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**A SEAT AT THE TABLE: WHY YOU DESERVE IT, BUT YOUR BRAIN
MIGHT BE TELLING YOU OTHERWISE**

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A SEAT AT THE TABLE: WHY YOU DESERVE IT, BUT YOUR BRAIN MIGHT BE TELLING YOU OTHERWISE



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[October 25, 2021](#) by [Jonathan Ibarra Paz](#) [comments \(0\)](#)

MY PERSONAL STRUGGLE WITH IMPOSTER SYNDROME

As a queer person of color, it took me a long time to come to terms with my sexuality. Until recently, I was not proud of being gay; I was deeply ashamed of who I was. No matter what I accomplished in my life, my accomplishments were never good enough because, at the end of the day, I was still gay; and being gay meant I would never be good enough.



Justin

Martin from Pixabay.

Through the lens of my own experience with imposter syndrome, as a queer person of color, I highlight the challenges many queer people of color, myself included, battle to establish ourselves in the legal field. I will also provide methods that, if implemented, would help to improve the success rate of queer people of color within the legal profession.

Gay – I was gay. I did not choose to be gay; I just was. I knew I was different as far back as I can remember, but my sexuality was never really the issue. I never thought that whom I was attracted to would cause so much harm to my self-esteem. I was wrong – very wrong.

It was middle school when my sexuality did become an issue. I never told anyone I was gay, but other kids assumed I was. I was constantly being pushed around by the other guys because of those assumptions. I was also made fun of because my voice “sounded gay.” There was not one day where my sexuality did not lead to some kind of bullying.

My suffering did not end there; my home life also took a toll on my mental health. My father suspected that I was not the stereotypically masculine, conventionally straight son he wanted.

He constantly reminded me how much I disappointed him. My father wanted a soccer-playing son. Instead, he got me. He wanted a son with a masculine baritone voice, but he thought I sounded too feminine and talked with my hands too much. He wanted a son who was *one of the guys*, but almost all of my friends were girls. He was the person I had looked up to more than anyone else in my whole life, and he betrayed me. I was only fourteen; I did not know how to cope with everything that was happening. I went into a depression so deep that I contemplated suicide, then I saw my inability to go through with it as another failure.

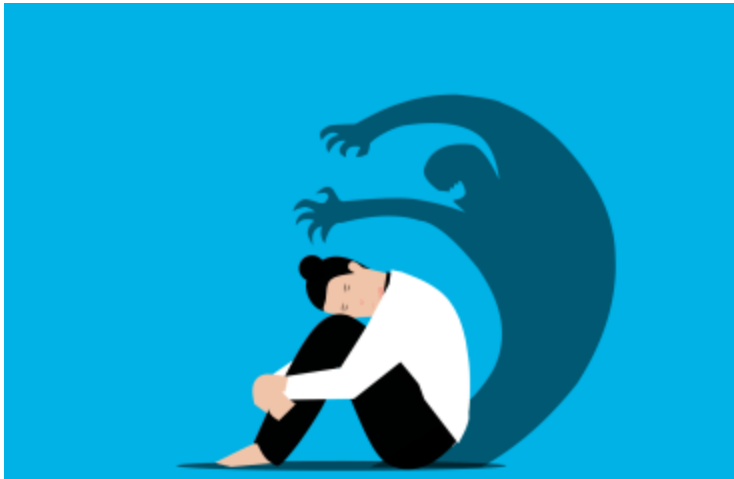
As a teenage boy who only wanted acceptance, bullied by both my peers and my father, I struggled to maintain any sense of self-esteem. I hated myself because others thought I was not good enough, and they thought I was not good enough because I was gay, so – of course – I learned to root my self-hatred in my sexuality. All I wanted was to be *normal*, but as long as I was gay, normalcy would never be within my grasp. As a result, I became very self-conscious and did everything within my power to avoid coming across as gay. Coming out was not an option for me, so I decided to move forward with my life without revealing my sexuality to anyone. I was terrified that coming out would only lead to losing more people in my life.

Regardless of the issues I faced both internally and externally regarding my sexuality, I still managed to succeed. I graduated high school, received an associate's degree, a bachelor's degree, landed a job in the legal profession, passed the LSAT, and got accepted into law school on a scholarship. Yet, despite all the progress I made in my education and career, I felt like none of my accomplishments mattered because I was still gay. My imposter syndrome was fueled by my inability and refusal to accept myself for who I really was.

WHAT IS IMPOSTER SYNDROME?

“Are you frequently worried about making mistakes and frustrated because your work is not perfect?” Do you suspect you will never be smart enough or good enough no matter how successful you already are? Do you often attribute your success to luck, chance, or anything else except your own talent and hard work?” If you answered yes to any of these questions, it could indicate that you suffer from imposter syndrome.

Imposter syndrome can be described as, an internal experience of intellectual phoniness... result[ing] in people feeling like they lack the skills, knowledge, and/or competence to do their jobs despite years of education, training, and recognition. Three characteristics often associated with imposter syndrome are: 1) denial of competence and inability to internalize success; 2) feelings of phoniness; and 3) fear of being exposed as a fraud.



mohamed

Hassan from Pixabay.

