Imposter Syndrome Podcast_mixdown.mp3

Voiceover 00:00:03] This podcast is brought to you by the University of Aberdeen.

Bekah [00:00:09] Hello and welcome to series two of our BeWell podcasts. I am Bekah Walker, your host, and I'm delighted to be here and bring you another jam-packed series. We will kick off the series today by discussing imposter syndrome and how to overcome it. We have had a lot of interest in this episode, and I am delighted to be joined by you all today. Before we get started, can we do some quick introductions, so our listeners know who you are and why you have volunteered to be part of today's episode?

Amanda [00:00:37] Hi, my name's Professor Amanda Lee, I am director of the Institute of Applied Health Sciences in the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition, and imposter syndrome is not only something that I have suffered from and still continue to suffer from occasionally throughout my academic career, but I also find that it's something that's really, prevalent among groups of academic and non-academics across the University. And I'm really keen that we all learn to know what it is and also how we can actually overcome or at least meet with it and accept it that it's part of life.

Meghan [00:01:12] Hi, I'm Meghan. I'm a fourth year English student, and I think this is the kind of resource that I would have benefited from in my first year when I didn't have a clue what imposter syndrome was but I was definitely experiencing it. So I really was keen to be a part of it. And I also was on the podcast series in the first series, and I really enjoyed it. So I'm really glad to be back today.

Ben [00:01:32] Hi, I'm Ben Kramer. I am a Ph.D. student in music composition. For me, imposter syndrome has been something that's kind of followed me since childhood, particularly being a musician in a field that is largely thought to be dying. So I was hoping that I could share a little bit of what I've dealt with and how I deal with it, and hopefully provide some help to everyone else.

Lucy [00:02:07] Hi I'm Lucy and I'm a first year Ph.D. student in archaeology. I've suffered from imposter syndrome all my life as well. And especially at university and because I'm a woman who's sort of in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, but not quite in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. So I've got like difficult feelings on that, and I think it's interesting to explore with other people.

Bekah [00:02:30] Awesome. Thank you guys so much for joining me. We've got such an array of expertise and specialists in the room, so it's absolutely fantastic for an episode like this. I'm really looking forward to this episode and discussing it with you guys, so thanks for giving up your time. So, what is imposter syndrome? It's often described as feeling like you are a fraud, doubting your own abilities and feeling like you're somehow going to be caught out at some point. Is this how you guys would describe imposter syndrome? And has it ever affected you guys? And do you feel that it's really prevalent in universities?

Ben [00:03:09] For me, at least, imposter syndrome struck me the hardest when I was doing my undergraduate, I had kind of a habit when I was a teenager of sort of following around my idols. I didn't listen to a lot of, you know, normal music that a lot of my friends did. Most of that had to do with not being able to afford CDs back then. So I always kind of looked elsewhere and there were a number of composers in Minnesota where I grew up, and they would often have concerts with local ensembles. And one of my mentors worked at my high school, invited us to a concert, and I got to hear this for the first time. So I would

go to these concerts, and I would email the composers kind of like a little fan and asking for their music. And then I started sending them music, and this just kind of carried on throughout the early part of my career. And I remember in undergraduate, I sat down with a teacher, and I asked for some feedback on a piece, and she pulled out the red pen and just started going through and saying, oh, well, this is ridiculous, et cetera. And I said, well, you know, I sent this piece to so-and-so, and they thought that this thing worked, and it was effective. And she just kind of stopped what she was doing and went on a little rant about how I was making the university look bad because someone who doesn't have their degree is attempting to stand on equal footing as professionals in my field. And I'll never forget that moment and what that kind of did to me, and it just followed me ever since. And just that idea of you're making not just yourself look bad, but you're making this institution look bad. You're representing your university poorly. And that's just stuck with me and that's the thing that I've been trying to escape ever since.

