



Counseling & Testing Center

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The LGBTQIA Group meets Tuesdays at 4:30 p.m. in Potter Hall, Room 409. For more information, contact brian.lee@wku.edu.

Don't hate me because I am beautiful

By Dr. Karl Laves

Okay, I hate that sentence, the title above. It comes from a television commercial in which a model is sharing that her beauty doesn't come easily, it requires a special shampoo (huh?) so we shouldn't hate her for being beautiful. I used to think this was just some creative advertiser's way to cash in on vanity and jealousy... let's forbid people to hate beautiful people (because we do) but also imply that using a particular shampoo could make us the kind of person that is hated for being beautiful.

Then I grew up; I grew up because I met some actual real people who were beautiful in a stereotypical, fashion-industry manner who really did think they were not attractive. Just like I started meeting people who really were bright who didn't think they were that bright. And I met people who could really sing who didn't think they were that good at singing.

We call this the imposter syndrome (IS). People who are good at something but see themselves as just average, or at least not as good as their talent suggests. The imposter syndrome is sort of the opposite of the Krueger-Dunning effect; remember that one? We talked about it in last month's newsletter. Simply put, some people are not good at something, but think they are, while some people are good at something but think they are not. With the Krueger-Dunning effect, you have people who don't know, don't know they don't know, but think that they know. It is like they are too "dumb" to know they are dumb; in fact, they are dumb enough to think they are smart. With the imposter syndrome you have the

opposite; people are so bright that they understand that there are always limitations to being bright so they see themselves as less capable or bright.

The upside of the imposter syndrome is that it keeps those who suffer with it humble. People with imposter syndrome (IS) tend to not have fat heads. Conversely, a lot of fat headed people are examples of KD. The downside of IS is that people who have it tend to doubt themselves, second guess themselves, and put themselves last.

Where does it come from? Good question. But one major cause is that some people were raised to be modest, humble, and sensitive. And some people were raised to understand that no matter how much you know, there is always someone who knows more. Now mix those messages, those life experiences with the entitled and histrionic goofiness known as American society where self-promotion, self-gratification, and self-celebration are mainstream values. Is it any wonder some of us get confused along the way?

First, we are told it isn't whether you win or lose, it is how you play the game; then we are scolded for not winning the game. We are told to focus in school and work hard; then we watch the elite rich kids leave school during the day for special trips. We are told to honor our parents and respect our elders, and then we watch our parents cheat on each other and our elders double dip their salaries. So it kind of makes sense that some of us grow up to have IS. We are smart enough to know that we know what we know but we have been encouraged to not brag about it so that those who want to brag about it can get away with it.

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Star's Report

Hi, everyone! April is a busy month around here with Sexual Assault Awareness events, and I've already been on a TV spot with Elizabeth. Did you see me on Midday Live March 30, hamming it up? Come on out to the events, together we can make a difference!



Star poses for the camera (Far left). The Counseling & Testing Center's Elizabeth Madariaga and Star discuss Sexual Assault Awareness Month activities during "Midday Live" on WBKO March 30.

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I think those of us with IS have probably had more than our fair share of people around us that play head games. You know, those people who seem to praise you for your effort but also leave you feeling like you could have done more? You know, those people who are really good at getting you to do their work for them, and when you object, they accuse you of being selfish? These are the people that are really good at head games. They know when to praise, when to chide, when to bribe, and when to scold. Nothing is their fault, they are only here to help because they care, and any loose money always ends up in their pockets.

I might argue that IS is nothing more than a healthy attempt to not become one of the takers, one of the head game players. If I go through my adult life doubting myself I am pretty sure I won't ever take advantage of someone. The problem, obviously, is that the world never gets to see me in my full potential; I take myself out of the game too soon.

So in a nutshell, how do you "overcome" IS? First you have to own it, you have to claim it. Then you have to commit to taking small risks to break out of the habit of doubting yourself. To do this you have to go ahead and do things you would usually avoid. You will still doubt yourself but go ahead and do it anyway. This is only way you get over your fear of

being harmful to others. It is like getting over any other fear; you want to be able to get in the water, then you have to get in the water. You could spend five years reading self-help books about water; you could watch sixty hours of swimming videos, you could journal all your deepest and heaviest thoughts about buoyancy...but the fastest way to get over the fear of water is to jump in the water. You don't have to jump in the deep end of the pool, but you do have to jump.

Find fellow IS sufferers and become one another's coaches. Hold each other accountable for taking action even if you feel doubt. And while you are helping each other, notice how we so often give advice that we won't follow ourselves. How can you expect your friend to take risks if you won't?

Finally, check out the counseling center, faculty development programs, and wellness programs on campus. You might find support groups for IS or related groups like Assertiveness Training. Hey, you really want to step in it? Call the counseling center and tell them you want an IS support program/group. You help round up the people and we will offer the programs. But for crying out loud stop beating yourself because you have IS...it isn't a weakness; you have it because you don't want to hurt people. That is honorable; but you get to honor yourself too. Take it from a fellow sufferer.

Eating For Me Group meets Mondays

If you struggle with eating issues of any kind, whether an eating disorder, emotional eating, bingeing, or just an unhealthy relationship with food, you are invited to participate in this support group for students.

The group meets every Monday at 3 p.m., in Room 2113 of the Downing Student Union.

This group is co-sponsored by Betsy Pierce, Counseling and Testing Center and Brandi Breden, WKU Registered Dietician. For more information, please contact Betsy Pierce at betsy.pierce@wku.edu.