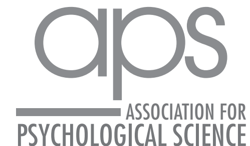

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Common Academic Experiences No One Talks About: Repeated Rejection, Impostor Syndrome, and Burnout

Lisa M. Jaremka[1], Joshua M. Ackerman[2], Bertram Gawronski[3], Nicholas O. Rule[4], Kate Sweeny[5], Linda R. Tropp[6], Molly A. Metz[4], Ludwin Molina[7], William S. Ryan[4], and S. Brooke Vick[8,9]

[1]Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, University of Delaware; [2]Department of Psychology, University of Michigan; [3]Department of Psychology, University of Texas at Austin; [4]Department of Psychology, University of Toronto; [5]Department of Psychology, University of California Riverside; [6]Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, University of Massachusetts Amherst; [7]Department of Psychology, University of Kansas; [8]Provost's Office, Muhlenberg College; and [9]Department of Psychology, Muhlenberg College

Abstract

Academic life is full of learning, excitement, and discovery. However, academics also experience professional challenges at various points in their career, including repeated rejection, impostor syndrome, and burnout. These negative experiences are rarely talked about publicly, creating a sense of loneliness and isolation for people who presume they are the only ones affected by such setbacks. However, nearly everyone has these experiences at one time or another; therefore, talking about them should be a normal part of academic life. The goal of this article is to explore and destigmatize the common experiences of rejection, impostor syndrome, and burnout by sharing a collection of short personal stories from scholars at various stages of their careers with various types of academic positions. Josh Ackerman, Kate Sweeny, and Ludwin Molina discuss how they have dealt with repeated rejection. Linda Tropp, Nick Rule, and Brooke Vick share experiences with impostor syndrome. Finally, Bertram Gawronski, Lisa Jaremka, Molly Metz, and Will Ryan discuss how they have experienced burnout.

Keywords

rejection, impostor syndrome, burnout, mental health

The symposium session at the Society for Personality and Social Psychology's (SPSP's) annual conference was packed. Everyone in the audience, regardless of career stage, listened to the panel with rapt attention. In fact, you could even see some audience members tearing up as the speakers shared their stories. As the session ended, there was a palpable feeling in the room. Something special had just happened—something that was long overdue but desperately needed. You could see it in the faces of audience members as they left. You could hear it in their voices as they expressed their gratitude to the speakers. And as the session panelists, we could feel it in their warm embrace as they hugged us and thanked us for speaking.

You might be wondering what type of symposium could engender such reactions. What could possibly move an academic audience to tears during a conference session? If you had asked us this same question a few days earlier, we would have been just as perplexed. In our many years of attending conferences, including the SPSP conference, none of us had ever seen an audience respond this way. But then again, this was not a typical conference session. We were not presenting our latest and greatest research findings or an exciting new theory. Instead, we were sharing our personal experiences with repeated rejection, impostor syndrome, and burnout. These negative experiences

Corresponding Author:
Lisa M. Jaremka, Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, University of Delaware, 109 Wolf Hall, Newark, DE 19716
E-mail: ljaremka@udel.edu

are not typically discussed in public, perhaps because of a stigma associated with admitting that your work was rejected, that you feel like a fraud, or that you are at the end of your rope. But nearly everyone goes through these experiences at some point in their academic careers. Thus, it should be commonplace to discuss rejection, impostor syndrome, and burnout. But instead, public conversations about these experiences are so uncommon that a symposium addressing them prompted a huge crowd and an overwhelming flood of emotions. In fact, people's emotional reactions during the session appeared to be less about the nitty-gritty details of each experience or about whether the audience could identify with the specifics of our stories and more about the fact that something was being said, that we were willing to talk publicly in a large forum and admit that we have been rejected and experienced impostor syndrome and burnout. We were breaking a long-held silence, allowing people to realize they were not alone in their experiences.

Although it was flattering to hear people say that the symposium was life changing, their doing so was also a clear sign that academic culture needs to change, and it needs to change in multiple ways. First, simply talking about these common experiences should not be life changing; it should be a nonstigmatized, everyday part of academic life. To achieve this goal, all six speakers from the conference session, plus additional contributors, are breaking the silence by sharing their personal stories and strategies for overcoming their struggles, and they are doing so in this public format. The authors span multiple career stages, statuses in academia, and types of academic positions, as well as a range of backgrounds and social identities. Accordingly, the content of these stories should resonate with a large proportion of academics. At the same time, there is value in the fact that people are opening up about their experiences, regardless of who wrote the stories, what type of jobs they had, or any other specific personal details. There is value in knowing that other academics get rejected, experience impostor syndrome, and feel burned out. There is value in simply knowing that you are not alone.

Second, the fact that impostor syndrome and burnout are common experiences does not mean they should be common. And the fact that repeated rejection can hurt and feel very personal does not mean that it should feel that powerful. Academia needs to change in structural and cultural ways that reduce the prevalence and/or impact of these experiences (e.g., adjusting standards so people do not feel compelled to put in a 60- to 80-hr workweek). Some of these changes are outside of most academics' personal control (e.g., when service and course loads are determined by university administrators) and are thus also outside the scope of this commentary. However, those of us in positions of authority have opportunities to foster structural and cultural change within our professional societies, at our universities, or within our departments or labs. Thus, we highlight a variety of ways that people in positions of authority can work toward positive change to help alter potentially toxic norms, reducing the likelihood that their colleagues and mentees will be so negatively impacted by repeated rejection or experience impostor syndrome or burnout in the first place. We also highlight ways we can engage in self-care when these experiences do happen, focusing on individual-level solutions that (hopefully) help people cope with and work through being rejected, experiencing impostor syndrome, or feeling burned out. Providing these individual-level solutions is not meant to imply that the onus is solely on the individual to enact change and adjust psychologically to these negative experiences. Key elements of change are structural and cultural shifts that can and should happen within academia. Rather, we offer individual-level solutions as a supplement to these larger changes. People who experience repeated rejection, impostor syndrome, or burnout need ways to engage in self-care as these structural and cultural changes take place, given that any type of large-scale change is notoriously difficult to enact and takes time to unfold. We also summarize our suggested individual-level and structural/cultural changes in Tables 1 and 2, respectively.

Note that this commentary is a collection of short personal stories from scholars who have gone through these experiences themselves and have "survived" to tell their stories (i.e., all of the authors are still in academia). This may inadvertently imply that the coping techniques we discuss in our own stories have helped us succeed academically. But this may or may not be true. In fact, it is possible that other people who used the same or similar coping strategies did not succeed according to academic-based metrics. Our suggested solutions are not about achieving a career goal or advancing to the next career stage. Instead, they are focused on staying sane in the face of repeated rejection, impostor syndrome, and burnout. They are about ways to try and stay mentally grounded as we navigate an academic or related career, and these ways of coping may or may not be linked to actual career achievements or academic-based metrics of success. An important caveat is that our suggestions are based on anecdotal evidence and thus may not work for everyone. It is therefore critical for the scientific community to advocate for and support research on these experiences, how they affect our mental health, how we can effectively implement structural and cultural changes to lessen the frequency and/or impact of these experiences, and how we can engage in self-care when they do happen.

We begin with Kate Sweeny, Joshua Ackerman, and Ludwin Molina describing their experiences with repeated

Table 1. Summary of Individual-Level Recommendations

Discussed by	Recommendation
	Topic: Rejection
Sweeny	• Remember that rejection is not failure; it is an inevitable step on the path to success. • Do not dwell on rejection. • Take time before moving to the next step. • Persistence is key. • Do not be afraid to seek help from a counselor or therapist. • Identify trusted colleagues with whom you can openly discuss your harshest and most embarrassing experiences with rejection.
Ackerman	• Do nothing. Allow yourself time to feel psychological distance from rejections and recognize that the impact of each rejection will diminish with further experience. • Reframe attributions for rejection to external reasons. • Take charge of what you can: Find places to take control of your response to rejection. • Know what you are getting into: Embrace the state of not knowing and understand the likelihood of success.
Molina	• Accept that rejection is part of the process of being an academic. • Accept the possibility that rejection hurts because it is about an evaluation of your ideas. • Let a little time pass before you engage and start figuring out "next steps" with rejections that really hurt. • Seek support from close friends and/or colleagues to give you some perspective on the rejection.
	Topic: Impostor syndrome
Rule	• It is a myth that a professor, CEO, or doctor looks, acts, or sounds a certain way. Recognize this myth instead of internalizing those messages such that we subscribe to them ourselves. • Seek help from a counselor or therapist.
Tropp	• Remember that our ideas are likely to be at least as good as anyone else's, even if our impostor concerns are telling us otherwise. • "Feel the fear and do it anyway"; try not to let feelings of insecurity or unworthiness dictate your behavior. • Remember that you may see yourself as an impostor but others are not likely to see you in the same way.
Vick	• Focus on past successes as evidence refuting impostor syndrome; use these as resources to draw on when you feel as if you are not good enough. • Develop a relationship with a therapist or counselor who can help you to recognize unfounded beliefs that maintain impostor syndrome. • Create spaces in which your identities are represented and celebrated, as reminders of your belonging. • Reflect others' values, skills, and talents back to them and help them resist impostor beliefs; the act of helping others can serve as a helpful reminder to yourself.
	Topic: Burnout
Gawronski	• Know that you are not alone. • Have physical space to recharge without being reminded of your work (e.g., no work at home). • Recognize that "more work" does not always mean "more productivity." At some point, more time for work just leads to exhaustion, and exhaustion increases the amount of time needed to complete a given task. Give yourself time to recharge. • Get a good night's sleep.
Jaremka	• Engage in some introspection: Identify what your burnout is telling you, as if it were a person speaking to you. • Engage in some introspection: Determine whether burnout and impostor syndrome are linked, and which seems to fuel the other. • Seek help from a therapist or counselor. • Set explicit boundaries around your work (e.g., no work on weekends).
Metz and Ryan	• Minimize social comparison when possible or limit it to others who have similar goals or positions. • Engage in some introspection: Identify your goals and determine whether your path is best set up to help you achieve them. • Engage in some introspection: Are your needs being met? What do you need to feel revitalized or motivated? What brings you meaning and intrinsic joy? • Seek help from a therapist. • Appreciate psychological and geographical distance from the sources of burnout. • Find a social outlet entirely unrelated to your work. • Seek the help of trusted others (in person or virtually) to provide an outside perspective on your current situation or struggles. • Build a self-care toolbox (e.g., exercise, meditation, socializing, spending time with a pet). • Find meaning in helping or mentoring others.

