

Episode 13: I, Imposter
Released on November 6, 2019

[00:00:00.36] ANTHONY SIS: The opinions expressed by the guests and contributors of this podcast are their own and do not necessarily reflect the views of Cornell University or its employees. Thank you all for joining us today. My name is Anthony Sis, and you are listening to the Inclusive Excellence Podcast.

[00:00:14.88] [MUSIC PLAYING]

[00:00:32.06] Welcome back. Thank you for joining me on another episode of the Inclusive Excellence Podcast. As you may recall, Sherron formally announced that episode 12 was going to be her last episode as the co-host of this podcast. In the search for a new co-host, I wanted to invite somebody who I feel like I could have great conversations with and who would be a great addition to the conversations that we've had thus far around diversity and inclusion here at Cornell specifically. So I could not honestly think of a better person to invite than my fellow colleague-- the one, the only, Toral Patel.

[00:01:06.59] [APPLAUSE]

[00:01:13.31] Toral Patel is the Diversity and Inclusion Specialist in the Department of Inclusion and Workforce Diversity. We oversee different processes within the department, but lately we've been working a lot on projects together, which is why I'm super excited that now we can add the podcast to that list. I'm delighted that Toral is joining the podcast, and I cannot wait for you all to learn more about her. So let's start with a formal introduction of you, Toral. What are your pronouns? How did you start your career here at Cornell? Tell the listeners what you want them to know about you.

[00:01:43.40] TORAL PATEL: Thank you, Anthony, for having me. I'm very, very excited to be joining this podcast. As Anthony said, my name is Toral Patel. I use the pronouns she, her, hers. I started my career here at Cornell about five years ago at the College of Veterinary Medicine as their staff recruiter. Recently, earlier in March this year, I migrated to the Department of Inclusion and Workforce Diversity.

[00:02:06.32] ANTHONY SIS: Awesome. So we started at the same time, which is pretty cool. But you definitely have a lot more institutional knowledge than I do, which is--

[00:02:12.56] TORAL PATEL: Just a little bit.

[00:02:13.31] ANTHONY SIS: Just a little bit, but it's been super helpful at least for me as somebody who's new to, also, this role in this department, but also just new to Cornell, to learn everything that you've learned thus far. So, once again, welcome to the podcast Toral. So I know you've been listening to the podcast, so you already kind of the structure of it and how we start each and every episode with a question of the day.

[00:02:34.13] TORAL PATEL: Yes. I'm excited to actually share my thoughts on the first question.

[00:02:38.69] ANTHONY SIS: The first question-- most certainly not the last, and you will also be creating some questions of the day as well. So each episode, we will alternate who chooses the question of the day, but for this one, since you're new to this podcast and to this particular episode, I will ask the question and then both of us will answer. So the question of the day is do you credit your success to chance, connections, or some other external factor?

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[00:03:04.19] TORAL PATEL: Wow, that is actually a great question. And if I answer right at the top of my head without really putting a lot of thought behind it, I think I'm going to say a little bit of everything. Because I do believe in chance, and I do believe in kismet, and things are supposed to happen the way they're meant to happen, but I also believe that the effort and hard work that I put into it helps getting me where I want to go. And then also I always, always wholeheartedly believe that I'm never going to get anywhere without other people backing me up, so I think a little bit of everything.

[00:03:37.97] ANTHONY SIS: A little bit of everything.

[00:03:38.90] TORAL PATEL: Yeah, how about you?

[00:03:40.67] ANTHONY SIS: For me, I think I attribute a lot of my success to the family that I grew up in. So when I say family, I say my biological family but also my chosen family. So people who aren't necessarily blood related to me but who I also consider as part of my family who have really helped guide me to where I am today. And so I do definitely believe in a higher being and all of these other things that kind of play a role in the path of my life, but in terms of my success specifically, I think there have just been a lot of people who throughout the course of my lifetime have invested in me.

[00:04:15.44] And I say the word investment-- I don't say that lightly. I think investing in anything takes a lot of commitment, it takes a lot of time, it takes a lot of effort. And so I just think about the people who have invested in me, who have helped ensure the success that I have today. I just hope that in some way, shape, or form in the future I can give back to other people and invest in other people just as much as people have invested in me.

