma place? » Les tribulations d'une jeune musicothérapeute aux prises avec le phénomène de l'imposteur]

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Abstract

Imposter phenomenon (IP) is an internal experience often affecting high-achieving individuals who doubt their abilities, believe they are frauds, and find it challenging to attribute accomplishments to their own competencies. Situated within the author's historical and socio-cultural context, this autoethnographic reflection explores themes in the IP literature including the role of early family history, the impact of the college-to-career transition, and the reality of working as a music therapist in a role-emerging setting. The critical theory of intersectionality and the idea of double consciousness are highlighted, and practical tools are provided to help emerging music therapists navigate and confront IP.

Keywords: imposter syndrome, imposter phenomenon, music therapy, intersectionality, autoethnography, reflection

Sommaire

Le phénomène de l'imposteur (PI) est une expérience intérieure vécue par beaucoup de personnes extrêmement douées qui doutent de leurs capacités, se voient comme des hypocrites et ont de la difficulté à attribuer leurs réalisations à leurs propres compétences. Enracinée dans l'expérience historique et socioculturelle de l'autrice, cette réflexion autoethnographique explore plusieurs thèmes de la littérature traitant du PI, notamment le rôle des antécédents familiaux, le contrecoup de la transition des études au marché du travail et les réalités du travail du musicothérapeute dans le cadre d'un rôle en émergence. Dans l'ouvrage, on aborde la théorie de l'intersectionnalité et l'idée du dédoublement de la conscience, et on propose des outils pratiques pour aider les musicothérapeutes novices à composer avec le PI.

Mots-clés: syndrome de l'imposteur, phénomène de l'imposteur, musicothérapie, intersectionalité, autoethnographie, réflexion

Introduction

Imposter phenomenon (IP; also known as imposter syndrome) describes highly accomplished individuals who believe they are frauds, tending to attribute their success to external factors instead of their own competence (Clance & Imes, 1978; Feenstra et al., 2020). Despite my early-career accomplishments as an emerging professional music therapist, I have experienced multiple manifestations of imposter phenomenon throughout the last four years. In this autoethnographic reflection (Denzin, 2013; Stige & Ledger, 2016) set against the backdrop of IP literature, I explore my own experiences with IP within my unique historical and sociocultural context.

Having reached out to and spoken with many music therapy peers and colleagues, I have come to understand that IP is something that many of us experience in different ways and within different contexts. I became aware of the prevalence of IP in my life about six months after starting work at a new site as a full-time music therapist. I had put forward my workplace as an internship site and interviewed several students. However, the students to whom I offered the position accepted placements in other workplaces, partly for geographical reasons (the other sites were in their hometown). At the time, I was upset by their decisions and took them personally; I could not believe that students (internship candidates) had rejected my internship site! As an avid journal writer, I journaled to try to gain insight into and learn about what I was experiencing, as well as to process and release some of my emotions. In the process of reading previous journal entries, I felt a lightbulb go on in my head; I realized that this was not a new feeling, and that IP had been showing up consistently as I was developing my career as a music therapist. I began to unravel the origins of IP in my life in personal therapy, supervision, and research. My goal in writing this autoethnographic reflection and sharing my own experience is that others experiencing imposter phenomenon will gain a sense of hope, strength, and solidarity, and skills to validate, navigate, and confront IP.

Exploring the Literature

A number of studies about imposter phenomenon have examined and explored trends and themes amongst those experiencing it. Initially I was curious about IP encountered by emerging music therapists (Seah & McFerran, 2015) and the role of early family history (Clance & Imes, 1978; Satir et al., 1991). As I continued my search, I discovered other factors that contribute to IP, including attachment styles and entitlement (Gibson-Beverly & Schwartz, 2008), cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1962), negative inner dialogue (Rokach & Boulazreg, 2020), internal qualities and external factors (Lane, 2015), and the college-to-career transition in emerging adulthood (McElwee & Yurak, 2010; Murphy et al., 2010).