Table 2. Summary of Cultural and Structural Recommendations

Discussed by	Recommendation
	Topic: Rejection
Sweeny	• Be compassionate when reviewing others' work, pairing criticisms with clear acknowledgments of the strengths of a manuscript or grant proposal.
Ackerman	• People in positions of power should be aware of the dynamics of providing feedback and the ways in which critical comments can be framed as collaborative rather than rejecting.
	• People in positions of power can build new norms into their training, such as dissociating one's identity from one's hypotheses.
	• People in positions of power can train mentees to become better rejecters themselves (e.g., pay attention to tone and content when completing manuscript reviews).
	• Every journal editor should follow a rule of editing or blocking needless negativity and ad hominem attacks from reviewers before releasing the reviews to authors.
Molina	• Change the focus to quality (over quantity) in hiring decisions and/or tenure and promotion decisions. This may ease the individual motivation to submit so many products at one time.
	Topic: Impostor syndrome
Rule	• Train reviewers to see their role as anonymous mentors rather than gatekeepers.
	• Embrace the diversity of success beyond just research metrics to include things such as work–life balance.
Tropp	• People in positions of power can share their own struggles to normalize and validate their mentees' experiences.
Vick	• Academic institutions should provide mental health coverage.
	• Leaders of professional associations should work to make conference agendas more inclusive, providing opportunities for talks, symposia, networking, and awards for people working outside of research institutions and in roles outside of faculty positions.
	• Institutional leaders (e.g., department chairs, division heads, deans, provosts, vice presidents) should be mindful of visible identity representation in campus buildings and work spaces.
	• Predominantly White institutions in higher education can work to build a critical mass of people of color and other minoritized identity groups across campus constituencies.
	• Diversify examples of "successful" career paths for graduate students to include faculty positions at liberal-arts colleges, community colleges, and nonprofit and private-industry organizations.
	Topic: Burnout
Gawronski	• People in positions of power should be mindful to not set potentially toxic expectations.
	• People in positions of power should remind themselves why they decided to pursue an academic career and not confuse the means with the ends, so they can set expectations for mentees accordingly.
Jaremka	• People in positions of power should remind their mentees of the importance of work–life balance and model those behaviors themselves.
	• Search and promotion committees should focus on quality over quantity, and grant reviewers should adjust expectations to the current limited-funding climate.
Metz and Ryan	• Redefine "achievement" and expand reward structures to include multiple types of academic and professional success.
	• Provide funding packages for graduate students that provide a living wage.
	• Organize training to emphasize support and collaboration rather than competition.
	• Provide program-level training in professional skills such as grant writing, journal reviewing, teaching, etc.

rejection, and then Nick Rule, Linda Tropp, and Brooke Vick discuss their personal stories surrounding impostor syndrome. Finally, Bertram Gawronski, Lisa Jaremka, Molly Metz, and Will Ryan discuss their experiences with burnout.

Repeated Rejection

Kate Sweeny's perspective

My name is Kate Sweeny, and I have been rejected. A lot. I have submitted many manuscripts and grants that received harsh reviews, applied for many awards I never received, and applied for many jobs I did not get. In case anyone needs evidence to support my rejection credentials, between 2014 and 2019 (an arbitrary snapshot of my recent career, culled from a painful trip down rejection-memory lane), I submitted approximately 45 unique manuscripts a total of 160 times (yes, I know that is a lot; see my comment toward the end of my section about my "maniacal" rate of submissions). Of those 160 submissions, approximately 75 were outright rejections of the "do not send it back here" sort. In that same period, I submitted 10 major grant proposals,

all of which were rejected. Suffice it to say, I am nearly a professional rejectee at this point. The rejections have become easier to swallow now that I have tenure, of course, and I am fortunate to have a relatively large lab that allows for a high rate of submissions. Nonetheless, it is never easy to hear that your ideas or your work fall short of someone's standards.

With all of that experience, one would hope that I have learned something from what appears to be a long career of failures intermingled with success. In fact, the most important lesson I can share is that *rejection is not failure*. It is simply an inevitable and often necessary step in the journey toward success—whether in research or teaching and mentoring domains. The life of an academic, particularly in the research sphere, demands that we take chances, that we aim higher than we think we can reach on the off chance that our work is deserving of publication in a desirable journal or funding by a major grant agency. I suspect we all know someone who largely avoids rejection by holding on to papers for far too long before submitting them or aiming only for sure-thing opportunities. He or she may avoid the sting of hearing "no" 85 times in 5 years, but I would argue that preemptively limiting your opportunities just to avoid that sting is the greater failure.

A quote from Brené Brown's book *Rising Strong* (2015) sums up my perspective on rejection in academia better than I ever could: "You can choose courage or you can choose comfort. You cannot have both" (p. 4). I would argue that the life of an academic researcher is pretty great—but to get a job like ours, to keep it and to thrive in it, one must have courage to face rejection over and over again.

On a more practical level, I have gleaned some strategies for coping with rejection over the years, from both personal experience and my many cherished mentors. First, do not dwell on rejection (easier said than done, but a good goal to pursue). My graduate advisor, James Shepperd, taught me this lesson well. Any time a manuscript of ours was rejected, he would respond with a shrug and say, "Oh well. Where to next?" Reviewers are notoriously inconsistent, so sometimes a harsh rejection is followed by a set of glowing reviews simply by going to a different journal or funding agency. Of course, it is always important to carefully and humbly consider the validity of harsh reviews, but it is equally important to trust yourself when you know you are on to something important and interesting. My advisor also taught me an important lesson about how to make rejection easier to absorb: Be compassionate when reviewing others' work, pairing criticisms with clear acknowledgments of the strengths of a manuscript or grant proposal. I try to model that approach for my mentees when editing their manuscripts and providing feedback on students' talks, and we can all contribute to a culture of greater compassion in our field by doing the same. It will not remove the pain of rejection, but it might make it hurt a bit less.

Second, take some time before moving on to the next step. If you get a tough rejection and find yourself feeling defeated, walk away for a few days (or for the really bad ones, maybe a few weeks) and then come back to the reviews when you feel ready to face them. Self-care is crucial to staying in the research game for the long haul, and you may also find that you can absorb the more constructive critiques if you let the emotional impact of rejection wane a bit.

Third, persistence is key. If the findings are interesting and the study is well conceived and well designed, your manuscript will almost certainly find a home somewhere. To date, my longest publication lag from starting the research to seeing the article in print is 7 years. I have published a number of articles in the fifth or even sixth journal to which I submitted them. I have been fortunate to be in a position to absorb these delays in publication and the frustrations of the resubmission process. And in the end, those articles are some of my favorites on my curriculum vitae (CV), and they were ultimately very well received and increasingly well cited. That being said, sometimes it is equally important to walk away, or at least to get a second opinion before persisting further. A few manuscripts in my career never ended up on the printed page, and I am confident that walking away from those projects was the right decision. In other cases, after a few rejections and enormous frustration, I have asked a colleague to read the manuscript and point out where I might be going wrong. In those cases, I always wished I had asked earlier because it is so easy to become myopic about our own work. When you start feeling like you and your reviewers are not seeing eye to eye, it might be time to get a friendly but critical set of eyes on the manuscript to help you process the rejection in a new way.

Fourth, do not be afraid or ashamed to seek professional help if the stress of rejection (or any aspect of this difficult job) becomes overwhelming. I have a family history of depression, a history that unfortunately continues with me. It took me far too long to seek help, but I finally connected with a good therapist and a good psychiatrist in recent years, and I am beginning to understand some of the cognitive patterns that exacerbate my work-related stress. For example, at times I have pursued what my colleagues affectionately refer to as a "maniacal" level of professional activity, driven by perfectionism, anxiety, and a fear of failure. Because of my productivity during these times, I look successful on paper. However, success should be defined more

broadly than the length of one's CV. There are many ways to define success, and research productivity is only one of them. In fact, my therapist has helped me to see that happiness with one's life is more important than miserable success as a researcher, and my ability to cope with professional setbacks has improved significantly as a result.

Finally, and perhaps most important, identify trusted colleagues with whom you can openly discuss your harshest and most embarrassing experiences with rejection. Commiserating with friends about these difficult professional moments washes away shame and loneliness and reminds us that our value as a scientist does not rest in any one success or failure, and our value as a person does not rest on our success or failure as a scientist (personal experience suggests that a glass or two of wine facilitates this process). In fact, my goal in participating in the SPSP symposium that inspired this piece, and now in contributing to it, is to convey exactly that message to the audience of listeners/readers: You are not alone. Any rejection you have faced, hundreds, if not thousands, of other researchers have faced the same or worse. It can be uncomfortable to talk about these challenges with even our closest friends, much less an anonymous group of readers, but I am confident that the risk is worth the message. We are all trying to do our best at a very hard job.

Josh Ackerman's perspective

Preparing for a discussion at SPSP, and for this commentary, about personal encounters with rejection was an eye-opening experience. For some of us, regular bouts with rejected manuscripts, grant proposals, award nominations, and so on mean that the sense of failure is always salient. For others, such as myself, these experiences fade into the ether, forming something like the "cosmic negativity background" of the universe, an ever-present but unseen feature of academic life. This blending of experiences makes it difficult to gauge the true frequency with which personal rejection occurs. This frequency came into full resolution, however, when I created a shadow CV for our SPSP symposium (see the Appendix).

Shadow CVs are a dark reflection of the typical CV; they include every case of rejection one has encountered over a career rather than just the successes, in all of the same categories you might normally publicize. These memorials to failure rose in prominence when several researchers shared their shadow CVs as a way of normalizing the experiences we often do not discuss in polite company (e.g., Looser, 2015; Stefan, 2010), much like the goal of our symposium. These garnered widespread interest, leading one of the posters to claim that his shadow CV "has received way more attention than my entire body of academic work" (Haushofer, n.d., p. 2).

As I put together my own shadow CV, it was a little disheartening to relive my rejections and to recognize how small the chances are of not being rejected in some pursuits. For instance, across the various academic jobs for which I have applied, I have a 5.1% success rate of moving from application to on-campus interview and only a 2.9% rate of receiving an offer. Also apparent were the rejection valleys, where negative experiences cluster together (e.g., a very successful colleague reports having 10 manuscripts rejected in a row and knowing another scholar who had around 20 such repetitions). By the time I finished documenting these failures, I was having serious doubts about my life choices. Now imagine posting everything on a big screen for hundreds of people to see, as happened at the SPSP symposium. As someone who struggles with the spotlight, let us just say this did not improve my opinion about the choices I have made in life. So why construct a shadow CV? It turns out, I actually found the process to be quite worthwhile; despite the downturns, it also revealed the progress that has happened in my career. Even displaying it for all to see was not as awful as I expected, perhaps because it was coupled with the sense of progress (or maybe I should thank dissonance reduction and affective forecasting failures). I recommend trying this exercise. You may find that your trajectory was better than you recall, that you feel an increased sense of resilience, or that although individual rejections still sting, they quickly blur into that cosmic background. And you may even want to share your shadow CV with others, helping to break the silence around rejection and normalize discussions about these experiences.

Beyond this idea, I have learned a number of lessons from dealing with rejection and by synthesizing best-practice suggestions from others (of course, these are anecdotal lessons, and additional research addressing the commonality and efficacy of these techniques would be quite valuable). One is: *Do nothing*. This piece of advice will not win any "most inspirational" awards, but it may be useful anyway. Consider the impact of psychological distance on how we feel and think (e.g., Bruehlman-Senecal & Ayduk, 2015; D'Argembeau & Van der Linden, 2004; Gilbert, Pinel, Wilson, Blumberg, & Wheatley, 1998). First-time rejections in a domain are likely the most affectively arousing and difficult to cope with. These experiences may loom especially large for researchers with few concurrent projects, as a result of working in smaller academic communities, and for those whose work involves difficult-to-reach populations and long time horizons. Not everyone is in an

equivalent position to absorb failure, and not every failure can be readily dismissed. But it does get easier (maybe not a lot easier!) as we learn how to predict what reviewers want, how to better frame our work, how to make better decisions, and how to emotionally regulate following rejection. Knowing that the intensity of rejection responses will somewhat diminish over time may help strengthen our resolve to move forward in the face of adversity. To mix metaphors, we are running a marathon through a forest, not a sprint from tree to tree.