[00:04:37.79] TORAL PATEL: Sure, I definitely agree with that, and I feel the same way. That I think a lot of people have had a hand in kind of bringing me where I am today. I think for me it started with my parents bringing me to this country. Because they specifically brought us here because they wanted to give us the opportunities that they didn't have. And if they hadn't done that, I wouldn't be where I am. But the other aspect that I wanted to add is that I also feel that time has a big component in that entire thought process as well. Because I also wholeheartedly believe that I will be where I need to be when I need to be there, and so that timing aspect is also a key for me.

[00:05:14.99] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah. And if you could just remind me, so you said when your parents brought you here. So were you born here? Or were you born in India and then came here?

[00:05:22.91] TORAL PATEL: I was born in India, and I moved to the States when I was about nine years old. It was about 8 and 1/2, almost 9.

[00:05:29.48] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah, it's a similar kind of story with my parents, too, except my dad met my mom here in the US, and so I was born here. But just knowing that so many sacrifices that my dad took, and, both, my mom as well, to really help establish the life that I had growing up, that my sister had growing up, it's very much-- you know, I attribute a lot of my success to them and just also the emphasis they put on education, even though they themselves didn't have a formal education.

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[00:05:53.78] So my mom went to college for a little bit. My dad has a GED. That's his highest degree, but they've always instilled in us that we need to go to school and that we need to get an education. Because that's going to be our path to where we want to get to in life in the future and, alternatively, it will impact them. And knowing that all the sacrifices they went through were worth it-- to know that their kids went to college and to know that their kids are achieving all this education, success in their careers.

[00:06:21.27] TORAL PATEL: Yeah, it's similar with my parents. Both of my parents only have a 10th grade education. And that's because the education system in India-- and I'm probably oversimplifying it in this podcast-- but in 10th grade you have to pass what they call a board exam type, or it's a national exam, and that exam determines your path and how you move forward, whether you go down a commerce path which is a business route or if you go down a science path. And so they have to make that decision very early in their life, and if they don't pass that exam, they can't continue.

[00:06:51.86] And so both of my parents only have that 10th grade education, and all of those tests are very subjective. So there isn't the Scantron sheet where everybody only has one right answer. It's literally up to the person grading that test whether or not you pass. And so I can tell you that when I graduated college as the oldest child, I think it was probably like the most proudest moment for my parents. They were more proud than even I was of myself just because it's something that they've never gotten to see for themselves, so it was a huge deal for us as well. The education is extremely important.

[00:07:25.29] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah. And just how education is tied to success, right? And I think part of that, in what I hear in both of our narratives, is that because our parents didn't have it, they equate that getting that education will equal success, but for some people success looks very different. And so I know when I think about this question in particular, I think about both personal and professional success being tied to education but also just in terms of my career, too, in kind of the path and the different job opportunities that I've had leading up to this point that my parents are all really proud of.

[00:07:56.48] TORAL PATEL: And I don't know for you if that was a motivating factor, but it was a huge motivating factor for me in order to see how successful I was going to be because I was doing it for them, too, not just for myself.

[00:08:07.85] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah, I mean, I was the first one to go out of state for school, for college. I'm the first one-- I'm the only one-- still in my family who has a master's degree so a huge part of that motivation when I was living away from home and just pursuing my master's was I'm doing it for my family. This is what they support me in doing and I'm doing it, not just for me, but also for them.

[00:08:27.14] And making sure that they held the degree-- even when I got my degree, to say, here, you need to hold this, too. Like I remember from my grad school graduation, I gave my degree to my grandma and my grandma was like, I don't know why I'm holding this. This is for you. And I'm like, no, but you played a huge role in me getting to this point so-- you know, yes, you deserve this degree just as much as I do, right?

[00:08:45.91] TORAL PATEL: Yep. Thank you, Anthony, for that question of the day. I actually had a great time answering and a lot of fun. It was reminiscing of things that I haven't talked

about in a while. But before we move on to today's topic, I hear that you have a pretty big announcement to make.

[00:08:59.75] ANTHONY SIS: I do. I'm actually really excited to make this announcement, so because we've been seeing such a large increase in people who are listening to the podcast through SoundCloud, I also have some great news and great opportunities to engage in the podcast through other platforms as well. So now you can listen to the podcast on Spotify as well as Apple Podcasts which is really, really awesome.