According to psychologists Pauline R. Clance and Suzanne A. Imes, about 70% of Americans suffer from imposter syndrome. Although imposter syndrome is not an actual diagnosis, it can contribute to mental health issues like anxiety and depression.

Unfortunately, minorities, people of color, and people from the LGBTQI+ community are often underrepresented in clinical studies despite the 1993 National Institutes of Health Revitalization

[Act](#) mandating that racial and ethnic minorities be included in federally funded clinical research. As of today, not enough research has been done to give exact data on the number of people of color from the LGBTQI+ community who suffer from imposter syndrome. Despite the lack of statistical data, it is evident that people of color from the LGBTQI+ community nonetheless suffer its effects to an even greater degree than their cisgender, straight, and white counterparts.

IMPOSTER SYNDROME AND ITS CORRELATION TO THE LGBTQI+ COMMUNITY

While actual data regarding the LGBTQI+'s correlation with imposter syndrome is not readily available, there is data indicating that people from the LGBTQI+ community do, in fact, suffer from mental health issues at greater rates than their straight counterparts.

According to the [Anxiety & Depression Association of America](#), between 30 and 60 percent of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, or transgender people deal with anxiety and depression at some point in their lives. In addition, people from the LGBTQI+ community suffer from anxiety and depression at a 1.5 to 2.5 times [higher rate](#) than of their straight or gender-conforming counterparts.

Given that anxiety and depression are often symptoms correlated to imposter syndrome, it is evident that people of color from the LGBTQI+ would suffer from it at higher rates than their straight counterparts.

HOW CAN WE COMBAT THE CAUSES OF IMPOSTER SYNDROME WITHIN PEOPLE OF COLOR FROM THE LGBTQI+ COMMUNITY?



[mohamed Hassan](#) from [Pixabay](#).

While imposter syndrome manifests as a battle between an individual and their thoughts, there are many steps that can be implemented to combat its effects.

The first step is recognizing that [you suffer from imposter syndrome](#). Once you recognize that your thoughts are weighing you down, you can seek a mentor to reinforce the idea that those thoughts are not your reality. You can also normalize your struggles and come to realize that everybody struggles, even if it is not apparent to the naked eye. You can seek therapy to help pinpoint where exactly your negative thoughts originate from so that you can begin to heal from traumas you might have endured. While no single method is a cure-all that will work for everyone, it is

important to try different strategies and see what method will actually work for you.

COMBATING THE IMPOSTER SYNDROME WITHIN THE LEGAL FIELD

Imposter syndrome is exceptionally prevalent in people of color from the LGBTQI+ community within the legal field because this profession was not made for them. The legal profession was built for straight white males, not queer people of color.

According to the American Bar Association, White men and women are still overrepresented in the legal profession . . . In 2020, [86% of all lawyers](#) were non-Hispanic whites. Furthermore, a survey from 2018 found that [3,028 LGBT lawyers](#) at 910 law offices across the United States, representing 2.99% of the 101,222 lawyers the firm surveyed. The numbers do not lie, and it is evident that queer people of color are not proportionally represented within the legal field when compared to white straights.

The legal institution can help combat the imposter syndrome that is prevalent within queer people of color in the legal field by, “striv[ing] to [increase diverse representation](#) at all levels of the company,” from recruiting and hiring practices to equitable career opportunities and promotions. Furthermore, legal institutions can [make room for differing views](#) because cultural norms oftentimes exclude people. Additionally, legal institutions should [avoid tokenizing](#) queer people of color and burdening them with carrying the diversity in the firm. Instead, people of color from the LGBTQI+ community should be given the support and environment necessary to succeed.

CONCLUSION

Have I overcome my imposter syndrome? Unfortunately, the short answer is no, but at the age of 22, I finally came out, and I continue to work to overcome it to this day.



[allysonmiller1969](#) from [Pixabay](#).

While I have not defeated my imposter syndrome altogether – I do face it frequently – I always attempt to remind myself that I am doing big things and give myself credit because what I am doing is not easy. I am a first-generation queer law student who has been on the Dean's List every semester since I started my law school journey. I kept my scholarship, participated in a litigation boot camp, and am heavily involved in extracurricular activities. Despite doing all this, some days, I still don't feel like I am good enough. Although I hoped to overcome my imposter syndrome by coming out, I quickly realized it was still very much a part of my daily life.

To overcome my imposter syndrome, I sought help from professionals and now I regularly attend therapy. My therapist constantly reminds me of my tendency to overlook all the work I put into my accomplishments and fail to give myself the credit I deserve. It is effortless for me to speak highly of others, but I do the

complete opposite when it comes to myself. However, I am working towards becoming my own cheerleader.

Every day, I remind myself that visibility is essential, so if being outspoken about being gay and brown helps anybody else realize that they deserve a seat at the table, I have accomplished my mission. I want to help carve the path for others who might find my experiences relatable, and I will not stop until that path is paved and clear. Imposter syndrome is a very real part of the lives of many law students – particularly those who identify as queer or as people of color – but learning to manage it is an achievable goal.