In a study of over 150 women experiencing imposter phenomenon, Clance and Imes (1978) discovered that women who exhibit IP fall into one of two groups of people who share a particularity in their early family history (p. 3): they either (a) have a sibling or close relative who has been assigned the role of the “chosen one” and they themselves have been told indirectly

they are inadequate in some way, or (b) their family has conveyed to them that they are superior in every way, close or equal to perfection. The authors state that a woman in the first category believes the family myth (in part) and wants to disprove it; on one hand, she strives to receive validation for her intellectual competence, and on the other hand, she thinks her family may be correct about her, which leads her to experience the imposter phenomenon. A woman in the second category knows that she has difficulty achieving certain things yet strives to fulfill her family's expectations and, in realizing that the standard is unattainable, begins to doubt her abilities which leads her to experience the imposter phenomenon.

Gibson-Beverly and Schwartz (2008) examined attachment and entitlement as predictors of IP in a study including over 150 female graduate students. The authors found that the "inability to internalize positive achievements may stem from negative early relational experiences" and that "a healthy sense of entitlement is important in the process of building and maintaining confidence in one's abilities and the internalization of one's achievements" (p. 128). Similarly, in a study examining the imposter phenomenon as one of the barriers to success for psychology students, Rokach and Boulazreg (2020) noted that "the IP reflects an inner dialogue which is concerned with ruminating over one's negative qualities" (p. 645). The authors state that this type of rumination may reflect that these students are operating in a state of "cognitive dissonance" (p. 645)—Festinger's (1962) concept, referring to two items of information that do not fit together psychologically in relation to behaviour, feelings, or opinions. Cognitive dissonance can be demonstrated through what Clance and Imes (1978) call "intellectual flattery" (p. 5), whereby students conform their opinions to seek approval from others, including supervisors, peers, or colleagues, in dissonance with what they truly believe. Lane (2015) identified internal qualities that lead to IP as being achievement focused, continually working on self-improvement and maximizing potential, needing external praise (from parents, professors, supervisors, or managers) to feel confident, and having an inability to self-validate. External factors that lead to IP may include comparison and evaluation, which can come about when witnessing peers/colleagues succeed, for example, or when working together on group projects. In addition to journaling, I often write songs to process my feelings, and I wrote a song called "Jealousy" in 2014 which was about comparison and feeling inadequate:

Jealousy, when it's not me
I'm not in control, so I fall down a hole
I drink a lot, alone in my room
Until I run out of orange juice
I live a lie, from day to day
When my mama calls, I tell her I'm okay

Ooh, no one really knows why she turned out this way
Ooh, should we try to change her, or let her fade away

When I feel so low, I go from vice to vice
But all the itching and scratching won't get rid of the lies
I try to think what keeps me sane
And a certain kind of warmth comes gushing in
Love is the answer, love is the key
Ooh baby you love me unconditionally
Ooh baby love me unconditionally

Ooh, no one really knows why she turned out this way
Ooh, should we try to change her, or love her anyway

Ooh, no one really knows why she turned out this way
Ooh, should we try to change her, or love her anyway

When examining the college-to-career transition in emerging adulthood—a developmental stage for individuals between the ages of 18 and 25—Murphy et al. (2010) found that because many young adults change jobs more frequently during this period, "career adaptability"—a term first coined by Savickas (1997)—was critical for these young adults to have "realistic expectations and a flexible approach to negotiating change and challenge within the working world" (p. 180), in addition to relational and social support. Similarly, Seah and McFerran (2015) interviewed five new music therapy graduates and found that, specific to the field of music therapy, many new graduates require adaptability and coping strategies as they often adopt sole positions in role-emerging settings when entering into clinical practice. The authors found that it is common for new music therapy graduates to experience feelings of loneliness and isolation as they shoulder new responsibilities and—especially unique to the profession—as they engage in ongoing advocacy and education.