[00:09:22.98] Some of you are probably actually listening to the podcast through Spotify and Apple Podcasts now, which is really great. This just means that now you can stream the episode in more places that you probably use more regularly other than just SoundCloud, so be sure to spread the word about the podcast and let them know where to find us. Also, just another really important note, to not forget to continue to like, love, review the podcast as we continue to release more episodes because your feedback is always welcomed.

[00:09:49.34] Now that we've got that announcement out of the way, let's move on to our topic for today. Toral, what are we going to be talking about today?

[00:09:57.71] TORAL PATEL: Our topic for today is imposter syndrome. So let me give you a definition so then we can talk about it a little bit more detail.

[00:10:04.44] ANTHONY SIS: OK. Let's do that.

[00:10:05.24] TORAL PATEL: According to a Harvard Business Review article, "impostor syndrome can be defined as a collection of feelings of inadequacy that persists despite evident success." So the way I define it then is that essentially it's the feeling of not being good enough, even though you are being praised and you have successes along the way. It's the feeling that you have inside of yourself. And I want to say that I'm so excited that this is actually the first topic of the podcast for me because this is something that I think all of us go through and all of us experience regardless of all of the other identities that we have. So regardless of our race or gender, ethnicity, the different backgrounds that we bring to the table, all of us experience imposter syndrome at some point in our life, so I'm really, really excited to be talking about this with you today.

[00:10:51.86] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah, it's so relevant for me, too. And I think about this particular role, and previous to this role, I was working in Student Affairs, mostly doing a lot of interactions with students at a college campus. And so I know for a fact, transitioning over into this role and coming not only into this new function of human resources but also a new institution in upstate New York coming from Miami, just so many different things that I remember feeling when I first started this position.

[00:11:18.47] And particularly with the podcast, one of the things that I really felt was like I've never done a podcast before, like I've never done consistent radio. I've done interviews here and there, but like one-off things, not something consistent. So I definitely know that just coming into this role, I experience a lot of imposter syndrome. So I'm glad that we're talking about it and to know that other people across the university are also feeling this way.

[00:11:40.74] TORAL PATEL: And for me, I think I have felt imposter syndrome throughout my life. And so it's not necessarily something that I feel all the time every single day, but it's at

various moments in my life so even when I was younger all the way to just recently when I accepted this new role.

[00:11:57.80] And so I think I talked a little bit earlier about coming to this country when I was nine years old, and when I came here, I couldn't speak a word of English. And trying to migrate into a brand new culture, I felt like I didn't belong. I distinctly remember going into a classroom-- one, I actually was put back a grade because I couldn't speak English.

[00:12:17.75] So even though as a nine-year-old I should have started in third grade, I actually started in second grade. And so that was something to get used to because everybody else was a bit younger than me. Throughout my entire school history, I was the oldest child in every single grade. And so that did have an impact on my life because, one, just age-wise, I didn't belong with the kids that I was with. But then I distinctly remember at various times in taking exams and so forth in second grade, that all I literally did was look around the classroom and just copy things off of posters because I had no idea what anything said and that was in front of me.

[00:12:57.30] And so that whole cultural feeling of not belonging in a country is kind of how I started my life here in the US-- that I don't belong. And the fact was that I didn't have anybody to help me overcome that initially because my parents also felt that way and they didn't belong and same thing with my brother and sister.

[00:13:17.15] So it took a teacher who took us under her wing-- so me and my brother and my sister-- and she would go out of her way to spend time with us on the weekends because she knew that my parents couldn't help us. And so she would pick us up on a Saturday, take us to the library, read books with us. She would take us to the movies. And to this day, every single one of us, all three of us, remember this teacher every time we talk about this feeling and what it was like when we came here. Because without her, and somebody to help me overcome that imposter syndrome, I don't know that I would have come as far as I have.

[00:13:49.25] ANTHONY SIS: Wow. You know what it reminds me a lot of the conversation we had with the previous episode around the International workforce and just how there's just a lot of things that people are adjusting to when they're coming from other countries to work here. That it's not just about working here, it's about adjusting to American culture and adjusting to life and just the daily functions of going to the store, going to work. Just all those little nuances that I think sometimes we take for granted, for people who are born here in this country, who are like, this is our way of life every day.