Another, more active lesson is: *Reframe attributions for rejection*. Like many of us, I have sometimes attributed prior rejections to aspects of my identity, leading me to wonder whether I was good enough to succeed in this field. This type of response is interesting because it contradicts the standard self-serving attributional bias that often accompanies highly self-threatening feedback (Campbell & Sedikides, 1999). But it is also a response that predicts attrition from the field dangerously well (Gardner, 2009; Lovitts, 2001), perhaps because it feeds the impostor syndrome and burnout discussed in later sections of this article. To persist in research, a better strategy may be to sometimes assume that rejection is not about you as a person; it is about X, Y, Z, or any number of other external reasons. Blind use of this strategy is also a hallmark of narcissism (Stucke, 2003), but it can be used in reasonable and productive ways. For example, one method of reconstruing rejection is to focus on the big picture of our enterprise. I publish research because I hope to contribute to a larger dialogue, and I would guess most other scientists do as well. Rejections are often simply part of this dialogue rather than statements about our personal foibles or abilities. Conversely, by treating acceptance of manuscripts or grant applications as end goals, we may lose sight of the broader discussion's value and give unnecessary weight to what are essentially individual points within that discussion. Perhaps it is due to privilege (and posttenure goggles?), but I have found the whole of my profession to be more meaningful from this vantage point, and each "no" I receive to be less powerful as a result.

A third lesson is: *Take charge of what you can*. Just as we may want to celebrate each of our successes (at least in the West; Miyamoto & Ma, 2011), we may also want to take a break following each rejection to let immediate feelings subside, as Kate referred to earlier. Take a walk, spend time with family, hit the gym. Dashing off an angry response to an editor or venting on academic social media is unlikely to be successful or encourage the type of professional image we probably want to convey. I know I have written many, many such responses, but instead of letting Reviewer 2 know how I really feel, I walk away instead of sending the response and revisit the review with a cooler mind. That said, if you are the kind of person who reacts to a dismissing decision letter by churning out pages of clear, convincing prose, go for it. An alternate way of taking charge is to head off rejection before it occurs. Consider those manuscript reviews you have received that have a negative tone and ignore what you think are the key points of your work. Remember, reviewers have little time to devote to reviews and are typically not compensated for their work, so small elements (e.g., grammar) could have a disproportionate impact on their evaluation of a manuscript. Do not ignore these elements and expect that reviewers will also disregard them. Proofread! Have others look at your manuscripts before submitting them. Send in the best work you can. You have probably heard these recommendations before. They are the bane of the idealistic scientist, who believes that the hypothesis or the result is all that matters, and not how they are communicated. The point here is to know what is in your control and what is not. And what is definitively under your control is submitting a product of which you are proud.

Furthermore, you may have more power than you realize in many situations. For instance, in the context of job applications, applicants who do not make the short list of promising candidates often hear nothing about their status from target institutions. Without an explicit rejection, how do you know when to begin crying into your pillow or your beer? Even those applicants who are more officially spurned may receive no input as to why. In such situations, why not ask for feedback from hiring committees? You might not always receive the level of detail you would like, but some people will be happy to respond, and you lose nothing by asking. In the end, taking control of whichever pieces of the research process you can may help ward off rejection, or at least help it sting a bit less.

Fourth: *Know what you are getting into.* When graduate students begin working with me, I give them a "handbook" of articles, blog posts, and other pieces of advice about what it takes to succeed in social psychology specifically and academia more broadly. Sometimes these reflect harsh truths, such as why academics stink at writing (Pinker, 2014) or why people leave academia (PsychBrief, 2017). But my favorite recommendation is a call to embrace the state of not knowing, otherwise known as "The Importance of Stupidity in Scientific Research" (Schwartz, 2008). The article's central theme is that the feeling of stupidity, or not having the answer to a research question, is a feature of—not a bug in—the scientific enterprise. If researchers knew all the answers, we would be out of a job! By realizing that our profession is one that generates new knowledge,

uncovers evidence, and engages in other activities of discovery, not one that involves having the answers up front, I think people can become more accepting of the fact that rejection must happen for progress to occur. A more field-specific bit of knowledge involves the importance of recognizing base rates. When it comes to successfully applying for jobs, grants, and even conference presentation slots, having good ideas is not all that matters. Large numbers of our colleagues may be comparably qualified and produce equally good work. When 200 applications are submitted for a single faculty position, for example, many very strong candidates will not (and cannot) be chosen. In this profession, we are not trained to embrace the concept of luck. It exists, though, and we should give it credit (as long as we do not allow this recognition to unreasonably diminish our motivation).

My final piece of advice is directed less to recipients of rejection and more to those with the structural power to influence recipient experiences. And that is: *Do more*. As a mentor, colleague, chair, or editor, each of us has the ability to improve the personal experiences (and workplaces and lives) of the people with whom we work. In departmental meetings and at conferences, be aware of the dynamics of providing feedback and the ways in which critical comments can be framed as collaborative rather than rejecting. When training students or junior faculty, we have even more power. Build new norms into your training. Consider one strategy for separating ourselves from the experience of rejection by stopping the practice of equating hypotheses with personal predictions (Schaller, 2016). "I/we hypothesize" is language that associates the success and failure of the hypothesis test with the researcher, not the idea. A good hypothesis should stand on its own, not on the back of whoever generated it. By explicitly avoiding the connection of one's identity to one's ideas, the focus is kept on those ideas and not on feeling personally rejected if the ideas are questioned or disregarded. Disassociating ourselves from our hypotheses might even have the added benefit of improving the reproducibility of our work as we remove personal biases and desires from the hypothesis-creation process. We can also train mentees to become better rejecters. When having students participate in journal or grant-review exercises, include feedback on the tone of those reviews, not just their content. Finally, every journal editor should follow a rule of editing or blocking needless negativity and ad hominem attacks from reviewers before releasing reviews to authors. There is no value in being passive on this issue. Together, small structural changes like these, coupled with more open communication about rejection, may help improve the status quo for everyone.

Ludwin Molina's perspective

One of the skills you pick up as an academic is an idea of how to optimize the chances of getting your work published or grant(s) funded, being an efficacious teacher, and so forth. Hopefully some of these efforts are successful. However, academia is humbling, so for most of us, not all of our articles find a home, not all of our grants get funded, and not all of our classes go well. We must be prepared for the rejection we will face along the way when trying to be successful. Rejection is a matter of fact for those of us who choose to be psychological scientists.

> "Don't let it bring you down / It's only castles burning"—Neil Young (1970)

Taking it personally. It is difficult not to take rejection personally. At least, that has been my experience. It hurts and brings me down. It is embarrassing to get a rejection on a project I have poured time into. And sometimes, if the rejection is quite unexpected or heavy-handed, it feels humiliating and even makes me wonder whether I belong in this field. One piece of advice I received early in my career was to distance myself from the sting of rejection by understanding that rejection was aimed at the ideas and not toward me. This is well-meaning advice, and it may work for some people; however, I have had difficulty employing it. If the rejection of my ideas is not personal, then I do not know what is! My ideas are deeply personal, and understanding that psychological science is a human enterprise affords us the capacity to see the submission process as an act of being vulnerable as an academic and as a human being. Putting my ideas out there for the world to see means that others can evaluate whether there is value in my work and whether they respect my ideas. And then, by extension, it often feels like I am putting myself out there to be evaluated, because they are my ideas and it is my work.

I am a first-generation college student, Latinx, an immigrant, and from a working-class background. It should come as no surprise that my set of identities is not well represented at the student or faculty level within graduate studies in psychology. This lack of representation within academic settings has shaped me in a variety of ways—some of which are not necessarily for the better. First, it has been a struggle to connect to an academic community that suggests by mere composition that I may not belong. Second, spending time in these academic spaces has fostered my impostor syndrome because it makes me reflect on how I am distinct from other community members (e.g., from a working-class background), and this difference is not

necessarily viewed in a positive light. So my experience of having manuscripts, grants, and so forth rejected plays into my broader insecurities about being an academic. Once again, it is challenging for me to experience rejection and not have it feel deeply personal. I assume I am not alone in this subjective experience of rejection, and that, at least, gives me some comfort.

What if we decide not to "domesticate" the process of rejection, and instead accept that it can hurt people and their self-concepts as academics? What if we decide not to deploy psychological strategies that distance ourselves from this experience? The notion that we are trying to share a reality with another person (Hardin & Higgins, 1996)—in this case, the reviewers—and that they may not confirm our perceptions on a research project is difficult to cope with—at least it can be for me. This lack of shared reality hurts, because it feels like a reflection of the relationship I am trying to establish with the other person, the discipline, and my self-conception as a researcher. But maybe there are alternative ways to cope that do not require that I distance myself from my ideas. Now do not get me wrong; I am not suggesting that academics become comfortable being masochists. Instead, I am suggesting that it is natural to take rejection personally and feel bad as a result, because our ideas often are personal, and rejection is not an outcome we seek or desire. What we do with rejection—either in the midst of it or after—is what is really critical for our trajectory as social scientists.

What should we do after rejection? I try to take what "positives" I can from rejection and the accompanying criticism, which can strengthen my article, grant, class, and so forth. If I am fortunate, I received a set of reviews that were critical, thoughtful, and without much collateral damage to my psyche. This has not always been the case for me, but I wish the reader better luck than my own. If the reviews are harsh but there is substantive feedback as well, it is okay to take time to let your feelings settle before you begin engaging with the reviews. But do not let your ideas sit so long that either you miss the chance for submitting a major revision or the momentum on the project dissipates so much that you do not submit elsewhere. I have let this happen on some occasions and have lived to regret it. We all have sufficient regrets in our lives, so do not let this become another arena from which to draw examples!

A key trait that young scholars should and can develop is persistence in the face of rejection. In my opinion, persistence is one of the key characteristics of successful academics. But if rejection is such a common part of academic life, how do we develop and then summon persistence? Like other skills we pick up in our training and discipline, it requires experience and practice. For instance, whereas some manuscripts and data are well received by reviewers, others have a much more challenging time finding a home. For the latter, determining whether an idea or research project merits further time and effort even in the face of rejection is a major issue of concern, especially if you have other collaborators on the project. When dealing with a manuscript that has been soundly rejected, for example, I set up a meeting with my collaborators about 1 to 3 weeks after receipt of reviews to have an open discussion about the viability of continuing with the project given the major, substantive reviews. Moreover, the meeting affords people the capacity to opt in or out of continuing on the project if their own portfolio of academic projects has changed since they first started on the project. Assuming that the answer is "Yes, I will continue with the project," then the critical reviews provide a set of points to consider as you move forward in that line of inquiry. I typically take a break from the reviews for about 1 to 2 weeks, and then reread them to decide which are primary and critical, which are secondary, and which are okay to ignore. Rejection can be the end of a conversation for some projects, but for other projects it can be part of an ongoing conversation you have with your research and/or teaching.

> "Find someone who's turning / And you will come around"—Young (1970)

The value of seeking support from your collaborators, close academic friends, and nonacademic friends when you experience rejection should not be underestimated. I need others to remind me of the ups and downs of this career and that my worth as an academic is not pinned to that one rejection. It can be easy to forget this bigger picture when I experience rejection, so it is helpful to turn to close others to remind me that I matter, I belong, and I have something worth saying. It is an act of courage, assuming that the work is good, to dust ourselves off after rejection and consider the "next steps" of our project, our grant, or our class.

Is structural change possible? One way to dampen the effects of repeated rejection is for us to pump the brakes on the "publish-or-perish" approach in our field. The volume of publishing that one needs to accomplish to secure a tenure-track job, receive tenure and promotion to associate professor, and so on, is scary these days. This norm within social psychological science forces us to put a lot of product out there, hoping that some will gain traction at journals or granting agencies. This means that we may send out manuscripts or grant proposals that are not as strong as they could be if we did not have to worry about publishing copious amounts. Taking a more

measured approach to our craft could mean that the submitted work would be of higher quality, resulting in an attenuation of the constant rejection many of us experience. One can imagine a rollback of "publish or perish" by emphasizing quality over quantity in the expectations for promotion and/or tenure. This suggested reform is a "slow train coming," given how our current academic enterprise operates. Nonetheless, values and norms change as a function of time and the people who are part of the community. This affords newer generations of psychological-science researchers a level of agency in determining how their professional community operates. A structural change like the one described here can have positive implications for our profession and its members, potentially reducing the likelihood that we experience rejection on such a frequent basis.