Feenstra et al. (2020) described the implications of considering how social context and environment may shape someone's experience of feeling like an imposter on societal, institutional, and interpersonal levels. At a societal level, stereotypes can demonstrate how society and culture can contribute to shaping imposter feelings (e.g., stereotypes of leadership qualities among men vs. women or stereotypes of ethnic minorities as being lazy or underachieving). At an institutional level, the way that certain people are represented (or under-represented) in certain positions demonstrates how organizations and other institutions play a role in shaping imposter feelings (e.g., the representation of women in nursing vs. surgery). Lastly, at an interpersonal level, everyday interactions contain important social evaluative cues which convey to individuals whether (and how) they are seen as persons of value and worth, playing a role in shaping imposter feelings. I decided to use this autoethnographic approach to critically reflect on and make connections between what I have experienced and discovered through research, journaling, supervision, and personal therapy.

Drawing on personal journal excerpts as qualitative data interwoven with personal reflections to explore my own encounters with IP, I describe and then interpret the impact of early family history, intersectionality, emerging adulthood, and working full-time in a music-therapy-specific role in order to gain insights into how I can challenge IP when it reappears.

Where I Begin

I've graduated… now what?

> Journal excerpt: September 5, 2018
> It's only been one week "back-to-school" but I'm not in school and I already feel like I'm floundering. I've been late for things or gone to the wrong spot for a meeting or not gotten a job I applied for. It's all very frustrating … My mind is so full I can hardly take anymore. What I need to prioritize is finding or creating a music therapy position. But where do I begin? How can I even enjoy my time? I should go to the park and breathe … I usually like shopping but I can't afford that. Or anything. [- Toronto]

These early career moments held hints of IP, unbeknownst to me at the time. I moved to Toronto in 2018 to complete my last summer internship at a downtown hospital, then completed my master's degree in music therapy. My student loan was about to run out and I needed to find new sources of income. I began two years of "hustling," working as a music teacher, an English teacher, and a barista. At the same time, I started working on the requirements to become a certified music therapist and registered psychotherapist. I reached out to music therapists in the community who had their own businesses to see if I could sub-contract, worked on proposals to implement music therapy programming at new sites, and kept my fingers crossed.

Pain and Inadequacy

> Journal excerpt: December 4, 2018
> I worry about things I do not have control over. I fret, almost to the point of exhaustion. I find it very hard to be still. I don't want to feel everything all at once; it's too sad. I'll never be good enough. I could never look at myself in the mirror and say, "I'm proud of you." I'm a fake. I have no money. I have no talent. I don't work hard. I'm a loser. I feel small and insignificant and hopeless and useless. I'm so good at encouraging other people. I'm so good at listening. I can be with other peoples' pain. But I hate being with mine. It's stupid and controlling and ugly. Even if I win lots of awards or get my dream job or sing on a big stage, I won't be happy. My achievements are all just a reflection of how empty and alone I feel … I need to get away from it all. I need to escape my reality. Doing things is only temporary. [- Toronto]

The feelings of inadequacy and despair emerging in this journal entry link to Clance and Imes's (1978) descriptions of belonging to a group of women whose family conveyed to them that they are superior in every way, close or equal to perfection. I felt that my parents put me on a pedestal for being a singer, getting good grades, and making everybody happy (or trying, at least). Amidst these pressures, my home environment was often turbulent and tense, punctuated by domestic violence and sometimes by my own feelings of shame. Although I have many positive memories from childhood, I have spent many years processing and trying to better understand the challenging ones. Reading and reflecting on this journal entry, I understand now that I was still in the process of working through some childhood trauma. I internalized from a young age that I, the middle child, was the peacekeeper, or the "placater," according to Satir's (1991) communication categories. This feels particularly relevant especially as I tried to avoid confrontation, seek approval, and please others (Satir et al., 1991). In childhood, I developed strong listening skills and sat with many difficult emotions. In examining my early family history and family-of-origin, I feel it is important to expand upon my identity as it relates to race and ethnicity to widen the context and acknowledge the role that intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) and social context (Feenstra et al., 2020) have played in the development and experience of IP in my life.