[00:14:20.03] But for some people, just that adjustment in terms of adjusting to work and then culture and then just-- it's just so many different elements. It's just so complex. It really reminds me of just kind of the importance of making sure that we're aware of when people feel this way, when people feel imposter syndrome, like how we're not further perpetuating it or further making it worse for some folks and to really just be mindful and considerate of some of the challenges that different populations might be facing.

[00:14:49.09] And I love the piece, too, around your teacher because mentorship, that's literally what it is. So I think about that with a lot of the imposter syndrome experiences that I've had where I've had people-- the people that I talked about earlier with my mentors were people who pushed me. Who were like, you know-- we know you can do better or we know you can do a presentation on this particular topic.

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[00:15:10.80] I just had that experience a few weeks ago where I did a presentation about diversity, equity, and inclusion training strategies. I literally waited-- I want to say-- two or three days before the actual presentation to put the content together because I had it in my head, but I just could not get myself to sit down to actually do it. Because in my head I kept telling myself I'm not competent enough to present on this topic yet. But the people who invited me to do the presentation were like, yes, you are and we know you can present on this topic, so just do it.

[00:15:45.41] And I just had to kind of like sit myself down, get myself out of that bubble, and really ask the question, why is it that I think this way? Why do I think that I can't present on this topic? Like what makes me less qualified than somebody else who's doing a similar type of work to not be able to do this presentation?

[00:16:02.36] So I really had to sit down and really struggle with that questioning of why I felt that way for me to actually move forward with it, and the presentation actually ended up being really great. I got really good feedback from people who were there. They gave some really good insight in terms of how I can enhance it, but they also took away a lot of really valuable information. And part of my approach was just recognizing my limitations in particular with this topic but then also recognizing that I actually have enough substance to actually present on this topic.

[00:16:30.42] But the key with all of this in terms of the story is that I had two people in particular who were like, we've invited you to present on this topic because we know you can do it. And even though I felt like I couldn't do it, they had to coach me through that. Why is it that you feel this way? We know you can do it. Just do it.

[00:16:45.87] TORAL PATEL: I mean, you've hit what imposter syndrome is, right? Because that's exactly what it is. It's even when there are obvious signs that says that you are successful-- so you've had these two people telling you that they think you're going to do a great job, even then you were doubting yourself, so that's exactly what impostor syndrome is.

[00:17:04.29] Even when there are successes that are obvious, that the doubt is still there, that you still consider yourself to be a fraud, that you're not good enough to be able to present on whatever topic in front of these people even though they're the ones that are telling you-- yes, you are because we've seen you present in the past, then you do a great job, right? So that's exactly what impostor syndrome is all about.

[00:17:23.80] So can you talk a little bit more about when you said you had to get yourself out of that bubble. Like what does that mean? Like what did you do to get yourself out of that bubble?

[00:17:32.22] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah, I think part of it-- and I'm going to be a little bit vulnerable here, too-- is that I think, just historically speaking throughout my life, I've always had a hard time accepting praise or welcoming praise. Like people will say, oh, you did a great job on this, and I'm like, OK, yeah, thanks, and then just walk away. I've always had a hard time just embracing it and accepting it for what it is and just basking in that moment of-- I did something really good or I did something really great. Somebody is recognizing me for it.

[00:17:59.73] Like I appreciate the recognition, but I've never been one to just be like, oh, my goodness, thank you so much. I know I feel like I did a great job. No, like I've never been-- I've always questioned my just-- I don't know what the word is. So I think part of that with how I sat myself down was understanding that that's part of what I typically do and then unpacking that

and telling myself, just sit in this for a minute. Like sit in this recognition that you've been invited to do a presentation on this topic, sit in this recognition about why you've been invited to do a presentation.

[00:18:33.76] It didn't just come out of nowhere. And so I started really thinking about what were some of the things that I could talk about related to this particular topic in terms of this role, in terms of previous roles, in terms of my life experience, so I just had to really sit there. And kind of like an onion-- because, you know, an onion, when you're cutting it up, it makes you cry and it gives you a reaction-- I just kind of had to sit in that discomfort and really unpack the layers of the onion to start crying, to start getting some type of reaction, to then say, OK, you're still alive, you're still here.