Impostor Syndrome

Nick Rule's perspective

I have serious doubts about whether I am qualified to give anyone advice about impostor syndrome. So many high-profile people in academia, business, government, and entertainment feel like impostors; surely, those people would better represent the phenomenon than I would. See how the irony illustrates the problem?

Despite its ubiquity, however, I suspect that impostor syndrome lands heavier on academics than it does on people in some of these other domains. Academic culture is built on a scientific enterprise whose foundation is skepticism, doubt, and stringent criteria for survival. Am I, too, just a Type I error in terms of my professional success? This question pushes me and many others forward, striving to excel: Get a bigger grant, publish another manuscript, score teaching evaluations without any negative comments, and otherwise trudge forward to the edge of perfectionism's mirage. The costs compound over time and so do the rejections (see above): Most grants do not get funded, most manuscripts do not get accepted, and it never fails that at least one student has something negative to say about our teaching. Facing those rejections hurts and, from my perspective as a full professor and former department chair at the University of Toronto, I can attest that the pain rarely eases as one advances in academia. The rejections also wear us down and, like a mouse in a cage pressing a lever for food that rarely comes, academia's intermittent reward structure can promote learned helplessness that leads to burnout (see below). Perhaps most pernicious, though, is that repeated rejection provides a steady supply of opportunities to see our successes as exceptions rather than evidence of our actual ability.

All too often, others help feed our impostor-syndrome beast. Consider that if you feel like an impostor, then there is a good chance that many others do too. That insecurity can lead people to feel competitive and jealous of others' accomplishments, sometimes inflicting their inwardly directed negative emotions outward onto others. I experienced this kind of "impostor shaming" when I was a graduate student. Ten years ago, SPSP held its annual convention in Tampa. I was born and raised just two counties north of the city in a very poor area: Seventy-five percent of the students in my elementary school qualified for free or reduced-cost lunch, a common measure used by the federal government to index poverty. My family's income easily placed us in the government's category of "extreme poverty," and my parents made it very clear that education was for the elitist rich. When I was admitted to Dartmouth as an undergraduate, my father, my boss, and my neighbors all told me that I was not smart enough to survive at an Ivy League school, and even if I somehow did not fail academically, I would fail socially because I would never fit in with all of the "rich folk." They assured me I would be back home soon, having only wasted my time and money. The message was clear: You do not belong in higher education and it is foolish to pretend that you do. My impostor syndrome was thus long honed and acutely primed as a graduate student heading to that SPSP conference in 2009.

Attendees may recall that the 2009 Tampa conference coincided with the annual Gasparilla Festival, essentially a "pirate parade" celebrating the city's history. I had scarcely ever been to Tampa and had only seen the parade on TV. The "rich" kids I knew in school might go down to the city for something like this, but that kind of merriment was mostly a luxury for all of the people living in the wealthy Tampa suburbs who had good jobs in the city.

The first morning of the conference, I attended a symposium consisting of a slate of speakers studded with my heroes in the field. Early in his talk, one of these speakers referred to the people attending the parade as "White trash." The room lit up with laughter as my heart sank into a sadness that distracted me from the rest of the symposium. Licking my wounds, I proceeded to my next conference event: the Graduate Student Council's new "mentor lunch" program, during which graduate students receive advice from star faculty—certainly a salve for my injured spirit. As we seated ourselves around the table with our boxed lunches, I was shocked to hear my mentor utter those same words, "White trash," about the people outside. I was crushed. The people attending the parade were the rich people I knew growing up, the better people in my community, the ones who called me "White trash"

when I lived there. If my heroes and mentors in psychology thought of them as "White trash," then what did that make me? Everything I heard growing up, but had cautiously come to doubt, was quickly affirmed: The "ivory tower" was an elite world in which people like me did not belong.

Through the course of my Ivy League education and then anticipated PhD program, I had learned how to "pass," to pretend like I belonged. Dressed in a sharp black suit for my talk that day, I did not look like a kid from an impoverished town an hour away. I had learned to curate my vocabulary and speech carefully, lest my words betray my southern working-class background. Although I looked and sounded like the professor I would soon become, the events reminded me that I was not really like the sophisticated intellectuals surrounding me. I was simply wearing a mask that allowed me to pretend. I was the definition of an impostor (or at least I felt like one). I left the conference that evening feeling solidarity with the local Floridians. Somewhat ironically, however, multiple intoxicated parade attendees shouted "faggot" at me on my short walk from the conference center back to the hotel. They quickly reminded me how my futile attempts to conceal being gay had made me feel like an impostor all my life. I felt as if I had simply traded one closet for another.

Years later, I learned that both of the individuals who made the "White trash" comments also came from working-class backgrounds, perhaps partly explaining their crass and racially offensive language. Initially surprised, I thought back to the potential impostor-syndrome cycle: Those who feel like frauds might sometimes be inclined to direct those self-critical thoughts outward. Perhaps the shame that these faculty members felt about their own backgrounds potentiated their condemnation of the people of Tampa.

People who come from economically underprivileged backgrounds like mine are not the only ones susceptible to impostor syndrome, of course. Lots of academic psychologists (possibly even most) come from privileged backgrounds that also lead them to feel like impostors as they try to match up to their parents' successes or meet the expectations that years of private schooling or other class advantages might have lent them. In some ways, the sense of fraud may feel even worse for these "privileged" people because they might question whether the luck or advantages of their circumstances take undue credit for their success.

Moreover, the second guesses that encourage impostor syndrome also come from more than just social class. Every time someone questions a Black doctor's expertise, mistakes a female executive for a secretary, or assumes that an assistant professor is a student, those individuals are reminded that they do not fit the image of success in their profession.

So what do we do about it? Overcoming impostor syndrome may require each of us to recognize the myth that a professor, CEO, or doctor looks, acts, or sounds a certain way, instead of internalizing those messages such that we subscribe to them ourselves. Understanding that success has many definitions may be the first step in rejecting the feelings of doubt that we feel when we notice that the prototypical images of success do not match what we see in the mirror. Changing these cognitions can help each of us individually, and vigilance about them can encourage a cultural change that benefits everyone.

Changing our own thought patterns (let alone those of others) is not easy, though, and getting support from someone with training and experience (such as a mental health clinician) may help tremendously. In graduate school, I avoided sharing hotel rooms at conferences whenever possible because I have frequent nightmares about my experiences growing up in poverty. Even now, my husband reports that I awaken him three or four nights per week with my screaming and sobbing; often, it wakes me too. Seeing a therapist about my posttraumatic stress disorder has helped a lot, however, and was instrumental in helping me come to terms not only with the events in my past but also with the stress and anxiety of academic life. Feeling like an impostor can often lead to anxiety and depression, and it regularly challenges one's self-esteem. I would therefore encourage readers with similar feelings to consider seeking support if it is available.

But individual changes will not address the systemic problems within academic culture that leave so many of us feeling like frauds (see Liu, 2018). One component may be the "impostor shaming" that I mentioned above. *Critical* is the operative word in "critical thinking," but it can sometimes amount to overkill. I was drawn to science for the joy of discovery and its opportunities for creativity and meaningful impact; I suspect many others were as well. It is difficult to maintain a spirit of exploration, however, if we demand perfection. I see this frequently in my work as a journal editor, and suspect that one way we could ameliorate the proliferation of impostor syndrome might be to train reviewers to see their role as anonymous mentors rather than gatekeepers. Taking a collaborative mind-set might defuse the feelings of personal threat and jealousy that sometimes seem baked into reviewers' comments, replacing them with a feeling of teamwork about meeting our shared goal of understanding the mind, brain, and behavior. Rather than compete with each other, let us compete with nature, which tries to prevent us from knowing its secrets; with ignorance, which undermines a rational society; or at least with other fields that will snatch up all the grant funding if we cease to make meaningful gains in psychology! Psychological science

is not a zero-sum game; there is room for all of us to contribute. Recognizing that your discoveries do not threaten mine and that my discoveries do not threaten yours, we can let go of the illusion that any of us is any more than a blind man groping parts of an elephant. Perhaps it is those individuals who fail to recognize their blindness that are the actual impostors.

Another helpful avenue might be to embrace the diversity of success. Our current system largely rewards excellence in research. Although we now have more awards for teaching and mentorship than in the past, the apparent collapse of legitimate debate over social and political issues may highlight the overlooked value in our roles as educators. As much as I respect the research superstars in our field, both past and present, the academics I admire most are those who seem to have a healthy life outside of their labs. As scholars of people, it might benefit our research to spend some time with them. Moreover, placing too much emphasis on one's career raises the stakes so high that it would be difficult not to feel the need to jealously guard it against perceived threats from others, as described above. Encouraging our students to take time off, to go on vacations, and to rest will not only prevent and treat burnout (see below) but also might help them to feel more whole as people, combating the unattainable expectations that lead them and us to feel like impostors.

Linda Tropp's perspective

"Impostor syndrome" generally refers to a tendency to doubt one's accomplishments, believe that one's success is undeserved, or believe that one is not as competent as others perceive one to be. Even as a full professor at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, this is a topic that I have known intimately. In fact, during certain periods of my career, I have felt like a "poster child" for impostor syndrome. I remember feeling grateful when my first "first-authored" manuscript from graduate school was accepted for publication, rather than feeling like I had earned it through hard work and arduous revisions. Following presentations of my research at other universities, I have often felt relieved and surprised to hear that members of the audience were truly interested in my work and valued what I had to say. These impostor-related concerns began to wane only after I had accrued enough publications and invited talks on my CV to use them as evidence—if I stopped to think about it, I could recognize it was unlikely that all of them were simply due to others' kindness, luck, or chance. But it is often hard to gain that type of emotional distance or perspective when one's feelings of being an impostor have such deep roots. Even now, after having been a professor for 20 years, with a long publication list and many other professional successes under my belt, I still find myself experiencing impostor syndrome from time to time.

Although people do not typically reveal that they feel like an impostor to a public audience, I feel compelled to share this so that other people will know they are not alone in these feelings. And even more than that, I wish to reassure you that you can still have a productive and successful career, even if you have these feelings. Indeed, many high-achieving, well-respected people around the world have expressed similar feelings—so at the very least, you are in very good company. Christine Lagarde, Chairwoman of the International Monetary Fund, has described how she "would often get nervous about presentations or speaking" such that there were moments when she would have to go "deep inside myself and pull my strength, confidence, background, history, experience and all the rest of it to assert a particular point" (as cited in Kay & Shipman, 2014). In her recent book, Michelle Obama wrote about how she repeatedly reflected on the question "Am I good enough?" She wrote that her self-doubt "was like a malignant cell that threatened to divide again and again" (pp. 55–56). Likewise, I remember often feeling nervous about speaking up in graduate school, fearing that what I had to say was not sufficiently important or insightful to take up time and space during class discussions. I was in awe of presenters at research conferences who could simply stand up and deliver a presentation without notes, whereas I felt the need to carefully curate everything I wanted to say on sheets of paper covered with type.

At the same time, I observed those people who spoke freely in class and who casually strolled to and from the podium as they delivered their talks. I wanted to unlock the secret to their confidence. I wanted to understand what led them to feel like their voices and perspectives were worthy of being heard, without hesitation or internal deliberation. Alas, I am not sure I ever quite found the answers I was looking for. But I did notice that, on some occasions, there was at best only a modest correlation between the amount of time for which people spoke and the depth of their insights. Sometimes, these speakers simply gave themselves the freedom to brainstorm in the presence of a class or an audience; at other times, it seemed as if the confidence and presumed certainty with which they delivered their message was what compelled people to listen.