"Where are you from?"

I can relate to music therapist Sangeeta Swamy (2017) when she talks about having to answer the question, "Where are you from?," countless times growing up; my own experience made me question my belonging. My mom, for example, describes arriving in Calgary in late January 1982 on the coldest day she had ever experienced—never mind how far she was from "home." My dad, on the other hand, followed in the footsteps of one of his older brothers who immigrated to Canada several years earlier, the first person from both of my parents' families to do so. I grew up as a first-generation Canadian in a middle-class, Indian (Jain, Gujarati) family in the suburbs of Calgary, Alberta. Both my parents were born in Kenya and emigrated to Britain in 1973, ten years after Kenya declared its independence from colonial rule. My parents were young but, like all ethnic Indians, they were given the option to become either British or Kenyan citizens. Some Indians chose to stay in Kenya while many others, including the majority of my extended family, chose to migrate to Britain, and today, much of my family lives in London, England. Both sets of my grandparents are originally from Gujarat, India, our language is Gujarati, and my family historically has practised Jainism as a religion as far back as we can remember.

Belonging and Identity

Expanding on this idea of "belonging" or of wanting to "belong," I spent a lot of my childhood and young adulthood wondering about my identity, and not sure how much or how little of my "Indian-ness" to show in different contexts. At times in my life, I have placed value

on what makes me different and, at other times, I have felt insufficient because of what makes me different, a paradox common within experiences of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). This paradox presented as a theme throughout my years of education and work, as I experienced being one of a few people of colour or a racial and ethnic minority in every school that I have ever attended, from elementary to graduate school, and in the majority of work places where I have contributed. I have vivid memories of feeling excluded as a child and of coming home and telling my mom I wish I did not have brown skin. Yet I also have memories of being proud of my culture in all its vibrancy and feeling that other kids were missing out. Whether it was attending Navratri (an Indo- Hindu cultural festival that takes place every autumn—see the Encyclopedia Britannica [2021] for more information) or attending SILPA (the School of Indian Languages and Performing Arts) in Calgary to learn North Indian classical voice, sitar, and harmonium, these vibrant and powerful representations of a broader ethno-cultural and national identity were a source of pride. In addition to a strong intentional focus on an Indian cultural education during my childhood, I was also exposed to and surrounded by music of contemporary genres, including pop, country, folk, jazz, rap and hip-hop, rock, singer-songwriter, and soul/R&B. My two favourite songs as a toddler demonstrate this "medley" quite well: "Jumma chumma de de" from the Bollywood movie Hum, and "Will You Be There?" by Michael Jackson. From age six to eleven, I sang in a children's choir that performed English/Western music, and in high school I sang in the vocal jazz choir and started learning guitar and writing my own songs.

As I neared the end of high school, I began applying to different music schools to pursue performance; my application was rejected by three schools to which I had applied specifically for classical voice training. In anger, I immediately ripped up the pieces of paper and threw them out, thinking, "I sang in a choir. Why won't they let me into the program?" But I had never received any formal, private training in Western classical voice or piano. As fate would have it, I was accepted into Carleton University's contemporary music program for vocal performance, after auditioning with a jazz standard ("Old Devil Moon") and a Fleetwood Mac song ("Rhiannon"). Auditioning for the Master of Music Therapy (MMT) program at Wilfrid Laurier in 2016 also highlighted for me the emphasis on having Western classical music training within the academic institution of music therapy. At that time, I was required to have Royal Conservatory of Music pieces, including a Grade 6 piano piece, as part of my audition. As I did not have extensive classical vocal training and minimal piano training, I felt my background was lacking. Despite making a concerted effort to fulfill the audition requirements, I now understand that those expectations may have contributed to my experience of IP as it relates to my own long-standing feelings of inadequacy, as well as my drive to achieve and succeed.