[00:19:05.16] Yeah, you're going to be shedding some tears. Yeah, you may get some reactions, but you're still there.

[00:19:08.78] TORAL PATEL: Just get down to the basics.

[00:19:09.88] ANTHONY SIS: Get down to the basics. Exactly. And I think that requires a lot of just owning up to things that you can improve on. And like I said, it's just sitting in that discomfort because the most uncomfortable part is having to admit to yourself that this is something that you need to improve on. It's not necessarily a flaw. It's just something that you need to improve on and that you have a hard time accepting.

[00:19:31.47] So I feel like I've gotten better as I've gotten older, but if you were to ask me two or three years ago, I would just be like, OK, yeah, thanks. I know I do great work or I know I've done a great job, but I don't need to hear it. I would just run for the hills. Now I'm just like, I'll run to the corner and try to come back and say like, OK, thanks, sit in it and then walk away.

[00:19:52.77] TORAL PATEL: For me, I have found myself blaming any success that I've had on anything other than myself. Like I wasn't giving myself the credit and so it's like, oh, yeah, no, I just got lucky. And then when you think about it, you're like, no, I didn't get lucky. I really worked hard. I worked hours. I spent hours and hours and hours doing something to make it happen.

[00:20:13.62] I find, initially, when I first started my career, I used to blame my successes on other things. And I want say blame is not the right word there but--

[00:20:22.17] ANTHONY SIS: Attributed?

[00:20:22.47] TORAL PATEL: --attributed, yeah, success to something other than myself.

[00:20:25.56] ANTHONY SIS: Like what or who?

[00:20:26.88] TORAL PATEL: So a lot of times it was luck. Like, oh, I just got lucky.

[00:20:31.72] ANTHONY SIS: Can I ask a follow-up to that though? Because I feel like people define luck differently, so how in that particular context did you define being lucky or luck?

[00:20:41.97] TORAL PATEL: For me, it was the success that I had or if a presentation went great or in my world, because I was recruiting and I filled a good job with a great applicant, that

it wasn't because of me-- oh, the applicant just all of a sudden appeared-- and that's not the case. I found that person. I found that individual. I went after them, and now we went through the whole process, they're hired and they're working here. And so I had a lot to do with why that person is working for this particular organization, but I always say, oh, yeah, you know, that's a great applicant. We had other great applicants, too, but for some reason, I never attributed that to me, like to myself.

[00:21:18.59] ANTHONY SIS: Well, that's so interesting because I feel like a recruiter-- for somebody who's applying-- a recruiter can be a make it or break it in terms of taking on a position. So in terms of your relationship with the recruiter, if you have a great relationship, that could probably be the main motivating factor in all of the application process for that person to become part of an organization. In my head, I'm like, of course, you are successful, that was you.

[00:21:43.84] TORAL PATEL: Well, a lot of people don't realize recruiting is like a two-way street. And so without the recruiter being in the middle, it's not just the organization that's looking for the individual that wants to work for them but the is also assessing the organization to see if this is the right place for me. And that recruiter in the middle is the person that kind of binds the two together. If you have a great experience with a recruiter, then you want to go work for that organization and vice versa. And so it is a two-way street, and a lot of people don't realize that the person in the middle is kind of the glue that ties it all together.

[00:22:14.50] ANTHONY SIS: Absolutely. So something I found really interesting, too, in that same article that you were talking about with the Harvard Business Review is that they mentioned this particular statement that "high achieving, highly successful people often suffer, so imposter syndrome doesn't equate with low self-esteem or lack of self-confidence. In fact, some research have linked it with perfectionism, especially in women and among academics." What are your thoughts on that?

[00:22:39.04] TORAL PATEL: That is actually very, very interesting because when you initially think of imposter syndrome and this concept of not belonging, that it's automatically tied to low self-esteem. It's this feeling of-- it's internalizing it, but now reading this statement, it's saying that maybe it's not, maybe it's the opposite. It's people trying to be so perfect that when they're not, they're feeling that imposter syndrome.