On average, it might be harder for folks like us, who experience impostor syndrome, to give ourselves such freedom to "take up space" or to "own" our contributions and capabilities with conviction. But that does not mean that what we have to offer is of any less value than what others have to offer. We simply have a harder time seeing that value. So, what can we do to try to overcome our

feelings of insecurity and still take steps forward to a productive and fruitful academic career?

First, we need to remember that our ideas are likely to be at least as good as anyone else's, even if our impostor concerns are telling us otherwise. In one particular seminar during my first semester in graduate school, I was feeling intimidated about speaking up in class, not being sure if my ideas would be "good enough." But then, I remember looking around the room and thinking that some of the most active participants were not necessarily the ones making the most brilliant points. They were simply allowing themselves to use the space of the classroom to explore and develop ideas. This moment helped me realize that I was entitled to do the same: I did not have to wait until I had the most brilliant insight to participate in class, because reasonably good ideas were "enough" for my participation to be worthy. And this insight has informed how I facilitate class discussions as a professor to this day—encouraging those who participate less often to speak up and recognize the value of their contributions, while inviting more active participants to reflect on and respond to the views and ideas of their peers.

Second, to quote Susan Jeffers, we can "feel the fear and do it anyway" (Jeffers, 2017). We are likely to have a wide range of feelings when we are touched by impostor syndrome—ranging from feeling intimidated or insecure, to feeling apprehensive about our preparedness, to feeling shame or unworthiness. It is very common to have these feelings—and I sincerely wish to validate whatever feelings come up as you reflect on the successes, challenges, and failures you have encountered as an academic. And, at the same time, I would encourage you not to let these feelings of insecurity or unworthiness dictate your behavior. Feel nervous, intimidated, insecure, and then "do the thing" anyway—whether that is applying for a job, submitting a manuscript, or talking with senior colleagues at a conference about your mutual research interests.

Third, try to remember that you may see yourself as an impostor but others are not likely to see you in the same way. When we feel like impostors, it is all too easy for us to assume that others can "see through the façade" and think that we are not as good as our records or contributions would suggest. But over the past 20 years I've spent in academia, I have discovered that there has often been a great deal of consensus in how others viewed me and my scholarship, seeing my academic trajectory and accomplishments in a much more favorable light than the views of them I had myself. So, when people have positive things to say about your work, believe them. When people tell you that they learned something from your article, let that positive feedback sink in. Allow each of these pieces of feedback to serve as "data points" to remind you that you are worthy, that you deserve to be here, and that you are needed for the contributions that only you can make.

Finally, together, we can also take steps to change the cultures of our departments and research conferences and the ways in which we relate to each other as peers. I can recall many times during my graduate years when I attempted to develop a sense of camaraderie with fellow students by disclosing my insecurities, and then feeling crestfallen upon receiving responses such as "Really? I don't feel that way." I can also recall interactions at conferences with people from other doctoral programs that felt like they were more focused on "sizing up the competition" than on exchanging ideas or exploring the possibility of collaboration growing from mutual research interests. Since that time, I believe there has been considerable change in the tenor of our academic culture, and I now find it quite heartening to see many younger scholars being openly supportive of each other and willing to share both personal insecurities and words of wisdom that might enhance others' prospects of professional success. Likewise, I have often shared experiences from different stages of my career with students and early career scholars at my university and other universities to normalize and validate their experiences, and to strategize steps forward in light of the challenges they may be facing. I believe articles like this one—in which many esteemed scholars openly reflect on the challenges they have experienced in academia—offer a useful, and perhaps crucial step in transforming the culture. Yet there is likely much more we can do to make our academic community as a whole more inclined toward mutual support and collaboration in the scientific enterprise.

Brooke Vick's perspective

Shortly after I was invited to contribute to this article and discuss my experiences with impostor syndrome, the process of writing my contribution became a study in the development and maintenance of impostor syndrome itself. I was riding the wave of excitement for the opportunity at hand, experiencing self-doubt about my ability and belonging, cursing myself for agreeing to write this piece in the first place, and then, ultimately writing. Specifically, my thought process went something like this:

> "What a fabulous, important idea for a manuscript! I would love to be a part of this."
>
> "I'm honored that my coauthors thought of me for this project. I admire their work so much; it would be great to collaborate with them."

> "I have had impostor syndrome since I was a teenager. Nearly 30 years of experience? Surely I can write this piece, no problem. I bet I can get it done in a week."

Shortly after I began to gather my thoughts for the piece and to review drafts from my coauthors, the process of social comparison that feeds impostor syndrome set in.

> "Wow, even my coauthors' failures are impressive (unlike mine)!"

> "We are all meant to represent people with successful careers. I am successful I guess, but not like THEM, not in the same ways."

> "One of these things is not like the others. Why did they include me? I am clearly not who they were looking for."

My productivity then grinds to a halt, making me feel less capable as this process unfolds. Impostor syndrome has worked its magic once again, leading me to believe that I do not belong in my field or in academia; that I have somehow fooled every professor, mentor, student, provost, and president with whom I have ever worked into believing I am something that I am not; approaching every interview, project, manuscript, or workshop as if this will be the one that topples my 20-year-old house of cards. It is exhausting.

When I think about why I struggle with impostor syndrome, despite accumulated evidence of my abilities and experiences of success, I acknowledge, as any social psychologist would, I suppose, that there are probably interacting individual and social variables that contribute. Individually, I have always held myself to high standards in whatever I do and am prone to bouts of paralyzing perfectionism as a result. I am also sensitive to social cues and am a skilled self-monitor; traits that help me to navigate social situations successfully but also set me up to engage in frequent social comparison with others (Soibel, Fong, Mullin, Jenkins, & Mar, 2012). Each of these characteristics on its own likely makes me more vulnerable to impostor beliefs, as my high standards and perfectionism can lead to anxiety. My anxiety encourages me to procrastinate and, therefore, ironically, fail to produce the quality work that I expect from myself. My lower quality work then becomes confirming evidence that I am, in fact, an impostor.

In my experience with impostor syndrome, however, the effects of these individual characteristics are exacerbated by social factors tied to identity and career path that can heighten the stakes of performance, shift the social-comparison landscape, and affect expectations of my abilities. As a woman of color working exclusively in predominantly White institutions (PWIs) in higher education, it is common for me to be the only person of color on a committee, in my department, or on the floor of my office building. When I enter the hallowed halls of historic buildings on various campuses, I do not see leaders of color in framed portraits or names of college leaders or award recipients of color memorialized on decorative plaques. As a junior faculty member, there were few senior faculty members of color available for mentoring opportunities and multiple instances of faculty members of color being denied tenure. This sent the message that faculty of color were not successful here or were not welcomed in the institution. Working within an institution that lacks a critical mass of underrepresented faculty and administrators of color can create repeated experiences of tokenism (Niemann & Dovidio, 1998). It is difficult to develop a sense of belonging to fight against impostor syndrome when faced with implicit and explicit visual messages to the contrary. The same can be true within different areas of scholarship, as well. When the canons of certain fields do not include stories of minoritized groups, or when courses on our experiences are electives rather than requirements, it can be difficult to feel confident as a respected scholar in these spaces.

I have heard many colleagues of color assert that they never felt more aware of their racial identity than when they became a faculty member at a PWI. This has also been the case for me. Research on solo status indicates that being the only member of an identity group in a given situation heightens the salience of the token identity, and increasing the salience of a negatively stereotyped or socially devalued identity can make experiences of stereotype threat and attributional ambiguity more prevalent (Inzlicht & Ben-Zeev, 2000; Sekaquaptewa, Waldman, & Thompson, 2007). Each of these experiences has contributed to the maintenance of impostor syndrome for me. Awareness of being "the only" in a space has led to experiences of stereotype threat, and experiencing stereotype threat has decreased the quality of my performance at times, which led me to judge myself unfit for my role. This evaluation has caused me to downplay the authenticity of accolades I received for my work, unsure if they were deserved or merely a way of "supporting diversity." Feedback that could serve to diminish impostor syndrome can, therefore, become less influential under these conditions (e.g., Crocker, Voelkl, Testa, & Major, 1991).

For impostor syndrome to develop, there needs to be a prototype to which we compare ourselves, an ideal psychologist, scholar, or academic that we strive to become. In our field, and certainly in my mind, that prototype is a prolific publisher of original research in

high-impact journals, a frequent recipient of prestigious research grants, and a tenured faculty member at an R1 institution. In my academic career, I have been, and continue to be, none of those things. I earned my doctorate in psychology to teach, mentor, develop, model, and inspire undergraduate students. I hoped to pass along our field's understanding of discrimination and prejudice and develop citizens who can be a force for positive change in the world. I wanted underrepresented students at PWIs to see evidence that they could do the same, following in my footsteps and the footsteps of those who came before me, should they so choose. I have therefore centered my academic career in small, liberal-arts colleges that celebrate these strengths—first as a tenure-track and then tenured psychology professor, and now as an associate provost and senior diversity leader. Although I have been steadily meeting my personal goals as an academic psychologist as my career progresses, I have been less successful resisting the temptation to compare myself to that aforementioned prototype. This is due, in part, to the nature of graduate training, the limited models of successful careers promoted within doctoral programs, and my experiences at national meetings within our field that celebrate and reward prolific scholars but that have traditionally done little to recognize other areas of expertise and achievement. When those accomplishments that have defined my career successes are not visible or well represented, it is difficult to feel as if I belong in the field, to feel as if I am not an impostor.

Despite the individual and environmental factors that make overcoming impostor syndrome challenging, I can say that my struggles with impostor syndrome have rarely kept me from pursuing new opportunities and growing in my career, though not without pain and suffering along the way. To keep it moving despite sometimes crushing self-doubt, I intentionally push back on the sources of my impostor feelings as best I can and encourage others to do so as well. I turn my office into a representative workspace with décor, images, and quotes that remind me that I may be "the only" in my department, on my floor, or in my building, but I am not alone and I do belong (e.g., I regularly write ideas in a journal, the cover of which says "Musings of a Magical Black Girl"). I surround myself with a diverse group of supportive friends and colleagues who know when I need a reminder that my self-doubt is unfounded. I talk to successful mentors and colleagues about impostor syndrome and often find that they struggle with it too. Learning that many women who fit my "successful academic psychologist" prototype also struggle with impostor syndrome helps to frame these beliefs as systemic rather than valid information about my abilities. For many of my tenure-track years, I regularly visited a therapist who helped me to recognize when my thinking was irrational and when it contradicted evidence about my capabilities.

I also regularly spend time working with faculty colleagues, staff members, and students to intentionally challenge their impostor beliefs. As I remind them of all of the ways in which they have earned their respective position, are capable of more should they desire it, and are talented and deserving of a sense of confidence and belonging, I am reminding myself these things too. I continue to accept new challenges and opportunities, despite sometimes having the sense that I am a fraud, with the knowledge that these successes will serve as valuable resources I can draw from whenever I need a reminder that I can, in fact, do this. And you can too. Remember all the times when you delivered presentations, met manuscript deadlines, and led your dissertation defense, feeling sure you were going to be discovered for the impostor that you believed yourself to be, and succeeded anyway. The next time you are faced with a situation in which you doubt yourself, try focusing on the data you have collected thus far. I am confident that a careful analysis of the evidence will swing in your favor and fail to support a conclusion of impostor.