Being perceived as different and feeling excluded at times due to being a racial and ethnic minority, I was often plagued by a nagging concern and question as to whether I had been accepted into different training programs because of my skills and talent, or because I fit a "diversity quota" (ticking a box). Although I am not opposed to the aim of diversity quotas to achieve specific targets (striving towards more diverse representation), thinking about how they apply to me specifically has sometimes made me feel insecure. This speculation about being chosen for my skills and

talent vs. racial/ethnic identity could be related to both IP and intersectionality, or perhaps what W. E. B. Du Bois, in the context of a duality of African-American life fuelled largely by racism, referred to as “double consciousness,” characterized as “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (1903/1999, pp. 10–11). Meer (2019) elaborates that double consciousness may illustrate “how our sense of self is necessarily constructed in a dialogue that is continually subject to implicit power relations” and that “self-recognition is a form of cultural recognition which … sees one’s cultural identity in connection with the cultural identities of other members of one’s community” (p. 52).

Working with a therapist who is a person of colour (and shares the same ethnic background as me) for the past couple of years has helped me to embrace my Indian heritage, and examine some of these doubts or fears related to IP and my race and ethnicity. I have explored how my constant striving to achieve may be linked to cultural expectations, intergenerational trauma, and being a child of immigrant parents. Although it is likely that I will continue to grapple with issues of identity and belonging throughout my life, I feel much more grounded in acknowledging and talking about these internal struggles with others, which has helped me feel more comfortable with who I am.

Figure and Ground

In Gestalt therapy training, the concept of “figure and ground” is frequently discussed: “the ground of a person’s attention, their phenomenological experience, is the current or historical backdrop to their experience … the whole picture out of which one element emerges as ‘figural’” (Joyce & Sills, 2018). According to this concept, we tend to segment our world into figure and ground, with the figure being the main focus (e.g., object or person) and the ground being the background. For example, as a client focuses on what represents the figure in their life, the therapist is encouraged to maintain active awareness of both the figure (e.g., what the client is sharing) and the ground (e.g., the client’s body language), things of which the client may not be aware. Relating this concept to my experience of IP throughout my life, it feels as though my family history and social context were often in the ground, while the figure represented my self-doubts about the next accomplishment or achievement in my life. I also recognize that many of my journal entries were focused on the figure; meanwhile, the ground was present and equally, if not more, important throughout.

Building a Practice: Inside and Out

> Journal excerpt: January 19, 2019
> I am slowly progressing towards my goals … yet how do I capture this restlessness? Sitting and reading a book is the hardest thing, so I’ll try it. Anything challenging, I’ll do it. I’m not afraid. Maybe I’ll fail. Maybe failure will teach me to persevere. When it’s quiet I want to sing. When it’s loud I want to escape. [- Toronto]

The “it” I write about refers to feelings in my childhood home; loudness often meant conflict, and quiet often meant peace or, at times, anticipatory tension (the “calm before the storm”). Moving from job to job at this time in my life, I often felt that I needed some stillness, but the rush of needing to achieve and the relentless comparing of myself to others drove me onwards. I also felt that, because I was working in an emerging field, I needed to prove to my family that I could succeed and that following my passion and pursuing music had not been a mistake. Becoming a music therapist (and pursuing music in general) was outside of the traditional expectations of an Indian child of immigrant parents in Canada in the 2000s. Despite these embedded expectations, I pursued this career and, in April 2019, eight months after graduating from the Master of Music Therapy program, I began working as a music therapist with two new contracts. From there, work blossomed and soon I was working in multiple health-care settings (long-term care, hospice, private practice, and community) and teaching part-time.

Although I was now working full-time as a music therapist, signifying that I could make a living in this profession, I was still experiencing IP.

> Journal excerpt: September 5, 2019
> Here I am, exactly a year since I felt lost, now working full-time as a music therapist, still learning, still growing, and feeling unsure of myself. “Trust the process,” she said, a 3rd year Gestalt student. How I wish I could be so wise … I am wrapped in predicted confusion, cloaked in degrees and letters behind my name, dressed awkwardly, almost comfortable, almost stylish. I imagine what life would be like if I was “her” or “her” or “her” … There I go doubting myself again. [- Toronto]

I read in this entry that although I now had an education as well as some experience, I still felt inadequate, or perhaps I felt that I had more to prove. It is also evident that I was still comparing myself to others in an unhealthy way, and this acknowledgement is part of the reason that I eventually decided to leave social media (Facebook and Instagram) in May 2021.