[00:23:01.63] ANTHONY SIS: I think growing up I definitely was instilled with a lot of these kinds of values around being perfect, even though it wasn't explicitly stated. So, you know, I remember very vividly just anybody that was in a position of authority, my parents are just like, you have to respect them, so police, firefighters, teachers.

[00:23:21.04] And I remember one case, in particular, when I was in first grade-- I don't know why I still remember this-- where I got punished from the school and then, alternatively, got punished by my parents who were like, well, the school said you were in the wrong. But I remember very vividly, I wasn't in the wrong. And so I think even just thinking about how growing up-- I mean, in retrospect to-- I think it was a means of survival.

[00:23:42.79] Recognizing that my dad, he was coming from another country. He probably had some experience with authority of negative experiences, so he probably meant good intention with being mindful of authoritative figures and the control or the power as like a young Latino boy that these figures could have. That's how I kind of see it. It wasn't like this was his

experience, so he wanted to make sure that I didn't go through those negative experiences that he went through as an immigrant coming from another country with English not being his first language.

[00:24:12.67] And so, in retrospect, that's how I think about it. But I think a lot of it for me, in terms of just being like I have to be on top of my stuff and if I'm not, people are going to think of me differently or people are going to think of me as weak, it definitely comes from my upbringing in terms of what they instilled in me.

[00:24:26.89] TORAL PATEL: I think it's a cultural thing, too. So respecting authority is a huge aspect of my culture as well. And I think I've shared this story with you before that you have to respect your elders no matter what, and there's a certain way to refer to them. It's a very formal concept because they are older than you, they've experienced more life, and so my dad, growing up, used to take advantage of that. And so a big part of my culture is if somebody older than you is working, if you're the younger person in the room, you immediately take over because it's not right for somebody older to be working when the younger person is just sitting around doing absolutely nothing.

[00:24:59.32] And so if my dad wanted anything done in the house, he would just start doing it knowing that we can't just sit there and let him work while we're sitting. And so if he wanted the house vacuumed, he would just get the vacuum out and started doing it and then immediately we'd have to be like, Dad. And so then I have to take it away from him because I can't see my dad working if I'm just sitting around. And so I think this respecting authority concept is definitely cultural, but I wanted to go back real quick to the point of perfectionism.

[00:25:25.39] And as a mother of young children, I wonder if that's something that I'm setting-- that tone of perfectionism in childhood, in early childhood. And so have you ever experienced if you get a 98 on a test, your mom and dad are like, why isn't this 100? And immediately you're like, 98 is a great grade. It's like an A plus, but the reaction is always like, why didn't you get 100? I don't know if you ever experienced anything like that.

[00:25:51.95] ANTHONY SIS: So I thought about that in some cases, too. And I've been pretty fortunate that my parents weren't as strict with grades. Like my parents were satisfied with Bs, but they were more impressed with As, but once I got a C, they were like, what's going on? Do better next time. We know you can do better.

[00:26:05.78] So, I mean, in that way I felt like it was much more positive reinforcement of just, OK, I knew they weren't going to reprimand me if I got a B, but if I got an F, then that was another thing. They were just like, what happened? But my parents weren't as strict, in terms of the academics, they were OK with my Bs.

[00:26:20.82] TORAL PATEL: I'm trying, as a mom of young children, not to have that mentality. So I'm trying to follow this new concept of trying your best. That's the message that I'm trying to give my children and say, I want you to try your hardest. As long as you know and I know that you've tried your hardest, then I'm OK with whatever grade you get. Now, of course, like you said, keeping that in mind that I obviously don't want you to get an F on anything, but what the goal is that if you're trying your hardest, you're not going to get that F or you're going to get a great grade. So that's kind of the mentality that I'm trying to follow but again--

[00:26:51.45] ANTHONY SIS: But is it hard though?

[00:26:52.53] TORAL PATEL: It is very hard because I want to question and I want to be like, why isn't this like a 95? Or why isn't this 100? You and I talked about this yesterday, and you knew the answer yesterday.