Although these approaches can help to quell the effects of impostor syndrome on an individual basis, they do not address the social and systemic factors that can provoke and maintain these beliefs. For example, I was privileged to have access to a therapist because my institution provided mental health care as part of faculty compensation. This type of support is not available for everyone working in our field, and it should be. My experiences with solo status, stereotype threat, and attributional ambiguity would be significantly reduced if our institutions—faculty, administration, staff, and students—were more diverse. Working in the diversity-and-inclusion realm, I know that most of our colleges and universities are talking about this goal. Too few of them, however, are achieving it enough to make a difference in the lived experiences of the underrepresented academics and professionals they are recruiting to their campuses. When representation across ranks and constituencies in higher education increases—when we see our expertise acknowledged, our labor valued, our stories told in the academy—I expect impostor-syndrome beliefs will decrease among these groups. Likewise, when we do what we can as individuals to work on deconstructing the lone prototype of the successful psychologist, discuss our experiences with impostor syndrome (as we are doing in this article), and support one another's diverse contributions to our field, we can help each other to find our place and feel confident that we belong in it.

Burnout

Bertram Gawronski's perspective

Repeated rejections and impostor syndrome often lead to feelings of burnout, a state of chronic stress that produces physical and emotional exhaustion and detachment. Burnout occurs when people do not feel like they have control over their outcomes. Although a lack of perceived control is often driven by an excessive amount of work, too much work does not necessarily lead to burnout. The experience of burnout is different from simply feeling fatigued or exhausted; it typically stems from a lack of perceived control that leads people to feel overwhelmed and "at the end of their rope." That is why burnout is closely linked to repeated rejections and impostor syndrome and why even people dealing with a modest amount of work can experience burnout. For example, repeated rejections can contribute to burnout when you feel that you are doing your absolute best, but are still being rejected. Likewise, impostor syndrome can cause burnout when you feel that your accomplishments are the product of external rather than internal factors. In the former case, it is the negative outcomes that feel out of your control. In the latter case, it is the positive outcomes that feel out of your control. In either case, it is the perceived lack of control that changes fatigue and exhaustion into the more extreme experience of burnout.

The most important thing to consider in dealing with burnout is that you are not the only one who experiences it. Judging from my conversations with peers, graduate students, and friends in the field, I can confidently say that pretty much everyone experiences burnout at some point in their career. Like many others, I went through a phase of serious burnout when I was a graduate student. In my case, it started when my research was not going well for a long period of time. Whenever I discussed my null results with more experienced researchers, their typical suggestion was "try this" or "try that," giving me the impression that I was doing something fundamentally wrong (remember that back then, null results were viewed much differently and had a much bigger stigma than they do today). But whatever I did, nothing made a difference, and I never reached a point where I had something to build on. When I finally got some promising data, the feedback I received from my mentors questioned the value of my original idea, so I was again left with nothing. Instead of thinking about research ideas, I became preoccupied with thoughts about how I could ever compete with all of the "smart people" whose CVs were so much better than mine. I felt overwhelmed, out of control, and burned out. I dreaded going into my office, but I felt guilty not going. When I did go, I could not concentrate and was unable to get anything done. Because I was so stressed out about work, I would wake up in the middle of the night and could not fall asleep again. Not being able to sleep further enhanced my feeling of exhaustion, my inability to concentrate, and the overwhelming feeling that I was unable to accomplish anything.

My conversations with graduate students and faculty lead me to suspect that these experiences sound very familiar to a lot of people. I do not know a single person in the field who did not go through a similar phase during graduate school. It often happens toward the end of graduate training, when people start thinking more about the job market and their future in the field. People ask themselves, "Will I get a job?" and "Am I able to compete with all of those smart people out there?" Having such a lack of control at this critical time of your career, compounded with being at the end of a long and intense training process (obtaining your PhD), is a common source of burnout.

Without experimental control and with a sample size of 1, it is difficult to say which of my coping strategies actually kept me sane in the end. But there are a few things that I have started doing to protect myself from experiencing burnout, and I found these strategies very helpful when I hit roadblocks later in my career (e.g., when I had to deal with longer phases when almost all of my manuscripts were rejected). And of course, people are different—what works for one person may not necessarily work for another person. So, these strategies may or may not work for you, but they might be worth a try.

First, I found it helpful to know that I was not alone. Virtually everyone I know has had experiences like I did at some point. It really helped me to know that a lot of famous psychologists had to deal with major setbacks in their careers, such as not getting tenure (e.g., Susan Fiske, Jamie Pennebaker), that could feed feelings of burnout. I doubt that any of these people were emotionally immune to the setbacks they experienced; they somehow persevered through them. Of course, knowing that other people have gone through similar phases in their career does not eliminate burnout, but it can give us a glimpse of hope when things are rough.

Second, it helped me to have physical space to recharge without being reminded of my work. There are some undeniable advantages of having the flexibility to work from home, but a major disadvantage is that one's home environment becomes "contaminated" with work-related associations. When a lot of things at home remind you of your work, it can be very difficult to find the distraction needed to recharge in times of exhaustion. I

personally appreciate having a work-free home for that reason.

Third, it is worth recognizing that "more work" does not always mean "more productivity." In my experience, the relation between the time I spend on my work and the actual outcomes of my work is more like an inverse U-shaped function. At some point, more time for work just leads to exhaustion, and exhaustion increases the amount of time I need to complete a given task (which can be a frustrating experience that contributes to further exhaustion). I found that giving myself time to recharge is an effective way to maximize efficiency, and being able to accomplish things in an efficient manner can be a rewarding experience that protects me from burnout when things are rough.

Finally, I would not underestimate the value of a good night's sleep. Although it may seem trivial, I found a lack of sleep to be detrimental in multiple ways. It contributes to feelings of exhaustion, reduces efficiency by increasing the amount of time needed to complete a given task, and undermines the regulation of negative emotions in response to upsetting experiences (e.g., rejections). I would not consider this recommendation groundbreaking or especially insightful, but our own research tells us that we often do not do what we know is good for us. I have found that good sleep can go a long way in protecting me from burnout before it starts, and being well rested can give me the lift I need to keep going.

I understand that these recommendations focus primarily on the person who is experiencing burnout, and thus could come across as "victim blaming"—putting the individual on the spot for creating solutions to a problem that may be driven by cultural or structural factors. But as mentioned in the opening of this commentary, the other coauthors and I provide individual recommendations because we all need ways to engage in self-care, even if cultural or structural change is the ultimate solution. So, what can happen at a structural or cultural level to decrease the likelihood of burnout happening for ourselves and others? For those of us in positions of authority, there is a lot we can do in our own labs, with students we mentor, or with students in our classes. As a first step, I think we should be mindful to not set potentially toxic expectations. If we expect our graduate students to work an excessive number of hours every day, including weekends and holidays, it is not surprising that many of them experience burnout. If we expect our graduate students to work while they are on vacation, we should not be surprised that they feel "at the end of their rope" halfway through our graduate programs. Giving ourselves time to recharge is not the same as being lazy or being a slacker, and we as mentors have the ability to reinforce this type of thinking for our students.

I also think it is important as people in positions of authority to remind ourselves why we decided to pursue an academic career, and not to confuse the means with the ends, so we can set our expectations accordingly. I decided to pursue an academic career because I love research and doing what I love makes me happy. If an academic career comes with the requirement that I accept a lot of things that make me unhappy (despite the opportunity to do research), an academic career has lost its purpose for me. If I lost sight of this end purpose, I might also lose sight about how my students have their own end goals and their own priorities, which need to be respected. Unfortunately, I have witnessed a tendency among many graduate mentors to lose sight of the end goals, believing that an academic career is all that matters and that everything else is secondary (e.g., spending time with family and friends). This tendency exists in many parts of the world, but I found it particularly common in the United States. Accepting that most people have multiple goals and that people differ in terms of what makes them happy might be a helpful step toward creating an academic environment that leads to less burnout and more happiness.

Lisa Jaremka's perspective

I have struggled with burnout at multiple points of my career. My first major bout of burnout was as a graduate student, preparing to finish my dissertation. I was overwhelmed with data collection, attending meetings, writing my dissertation, and a million other tasks, and I felt that my to-do list was getting longer each day rather than shorter. I started an unhealthy sleeping pattern in an effort to catch up; I would nap from about 9:00 to 11:00 p.m., get back up to work from about 11:00 p.m. to 3:00 a.m., and then sleep again from about 3:00 to 8:00 a.m. My lack of sleep only further contributed to feeling overwhelmed and burned out. I was so fatigued that I worked inefficiently and made needless mistakes along the way, often spending more time on a task than I would have in a non-burned-out state. Being a first-generation college student, I also felt an intense pressure to succeed, which further fueled the imbalance I was experiencing between work and the rest of my life. I felt like I had to succeed, and that success was contingent upon my performance as a graduate student rather than other domains of my life. Thankfully, after getting my PhD, I started a postdoctoral position that provided me with a healthy work–life balance. My postdoctoral mentor ran her lab more like a business than any academic setting I had experienced thus far, requiring me to be in the lab from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, but also explicitly opening nights and weekends to be work-free. I felt like a "real"

person for the first time in a long time. And transitioning from feeling burned out to having a healthy relationship with my work highlighted how academia often fosters burnout via extremely high expectations for productivity, huge demands on our time, and a culture of regularly working on weekdays, at night, and on the weekend.

My second major bout of burnout has been as an assistant professor at the University of Delaware, a journey that is (hopefully) nearing completion as I gear up for the tenure process. The demands on a typical assistant professor at an R1 institution foster burnout. Starting a new position in a new city where I did not know anyone, I had to set up my lab; hire a lab manager, graduate students, and research assistants; begin data collection; finish writing manuscripts from my postdoctoral position while also starting new manuscripts; write grants; and so forth. Along the way, I was lucky to have a supportive department with helpful and kind colleagues who truly cared about my success. Not all assistant professors are as fortunate, which significantly contributes to the demands of the job, so I am thankful for being around supportive colleagues. At first, I managed to have some semblance of work–life balance, and I was feeling fairly proud of my ability to do my job and not feel burned out at the end of the day. But then demands outside of work increased substantially. In the span of 6 months during my second year, four people in my family passed away, including my younger brother-in-law, who unexpectedly died of a drug overdose.

Right around this time, I was diagnosed with infertility, which required me to see a physician multiple times per week, have multiple surgeries, and take various medications. Although infertility is not life threatening, it consumed a significant amount of emotional and physical energy. My husband and I were finally ready to start a family, financially and emotionally, but we were unsure whether we would ever be able to conceive a child of our own. And it did not help that most people do not understand infertility as a medical diagnosis and offer all sorts of unwanted and unhelpful advice. There were the people who implied that it was my fault for supposedly prioritizing my career over having children. I heard this type of comment directed toward me and other women many times, but never once toward a male colleague. Even though I had experienced sexist comments before, this one really hurt because the infertility diagnosis was such an emotional and sensitive topic. And then there were those who told me to "just relax" and I would get pregnant, as if an actual medical problem diagnosed by medical specialists can simply be "relaxed away."

Needless to say, these and other comments wore on me over time, contributing to my feeling that I was at the end of my rope. More broadly, these personal experiences really shifted how I related to my work in many ways. Whereas I might have been "keeping my head above water" before, these new demands quickly spiraled into my feeling overwhelmed, out of control, and burned out. In theory, I could have taken a leave of absence as these and other significant personal stressors all unfolded. But as the primary breadwinner in my marriage, that was financially out of the question. And given my intense desire to succeed as a first-generation college student, this was also emotionally out of the question. Life as a successful scientist at a research-intensive university does not always leave room for personal demands. At times, it has felt impossible to maintain productivity while also balancing these personal issues, and yet the tenure clock keeps ticking. The tenure clock does not care about the struggles you might be experiencing, either within or outside of work. It just keeps ticking, and ticking, and ticking. This speaks directly to the fact that aspects of academic culture foster feelings of burnout (or impostor syndrome; see above). Academic culture needs to change not only to destigmatize the experiences of rejection, impostor syndrome, and burnout, but also to make these experiences less common.