Self and Others’ Expectations: Working in an Emerging Music-Therapy-Specific Role

> September 10, 2020
> I am the music therapist at Homewood Health Centre in Guelph, Ontario, Canada. Today, in an experiential exercise as part of my Gestalt psychotherapy-training program, I shared the impact that my parents’ expectations have had on me. When I was young, and they asked me to sing in front of guests. When I was called an “angel.” When I succeeded and was held to that standard, or my brother was suddenly held to that standard. I practiced saying directly (aloud) that I am going to do what is right for me. [- Guelph]

It felt freeing to acknowledge, with my classmates’ support, the pressure I had felt growing up with my parents’ expectations, and how those expectations may have led me to develop certain

qualities, such as being achievement-driven and striving for external praise and validation, which I now know are linked to experiences of IP. In the past couple of years, I have had some intentional and honest conversations with both parents; the unraveling and "working-through" continues.

Am I Good Enough Yet?

Initially, beginning a full-time music therapy position had felt a lot like winning the lottery; I had finally proven to my parents that I could making a living working as a music therapist, which meant (or so I believed at the time) that I did not have to strive so hard to achieve anymore. I thought, "This is it! I've made it! All my hard work has paid off! I never have to doubt myself again!" Since then, I have come to the realization that no matter how much I accomplish, the imposter phenomenon will likely return and I will have to confront it again. For example, within the health-care institution where I currently work, there is a focus on evidence-based practice and knowledge, formulation of goals and treatment plans, and working collaboratively within an interdisciplinary team. Sometimes, I am afraid of what the other team members think of me. Do they think I am educated enough to be part of their team—that music therapy is worthy enough to have a seat at the table? While I know that, logically, the answer is yes, my imposter mind often pushes back. As a music therapist who operates alone much of the time, it can be easy to get stuck in my head with my own doubts and fears, especially without daily access to an active sounding board of other music therapists who can relate to what I do.

Imagining Futures

> Journal excerpt: September 30, 2020
> Sometimes I still feel terribly lost. Am I where I am meant to be? Will things remain the same for the next 30 years? Will I feel trapped? Will I have a choice? I'd like to leave the trapped feeling. I'd love to feel like I was 17 … with my whole future ahead of me. No relationship, no rent, no job, no responsibilities. Because of my upbringing, will I always feel like I need to leave? Before I've even been here a month,
> I feel like I may be doomed to the reality of "sameness." [- Guelph]

The fear and the questioning evident in this entry was clearly connected to my family-of-origin and feeling the need to "escape" or to find a better situation/environment in which to thrive. I also see parallels between my parents' trajectory and my own, having moved away from home and feeling like I was finally starting to "settle." I am still grappling with what it means to be a settler in Canada, settling (as my parents did) in a "home on native (Indigenous) land."

After about a month in my new role, I also began to feel certain doubts and fears related to staying in the same place forever—of giving myself away to my career—and reaching a plateau, no longer moving upward/forward/onward. For someone who has constantly strived to improve and achieve, it was scary to think that my momentum might slow down or stop completely. I have

discussed these fears in both supervision and personal therapy and come to the conclusion that I always have a choice. The road does not end; it simply goes in different directions or presents new obstacles. I now feel more settled in my role and confident that there is still a lot of room for growth, in all aspects of life.

Moving On with New Strategies

I feel that writing about and researching imposter phenomenon has helped to reduce the impact of the anxiety I had attached to it. Since exploring and developing a greater awareness of how family history, social context, intersectionality, internal and external factors, emerging adulthood, and working in a music-therapy-specific role have collectively affected my life, I have faced and learned some difficult truths about myself and begun to develop strength and resilience in a new context.

