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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Join the Counseling & Testing Center staff for a month of activities for Sexual Assault Awareness Month. The first event, “Love the Way You Lie,” was held at the Downing Student Union, March 29. SAAM activities kick into high gear Monday, April 4 with activities beginning at 10 a.m., at the Downing Student Union and a proclamation signing at 1 p.m. Come enjoy a variety of activities including opportunities for selfies with Big Red, President Gary Ransdell and Star, the CTC Therapy Dog.
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!

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.