With that in mind, I think it is critical that people in positions of power (e.g., people teaching classes, principal investigators, office members in professional societies) make a concerted effort to improve the culture of academia for their mentees and their colleagues. There is huge potential for cultural change (or even structural change, for those of us in administrative positions) if academics in these authority roles actively and purposefully try to change things for the better. For example, I actively try to prevent burnout among the doctoral students in my lab. We regularly discuss taking time off and setting boundaries around our work. In fact, as we prepare for either winter or summer break, I ask not only about their research plans during those times but also which week or weeks they are planning to take off from work. And if they think they are too busy to take time off, I push them to reconsider and remind them about the importance of life outside of work. I also model this behavior by having clear boundaries myself, including taking time off during winter and/or summer break.

There is so much more than can be done to address burnout in academia at a broader level. For instance, standards for obtaining a job and getting tenure at an R1 institution are incredibly high these days, with expectations that far supersede what was expected of our predecessors. With that in mind, it is no surprise that so many early career researchers experience burnout! These expectations could be improved, for

example, by having search or promotion committees focus on quality over quantity of publications and adjust grant expectations to match the current limited-funding climate. It is hard to overstate how significant these bigger-picture cultural and structural changes could be for the experience of burnout in academics' everyday lives.

There are also individual-level strategies I use to cope with burnout. I find it helpful to identify what my burnout is telling me, as if it were a person speaking out loud; it always has interesting things to say. For example, it likes to tell me that I would be happier if I got a part-time retail job because it would be easier, and I would get to clock out at the end of my shift and leave my work at work. There are multiple flaws in this logic, of course, including the assumption that retail jobs are easy and that I am obligated to take work home with me as an academic. But then again, my burnout is not logical! Recognizing that my burnout fuels these thoughts helps in a few ways. First, it helps me to realize that I need to engage in self-care to reduce my burnout. Second, it forces introspection, so that I think through why I am having those thoughts and how I might modify my work environment accordingly (such as deciding to have a work-free home, as Bertram suggested above).

Like the other authors of this article (and most academics), I have also experienced impostor syndrome at various points in my career. Relatively recently, I realized that my burnout was fueling my impostor syndrome. I noticed that as my burnout subsided a bit, so did my impostor syndrome. And then, when my burnout flared up, my impostor syndrome did too. This critical realization helped me identify the source of the problem. Rather than struggling to cope with my impostor syndrome, I needed to engage in self-care to reduce my burnout and thus "kill two birds with one stone." I highly recommend that you engage in some introspection as well. What is your burnout telling you? Does feeling burned out make you more vulnerable to feeling insecure and like an impostor? Or perhaps the direction goes in reverse for you, such that feeling like an impostor feeds your burnout. A little introspection can go a long way, and achieving that introspection by talking with a professional therapist can help tremendously. I have certainly benefited from therapy at various points in my life.

Finally, I also recommend setting explicit boundaries around your work to combat burnout. This could mean different things to different people. For me, it means that I do not work on Saturdays except in very extreme circumstances, and I do not get e-mail notifications on my phone. For other people, it means stopping work by a specific time in the evening or having a work-free home environment. There are many forms that boundaries can take, so find one that works for you and stick with it as diligently as possible. You might be surprised by how having boundaries immediately increases your sense of control, thereby reducing burnout.

Molly Metz's and William Ryan's perspectives

We are early-career psychologists with teaching-focused academic positions. We also happen to be married. Following are our experiences with burnout, as informed by our training, our relationship, and the ways in which our identities shape how we navigate academia.

Molly: Although we come from the same graduate program and have the same job title at the same institution, Will's and my personal and professional backgrounds differ in ways that have meaningfully contributed to our experiences with burnout. Will's parents both have advanced degrees, whereas I come from a single-parent household and am the first in my family to earn a 4-year degree. Although I have always known that I wanted to be a teacher of some kind, perhaps because I am a first-generation college student, I have long struggled with self-doubt and questions about whether I belong in academia.

Will: Wanting to be an academic has been one of the few constants about my identity. This identity preceded my identity first as a lesbian, and then as the transgender man I am now. For as long as I can remember, I have wanted to be a professor, and as a professor's child, I have always felt at home in academic environments. Although my background has certainly served as a source of privilege, the centrality of this identity to my sense of self may have intensified the impact of burnout on my well-being. Molly and I have been navigating the ups and downs of our careers together for a few years, and although it has been a struggle to integrate and balance our relationship and career goals, the process has ultimately brought clarity and richness to both.

Molly: I entered graduate school feeling passionate about teaching and was fortunate that my advisor enthusiastically supported my passion. However, I was not always met with such support. Sometimes, the negative remarks were explicit; other graduate students would complain about their teaching-assistant duties and ask, "Who cares about teaching, anyway?" Or there was the faculty member who said to me with a smile, "Wow, you're lucky—if you'd said you were interested in teaching during an interview with me, you never would have been accepted to the program!" Sometimes the digs were more subtle, which of course led me to question my own

perception of events, such as when faculty members would fall asleep or work on paperwork during my research talks. These experiences wore on me over time. Even in the best of circumstances, it is difficult for graduate students to avoid comparing themselves with their peers, and via social comparison, it was evident that I was not achieving success by the narrow standards of my research-focused colleagues. I was winning teaching awards, training teaching assistants in the department and across campus, and receiving stellar student evaluations, but I had no first-author publications, had received no research fellowships, and did not attend any prestigious training programs. I know now that there are multiple ways to be "successful," but this was not evident in my research-focused program. Not meeting these standards of success was mentally exhausting and contributed to my doubts about whether I belonged in academia. I was constantly being reminded that the thing I valued (had and continue to value) more than anything else in the world was a mere job requirement for most, something they had to do as the price for getting to do the "real work" of research.

More than once, I considered leaving graduate school; I was tired, depressed, and unsure I would ever feel like I belonged. One major deterrent to taking even a short leave to take care of myself was my financial situation. In addition to needing to take out loans to make rent (even given my stipend), I also did not have much of a safety net, no savings or family money on which to rely nor a "family home" to which I could return. Taking time to heal was simply not an option. I reached out to a former student of my program, who had left after the fourth year, to ask what led to that decision, and the student expressed similar experiences of feeling unmoored and uncertain. The major difference, though, is that the student was not sure whether the struggle was worth it and no longer knew the purpose of continuing. Despite all of my anxieties, I never questioned that I wanted to be a university professor; the path I was on was the best path to that destination, and this is what I reminded myself during tough times. I do not think this certainty is necessary for success, and I know not everyone feels certain all the time, but thinking more deeply about what we want and what we are willing to take on to achieve that is never a bad idea. Although my passion for teaching contributed heavily to my experiences of self-doubt, it was also what kept me afloat when feelings of burnout arose.

Will: I did not begin graduate school with the same passion for teaching that Molly had. Because my goals were focused on research at the time, my graduate experience and sources of burnout were different. Whereas others I knew struggled with whether they belonged in graduate school or were capable of high-quality research, everyone seemed to assume not only that I would achieve these outcomes but also that somehow I already had the tools I needed to do so. This led to a different source of impostor syndrome as I tried to keep up with expectations. By the end of graduate school, I was suffering from severe burnout, partially fed by the impostor feelings I had been experiencing. On paper I was doing well, but in reality I was miserable. This disconnect told me that succeeding at research was not enough to be fulfilling on its own; I needed to find something else to motivate me. I also had recently been diagnosed with a chronic illness exacerbated by stress, and I just could not maintain the same pace without taking care of myself. Recognizing the importance of health and social connection is what allowed me to prioritize these needs over my research career. My past self would resent me for saying this, but this dark period ultimately served as a source of growth.

It was during this time that I discovered my passion for teaching. Even when I was at my sickest and feeling most burned out, I found the energy to do my teaching-related duties and spend time mentoring research assistants. The fact that I was able to do these things and found them revitalizing told me that I found teaching intrinsically motivating. This makes sense in retrospect; it was fulfilling basic psychological needs that were not being fulfilled elsewhere, particularly competence and relatedness. With teaching comes connection and meaning in working with students, and clear immediate feedback from students about how you are doing. In many ways, burnout helped me to discover my love for teaching and to prioritize it, despite pressure to focus solely on research.

As I neared the end of graduate school, Molly was on the job market for the second time and we needed to consider our two-body plan. After 2 years of a long-distance relationship, burnout led me to make a professional decision I might not have made otherwise. Rather than applying to jobs "anywhere and everywhere," as I was urged, I chose to not apply at all, instead deciding to accompany Molly and look for work wherever she landed. Had I not felt so burned out, I may have given in to pressure to immediately look for a job rather than prioritize my relationship. I would also like to give some credit here to my experience as a trans man. When people are surprised that I placed our relationship over my career, I cannot help but think they would not find this to be remarkable were it Molly who had made this choice. Though one need not be trans to recognize how sexism operates in academia, being trans helps me to understand the ways in which gender is constructed and

enforced for everyone and to feel freer ignoring these pressures. Without a boyhood of messages telling me my worth is tied to my career, it was relatively easier to focus on finding meaning and well-being in my relationship rather than continuing to live with the major stressors that led to my burnout in the first place.

Molly: Deciding to move together to wherever my next job would be was simultaneously liberating and terrifying. Though I was thrilled with the prospect of being in the same city as my partner after 2 years, I also immediately felt the pressure of having the leading career. Even after securing a job in a major city with multiple universities, I was overcome with the pressure of being the primary income earner for 2 years and the stress of being the reason we had so much student-loan debt to contend with. Any stress Will had, well, it was my fault because we were here for my job (at least it felt that way)! After a lifetime of putting others' needs before my own (due in no small part to my own gender socialization toward prioritizing the feelings and experiences of others), it is still a challenge to take the lead.

Will: When people talk about the challenges of being a dual-career couple, they tend to focus on the mechanics—navigating long distance or finding a job in the same city or university—and those challenges are real and can certainly contribute to burnout. But there are also emotional and psychological challenges that we do not talk about as much. On one hand, because of our shared culture and training, each of us has a deeper understanding of what the other is going through and the challenges he or she is facing. On the other hand, we often face these challenges at the same time. Part of providing effective support is being able to put your own concerns aside and being fully present for the other person, but that can be difficult when you share those same concerns. It has been a struggle experiencing burnout simultaneously; although we can empathize with each other, it is also so hard to watch someone you love going through a difficult time but not feel equipped to attenuate their stress. It has also been difficult to maintain effective work–home separation. It is very easy to spend all of our free time working in each other's presence. The together part is great, but a healthy relationship also requires spending quality nonworking time together.

Molly: Just as Will's and my sources of burnout have varied from each other, some of our coping strategies have, as well. As Lisa and Bertram explained, it is almost impossible for me to disentangle the effects of impostor syndrome from those of burnout. When I am feeling burned out and my defenses are down, I lack the resources necessary to cope effectively. One of the most important ways that I take care of myself is with regular meetings with a trusted therapist. I cannot overstate the benefits of having someone to validate real concerns but call into question irrational ones, someone who is qualified to help me examine my unhealthy thinking patterns more deeply and see when I am being too hard on myself. I highly recommend therapy, although of course the right fit is key, and not everyone has the time or insurance coverage necessary to obtain quality care.