A Therapist Needs a Therapist

Looking back over my processes, I realize that some of my earlier journal entries reflect a younger self who had not yet engaged in in-depth personal therapy to process events from youth and early childhood (that lingered into emerging adulthood and the independence associated with entering into a professional, full-time workplace). In the Gestalt psychotherapy-training program, a minimum of 50 hours of personal therapy was required to move from year two to four (2019–2021). I am grateful for the opportunity to explore these influences in personal therapy, supervision, and my own reflections, journal writing, and songwriting. I now have a heightened awareness of certain negative thought patterns, self-beliefs, and fears that I possess.

Using My Own Approach to Music Therapy

Recently, I have begun to wonder about using my own approach to music therapy (person-centred, anti-oppressive, strengths-based, resource-oriented, and music-centred) as a way to address my own IP issues. As a music therapist and psychotherapist, much of my work with clients happens "in the moment"—in the space we co-create, the way the music (or silence) supports the feelings in the room, and the way words can be used to deepen curiosity, understanding, and discovery. In one of my journal entries, I mentioned that I have always felt as though I had a great capacity to listen to and be with others' pain, but not my own. Over the past few years, I have learned that treating myself with the same compassion and empathy I reserve for clients will not only help me challenge IP, but can potentially reduce burnout and make me a more authentic and confident clinician.

Daily Reminders and Practical Tools to Confront IP

The acronym "QTIP" (Quit Taking It Personally) is written on the whiteboard in my office. I have left social media (Facebook and Instagram) to minimize comparison and evaluation and allow me to focus on my strengths. I try to incorporate positive affirmations and gratitude into my day and, more recently, I have tried to honour and remember my context(s) with regard to my personal history and social context in the face of self-judgements and negative self-beliefs.

Clance and Imes (1978) suggest keeping a record of positive feedback and how you prevent yourself from accepting this feedback, as well as actively experimenting with the opposite—that is, to listen and let the positive response soak in. They also suggest a Gestalt experiment, to role-play and embody the opposite of a negative belief (e.g., if the negative belief is, "I'm incompetent," embody and role-play, "I am highly competent"). I have begun to write down compliments or positive feedback from patients and colleagues in a notebook, and if I am having a challenging day, I refer to it to be reminded of the positive qualities that others see in me. I have not often embodied the opposite of negative beliefs, but I did get a chance to embody a "superhero" on Hallowe'en and found it to be effective in boosting my confidence for the evening. I cannot dress up like a superhero every day around the workplace, but there may be other ways of practising this technique.

Lane (2015) suggests developing self-validation skills and normalizing the IP experience. Here is an affirmation I developed in response: "I am not the only one who experiences the imposter phenomenon and it is normal to experience. I am highly competent and intelligent. I have worked hard and accomplished an incredible amount in my life. I am a/an (insert positive descriptive word) music therapist. I am proud of myself."

Giving and Receiving

I continue to explore dichotomies and the "in-between" spaces—times when I feel both shame and pride related to identity and belonging, or times when I feel both insecure and confident as the only music therapist in a team meeting, or times when I feel both vulnerable and resilient in exploring my own fears and self-doubts. Even though I still occasionally struggle with IP, I also know that I am not alone, and that I am a highly competent music therapist. I am thankful for the social support I have received from peers, colleagues, family, friends, and my partner, all of which have helped me cope with the imposter phenomenon and better understand myself. I am interested in giving back to the music therapy community, especially to students and emerging music therapists, as they may face similar struggles when entering the field of music therapy. Possible questions and areas for further investigation include exploring the prevalence of IP in emerging music therapists in Canada while considering different social contexts, and whether IP is more pronounced in new versus seasoned practitioners, or if it appears differently as we acquire further experience and training. I have learned so much going through my own challenges and growth as a music therapist. I know that each of us has a unique journey, and hope that we can remember as we move forward: we (you) are not alone.

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