[00:27:05.34] ANTHONY SIS: It reminds me of this whole thing of how do you break the cycle? Or how do you break what you've normally been used to? So in this case, how do you break that? In terms of how you grew up, this is what you understood, in terms of your academics? But then also even with imposter syndrome how do you disrupt it when you've constantly been thinking about it subconsciously in many cases? That you aren't seen or aren't welcomed or that your opinion isn't going to matter and sometimes we are conscious of it, sometimes we're not, so how do we disrupt these?

[00:27:33.27] TORAL PATEL: And then also not to add a question on top of a question, but then how do you, on top of that, still instill cultural aspects? Because I still want my kids to take away some of the culture aspects that I grew up with, and so it's like how do you define what is part of your culture and what is not to disrupt that?

[00:27:51.54] ANTHONY SIS: Ooh. That's a good one.

[00:27:53.01] TORAL PATEL: That's maybe another podcast topic.

[00:27:55.14] ANTHONY SIS: Maybe. That's what I'm listening. That's what I'm hearing. So how do we disrupt this imposter syndrome? I talked a little bit about how I've done it, but how have you done it in maybe more recent experiences if anything?

[00:28:07.21] TORAL PATEL: So for me, I think it's similar to your story that-- and when I took on this new position, as I said, I've been doing recruiting for about 15 years with slowly taking on more and more diversity and inclusion work. But this is my first time where I'm walking into a room where my full-time job is diversity inclusion work.

[00:28:26.82] When the position was posted, I actually reached out to the hiring manager who is now my boss, and to say, I don't know if I'm quite ready for this position, but if you're willing to take me under your wings, I might be interested in applying. And her response to me was you actually sell yourself short. And when she said that, it was actually very powerful for me, and I had to take a step back.

[00:28:49.20] And she actually said, look at what you've been able to do in the last three years without having that formal background and without it being your full-time job and yet you still were able to do so much work when it came to D&I space. So imagine what you can do if you took this on full-time. And until she put it in that context, I didn't think of it that way. I thought of myself as lacking because it wasn't my full-time job because I hadn't done it before.

[00:29:15.60] At least that's what I kept telling myself, until the moment of where I was actually even interested in applying for a job all the way to that point. And so I think for me, this big realization was take a step back and really think about what you've done. And then when I put my resume together and actually saw it in writing, it actually opened my eyes even more to say, you know what? I have actually done a lot in the last three years.

[00:29:39.30] I guess I don't know that there is a one way that I've overcome it. It's just more of listening to the people around you that are telling you and that know you and they know your

work and what you can do. Really listen to what they're saying and then maybe sometimes even writing it down and actually physically seeing it on paper can help, too.

[00:29:58.14] And then I think in other positions, it's just come with experience where my confidence has come in. So after 15 years of doing recruiting, I can say, OK, I've got this. You know, like I don't need anybody to tell me what to do. I've been doing it long enough that I'm very confident in what I can do and what I bring to the table.

[00:30:15.45] ANTHONY SIS: For definitely disrupting imposter syndrome, I mean it looks different. And I also think there's not a pinnacle moment where once you've overcome it in one case or one scenario, it's like, boom, you're an expert at overcoming imposter syndrome in all cases. It looks very different. It's very much based on context and space and location and organization, so I think the question around success and what do we attribute our successes to is really important because I don't think we give ourselves enough credit sometimes for the work that we've done.

[00:30:50.73] I think as we think about wrapping up this conversation, I wonder if we can talk a little bit about just how our identities also impact imposter syndrome. So I know for me-- as somebody who is Latino, identifies as a Latino, and is also queer and present in a very masculine way-- I know for me, I present in a very masculine way but that's not how I identify in terms of my gender. So I identify as genderqueer, and that's also, I think a lot of times, where sometimes my impostor syndrome really kicks in.

[00:31:20.55] It's like when I'm navigating certain spaces, and people think of me in a certain light, think of me as this very masculine presenting cisgender individual, as somebody who is not that, so I know for me with imposter syndrome, it sometimes kicks in really high when people are seeing me a certain type of way. But then I feel like I'm presenting a false version of myself knowing that I identify differently than what I present as sometimes. And so I think it would be remiss to kind of not have a brief conversation about just how our identities personally play a role also in imposter syndrome.