I have also benefited from distance from the initial location of burnout, both psychological and geographical. When I left graduate school, I had internalized years of doubt about the limits of my research skills and knowledge and was certain that research was not for me. After a few months in a new position and regular weekly meetings with new colleagues, I found myself feeling competent and creative again and have since started a new line of research.

Finally, I cannot overstate the benefits of having trusted others who can help bring perspective to your views of the world. In graduate school, this was having a social outlet with people completely unrelated to academia or psychology (i.e., a community choir). My first time looking for a job, it was meeting an incredible group of women at a conference who had recently been on the job market and had teaching-focused jobs similar to the one I hoped for. They helped me understand the strengths of my applications in a teaching-related context. Now, I find support in online communities of people with similar career goals and values (such as the Facebook group for the Society for the Teaching of Psychology). And of course, despite the challenges that being a dual-career couple brings, I would not trade for the world having an empathetic partner who deeply understands the challenges I face.

Will: At the end of graduate school, when my burnout was the worst I have experienced (so far), I had to use every coping tool I had and add several to my toolbox just to cross the finish line. I listened to guided meditations nightly, exercised regularly, spent time with friends, walked on the beach, and got a dog. I also benefited greatly from therapy. My therapist in graduate school helped me process my feelings and engage in active coping, but it was also she who pointed out that, given the stressors and lack of support I was describing, it was hardly surprising that I was feeling as burned out as I was. She helped me see that much of my distress was due to the system I was in, and that therefore I could not expect to fix it on my own. Instead, the goal was to cope long

enough to finish the program and move on and to advocate for cultural and systemic change if and/or when I had the ability to do so. I also cope with feelings of burnout by finding opportunities to help others in some way. In graduate school, it was my work at the Resource Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity and mentoring undergraduate research assistants and junior graduate students that gave me the sense of purpose and energy I needed to finish my degree. Now it is the students I teach and the industry work I do that gives me this sense of purpose.

Molly and Will: Though we value and respect all of the available advice for coping with challenges like burnout and impostor syndrome, we have become wary of the emphasis placed on individual coping strategies within academia and in our broader culture. Focusing on the individual prevents us from addressing the structural factors that are contributing to these all-too-common experiences. Would it not be nice to live in a world where people, graduate students and academics included, did not need to be so resilient? How can we change social structures to reduce this need? In academia, what if we could move away from the stereotype of the "good graduate student" being the one who stays overnight in the lab? How can we make it so that more people feel at home in academia? Rather than measuring academic success by the ability to clear a series of hurdles, what if those hurdles were replaced with scaffolding and we provided the support and resources to help people get to their destination? This might be achieved through funding packages that provide a living wage; programs that foster cooperation between areas or labs rather than competition; better program-wide training for academic skills (e.g., grant writing, journal reviews, teaching) so that there is not so much variability by advisor; better supports for coping and mental health, including mental health coverage by university health-insurance plans; or additional training aimed at helping graduate students better package their skills and apply them to nonacademic contexts. Think how far we could go and who else might make it out, thriving rather than just surviving. There is so much potential for structural changes to reduce the likelihood that people experience burnout in the first place.

Conclusion

Repeated rejection, impostor syndrome, and burnout are common experiences among academics. Despite the nearly universal nature of these experiences, many academics perceive a stigma associated with admitting that their manuscripts were rejected, they feel like a fraud, or they feel that they are at the end of their rope. The purpose of this commentary was to destigmatize these experiences by providing a collection of short personal stories and anecdotal lessons learned from scholars who have endured these experiences and lived to tell the tale. We hope that by sharing our stories, readers will see that they are not alone and that having these experiences is not a sign of some personal defect or problem. In fact, there are many cultural and structural factors that contribute to the omnipresence of repeated rejection, impostor syndrome, and burnout that are beyond many people's personal control. Thus, we highlight throughout the commentary a variety of structural and cultural changes that could reduce the negative impact of experiencing rejection and reduce the prevalence of impostor syndrome and burnout. We also highlight a variety of individual-level coping strategies that have been beneficial for us and that may help readers maintain their sanity as cultural and structural changes (hopefully) unfold. We summarize our individual-level and cultural and structural recommendations in Tables 1 and 2, respectively. We also highlight potential additional readings, both additional commentaries and reviews of scholarly work, in Tables 3 and 4 for those interested in learning additional perspectives.

We hope this commentary will be an impetus for additional research on these topics, specifically focused on the experience of academics. That being said, there is also ample social psychological research already available that can be applied within the ivory tower. For example, there is work on the efficacy of belongingness interventions in improving academic outcomes and well-being (Walton & Cohen, 2007, 2011). There is also research from self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) on how the support of basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) facilitates high-quality motivation rather than burnout. From affirming belongingness to building physical spaces that facilitate connection among colleagues, there is a lot we know already, and we encourage scholars to think about ways of applying existing work to understanding repeated rejection, impostor syndrome, and burnout, in addition to conducting new research.

In conclusion, repeated rejection, impostor syndrome, and burnout are common experiences among academics. The goal of this commentary is to normalize these struggles and help people feel more comfortable sharing their own stories. We encourage fellow academics to further destigmatize these experiences by sharing their own stories and/or paths to overcoming rejection, impostor syndrome, and burnout with others.

Table 3. Other Commentaries and Opinion Pieces Relevant to Rejection, Impostor Syndrome, or Burnout

Rejection

- *They're Just Not That Into Your Research: Rejection in Academia*
  https://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/rejection-in-academia
- *The Silent Majority: manuscript Rejection and Its Impact on Scholars*
  https://journals.aom.org/doi/abs/10.5465/amle.2010.0027
- *Why Is Academic Rejection So Very Crushing?*
  https://www.chronicle.com/article/Why-Is-Academic-Rejection-So/146883

Impostor syndrome

- *Impostor Syndrome Is Definitely a Thing*
  https://www.chronicle.com/article/Impostor-Syndrome-Is/238418
- *"You Don't Belong" and Other Myths WOC Ph.Ds Believe*
  http://theprofessorisin.com/2019/05/24/you-dont-belong-and-other-myths-woc-ph-ds-believe-woc-guest-post/
- *Never A Fraud: Combating Impostor Syndrome*
  https://tenureshewrote.wordpress.com/2015/02/23/never-a-fraud-combating-imposter-phenomenon/

Burnout

- *Pithy Burnout Prevention*
  https://science.sciencemag.org/content/365/6448/22
- *Beat the Burnout*
  https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/gradhacker/beat-burnout
- *When Passion Leads to Burnout*
  https://hbr.org/2019/07/when-passion-leads-to-burnout
- *4 Ideas for Avoiding Faculty Burnout*
  https://www.chronicle.com/article/4-Ideas-for-Avoiding-Faculty/243010
- *The 40-Year-Old Burnout*
  https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-40-Year-Old-Burnout/237979
- *Battling Burnout: Cultivating an Atmosphere of Self-Care in Education*
  https://www.higheredjobs.com/Articles/articleDisplay.cfm?ID=1994

Mental health

- *Why We Need to Talk More About Mental Health in Graduate School*
  https://www.chronicle.com/article/Why-We-Need-to-Talk-More-About/247002
- *Stigma, Stress, and Fear: Faculty Mental-Health Services Fall Short*
  https://www.chronicle.com/article/Stigma-StressFear-/237353
- *Mental Health Crisis for Grad Students*
  https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/03/06/new-study-says-graduate-students-mental-health-crisis

Recommendations for cultural change

- *Ten Simple Rules Towards Healthier Research Labs*
  https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pcbi.1006914
- *Advice on Advising: How to Mentor Minority Students*
  https://www.chronicle.com/article/Advice-on-Advising-How-to/245870
- *3 Ways Colleges Can Help Faculty Members Avoid Burnout*
  https://www.chronicle.com/article/3-Ways-Colleges-Can-Help/243134

Note: This is a list of potential additional readings relevant to the topics covered in this article. The authors do not necessarily endorse or advocate for any of the views expressed in these additional readings; we provide the list as a way to learn about additional perspectives on these important topics.

Table 4. Reviews of Scholarly Work About Rejection, Impostor Syndrome, or Burnout

Impostor syndrome

- *The Mentoring and Induction of Educators of Color: Addressing the Impostor Syndrome in Academe*
  https://doi.org/10.1177/105268461102100405

Burnout

- *Antecedents, Correlates and Consequences of Faculty Burnout*
  https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2018.1461573

Burnout and mental health

- *Examining the Factors Impacting Academics' Psychological Well-Being: A Review of Research*
  http://doi.org/10.12735/ier.v5n1p13

Cultural and structural changes and mental health

- *The PhD Experience: A Review of the Factors Influencing Doctoral Students' Completion, Achievement, and Well-Being*
  https://doi.org/10.28945/4113

Note: This is a list of potential additional readings relevant to the topics covered in this article. The authors do not necessarily endorse the research reviewed in these articles; we provide this list as a way to learn about additional perspectives on these important topics.

Appendix

JOSHUA M. ACKERMAN

CURRICULUM VITAE DEFECTUM

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES NOT OFFERED

2000 Ph.D., University of California, Santa Barbara
University of Texas, Austin

1998 Ph.D., 5 I/O Psychology programs I can't remember

ACADEMIC POSITIONS MOSTLY GHOSTED

2009 84 Faculty openings (25 Psychology, 59 Marketing)
Campus visit fails (Marketing): University of Michigan, University of Chicago, University of Miami

2007 51 Faculty openings (Psychology)
Campus visit fails: Michigan State
6 Postdoctoral searches

GRANTS & FELLOWSHIPS THANKSED BUT NO THANKSED

External Funding

2018 NSF (x2)

2018 Russell Sage Research Grant

PAPERS REJECTED

Total = 43

Almost 50% of all rejections came from 3 papers (2 of which were dropped)

2019 Nature Human Behavior, JPSP, Psychological Science, SPPS

2018 JPSP, QJEP, Evolution & Human Behavior, Journal of Marketing Research

2017 JPSP, Journal of Marketing, Journal of Public Policy and Marketing

2016 JPSP, JEP:G, Journal of Consumer Psychology, International Journal of Research in Marketing, Journal of Consumer Research, Journal of Language and Social Psychology, Journal of Marketing Research

2015 JPSP, Cognition, Communication Research, Language, Cognition & Neuroscience, Journal of Consumer Research

2014 JEP:G, Psychological Science, Journal of Consumer Research, Journal of Marketing, Journal of Marketing Research

2013 JEP:G, Psychological Science, Journal of Consumer Psychology, Journal of Consumer Research

2012 JEP:G, SPPS, Psychological Science, Journal of Consumer Research

2011 JPSP, Psychological Science, SPPS, Journal of Consumer Research

2010 Science, Journal of Marketing Research

2008 JPSP

CONFERENCES POLITELY DECLINED

2018 SPSP (single-paper)

2017 SPSP (single-paper)

2014 SPSP (symposium)

2011 Society for Consumer Psychology (symposium)

2010 SPSP (symposium)

2009 Society for Judgement and Decision-Making (symposium)

Transparency

Action Editor: Laura A. King
Editor: Laura A. King
Author Contributions

L. M. Jaremka, J. M. Ackerman, B. Gawronski, N. O. Rule, K. Sweeny, and L. R. Tropp participated in the initial Society for Personality and Social Psychology (SPSP) symposium. M. A. Metz, L. Molina, W. S. Ryan, and S. B. Vick were added after the initial SPSP symposium. All of the authors are listed alphabetically by surname but each contributed equally to the manuscript.

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ORCID iDs

Lisa M. Jaremka https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7043-1215
Joshua M. Ackerman https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6322-2194
Kate Sweeny https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6653-422X

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