[00:31:52.02] TORAL PATEL: Sure. For me, I think the biggest identity that plays a role in my everyday life is my cultural background. It's more that identity than I think any other, more than gender, more than anything else. And the reason is because in my cultural group, of all of the women that I normally hang out with, I am the only one that actually works outside of the house. And so everybody else has a business that they own, and they work within that business, but they're essentially at home, and I'm the only one that steps away.

[00:32:21.99] And so where my imposter syndrome comes in at times is it's this need to kind of be like-- for lack of a better term-- like a superwoman, where I feel like I need to give my all and be amazing at work but then also have somehow come up with time to be just as amazing outside of work. And what I mean by that is, because of all these other women there at home, they do a lot of cultural stuff during the weekday. And I'm not available during the weekday, and so I feel this need to like catch up to them.

[00:32:56.64] You know what I'm saying, like catch up to them and somehow figure out whether I have to leave work early this particular day to go do something all the way in Syracuse. But then what I find myself doing is working myself really, really thin because I'm also working a full-time 40 plus hour job outside of the house. And then also trying to then keep up with everybody else in all the other realm in terms of the food that they cook, the clothes that they wear, all the

things that they're participating in, making sure that their children are participating in all these programs, or things like that like.

[00:33:29.46] Sometimes I wear myself out in trying to keep up. So those two identities for me, I do sometimes have to-- it's a huge balance. It's a balance every single day. I think you and I have talked about how crazy, busy my life is because of those things that I'm trying to navigate all the time. I don't know if it's like a true form of imposter syndrome as much as I don't feel like I'm giving my all and that maybe I'm not good enough to be in any one space.

[00:33:57.06] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah. Well, what I was going to say, it sounds like to me, you lean into a little bit of that perfectionism in all the areas. You want to be perfect at your job. You want to be perfect in maintaining balance with your family and attending to these cultural events, so it's like you're trying to achieve this-- for lack of a better term-- unrealistic sense of perfectionism across all areas.

[00:34:14.70] What I like to tell people when it comes to work-life balance, I'm much more of a fan of work-life negotiations where there's going to be times where your life is going to dominate more than your work, and there's going to be times where your work dominates more than your life, so it's about negotiating--

[00:34:26.52] TORAL PATEL: That's a good way to look at it.

[00:34:27.70] ANTHONY SIS: And that's how I always see it. And so when I heard about that particular aspect of work-life negotiations, it's this understanding that at times it's not always going to be that way, but at times work is going to take over more than life and vice versa. When you were saying you're trying to achieve a certain level and I'm like, who's setting that level though? Are you setting it?

[00:34:48.75] TORAL PATEL: I definitely set that expectation for myself. Nobody else sets it for me. That's for sure. Nobody in my family sets it for me, none of my friends actually set them. It's myself and, in fact, all of my friends say, hey, don't worry if you can't make that happen. Like it's OK, we could do something else, but I'm like, no, I'm going I'm going to be the woman that can make it happen. I'm going to make that happen.

[00:35:10.42] ANTHONY SIS: Trying to be that superwoman.

[00:35:11.31] TORAL PATEL: Yeah, so I think that perfectionism we talked about earlier about being a supermom, too, same concept there as well.

[00:35:18.63] ANTHONY SIS: Well, this definitely I think is a great launching pad to our conversation with two guests that will be a continuation of the topic of imposter syndrome, so we won't reveal who those guests are yet, but you will shortly know in a couple of weeks.

[00:35:33.09] [MUSIC PLAYING]

[00:35:35.85] Thank you all for listening to today's episode of the Inclusive Excellence Podcast. If you liked this episode, please leave us a comment and like us on SoundCloud, Spotify, or Apple Podcasts to let people know about this podcast. Also if you or a fellow colleague would like to be interviewed for an upcoming episode, please email us at ie-academy@cornell.edu. My name is Anthony Sis.

Episode 13: I, Imposter
Released on November 6, 2019

[00:35:59.85] TORAL PATEL: My name is Toral Patel. Thank you for listening to another episode of the Inclusive Excellent Podcast.

[00:36:05.85] ANTHONY SIS: A special shout out and thank you to Bert Odom-Reed, our sound engineer from the Cornell Broadcast Studio, for making us sound wonderful each and every episode.

[00:36:13.82] BOTH: Thank you, Bert.

[00:36:14.63] [MUSIC PLAYING]