Meghan [00:05:40] I don't think I'd really came across the term impostor syndrome until my first year of university, at least. And if I had, I certainly didn't know what its definition was or that applied to me, but it definitely did. I think that's what I struggled with the most. I think for me, it's like a mixture of social comparison and feelings of self-doubt and paranoid like perfectionism, which is something I definitely have, and it's something that I think, it's when you become fearful that you will be exposed for being something that you are not, even though you are. Everyone else will just find out you're a fool, I think that's like its definition. But I think first of university, especially, is kind of a whirlwind of sensory stimulation and feeling overwhelmed because you're meeting so many new faces and you have to take in so much new information. And I think it's natural in that situation to compare like every inch of your life to the girl next door. So all of your peers, like people in your seminars and societies. So I think going into seminars in particular for me was when it would peak because you feel as though everyone else in the room has received this memo that you've somehow missed, and they somehow know so much more than you. And I think even though I'd sit there, I'd have read the book and I had done all of the preparation, and I couldn't have done any more work for it. I still sat there, and I was playing down my abilities and trying to question whether the university admissions team had made a mistake, and somehow, I was not meant to be there, and they'd let me in. So I always felt like I was in a room with people that knew so much more than me when it wasn't the case, it was just that I was letting the imposter syndrome and lack of confidence stop me from actually just joining in. And I think it can just sometimes lead to a lot of isolation and feeling disconnected, not just from other people, but from experiences and opportunities as well, which when you are in university, you should be kind of taking them and like diving in headfirst and even doing all of those things. So yeah, I think university students definitely in particular struggle with it a lot, but it's not spoken about, which is quite sad.

Amanda [00:07:36] My feelings of imposter syndrome, for me, started because I was the only one in the family that ever went to university, and so I did my first degree and then my master's degree, and it got to the stage that my family didn't really understand the pressures that students were under because I was the only one at university. And then I went and got my first research assistant job in the University of Dundee and was persuaded by one of my line managers to do my Ph.D. and it was just that feeling of, you know, someone was sitting on my shoulder ready to tap my shoulder and say, actually, you know, you're in the wrong place kind of thing. So I was a statistician in a very busy research unit, and I was trying to do a Ph.D. at the same time as doing my research post. I had three supervisors, all male, all clinical, one of them being the head of the unit and one being the deputy and one being a clinician in Glasgow. And so, I wrote up a Ph.D. Lots of

nights and weekends, and anyone familiar with doing a Ph.D. will testify to. And my two supervisors read subsequent draughts and I took on both their comments and everything. And I kept thinking, there's no way this is going to fly, you know, there's absolutely no way I'm going to get this Ph.D. This is just a bit of a waste of time kind of thing, but, you know, pursued it. And then I think my two supervisors said, I think it's ready to go in and we have the examiners lined up, and, at that point, the head of department, who I'd invited to all the supervisory meetings, and who never came to any of them. So I had a meeting with him, given him my Ph.D. he had it for about a month, and then he called me in to see him. And as I walked into his office, I'll never forget it. I walked in, I saw my Ph.D. on his desk, and he must've used four pads of post-it note pads throughout the Ph.D. I don't think there was a page without some post-it note pad on it, in all different colours. And it was quite pretty. But just that feeling of wow, this is the time, the fact you've been found out, you know, he's obviously got comments on this, not just one or two or three, but there's multiple, there's hundreds of them. And he literally asked me to sit down, threw my Ph.D. across his desk and said, I've no idea what this is. I don't know how you got your first two degrees, but you're certainly not going to get a Ph.D. from here. And I sort of kept control, I wanted to burst into tears, I didn't, I managed to say, well, where do I go from here? And he said, well, you need to think about this because I'm not even going to go through it, my comments are on there. And so I went back to my desk and eventually phoned my other two supervisors who said, just ignore him and just put it in, it's fine. But he's head of department, you know what he says goes kind of thing. No, no, just get it submitted. So it went in after a lot of persuasion. About two months later, I got called into my internal examiner, who was head of medicine in Dundee at that time, who said, I've been in conversation with your external examiner, who was in Ireland, and he's only got a couple of things to say. Basically, he said it's not worth the flight price of this flight to come over from Ireland to vie for your Ph.D. and he wants it passed without any changes. But, he said, I'm you're internal examiner and I've got a typo on one of the tables that I want you to correct, but I'm in complete agreement with him. But we have got a problem in that your head of department has basically said that he doesn't believe you should be awarded this without viva. But the university are actually seeing whether they can award it to you without viva. So it was a very nerve-wracking sort of couple of weeks after that, but I eventually got my letter through to say I've been awarded the Ph.D. without viva. And in the meantime, because of all the stress and everything, I had decided I was going to leave Dundee and get another job and I moved to Edinburgh University the day that I got my letter through to say it had been passed officially kind of thing, and I left the unit. And I did say at that time to anyone, you know, to my supervisors that I will never, ever make anyone feel the way I felt that time that he absolutely crushed me. It took me a while to get over it and to realise that, you know, I did have a career in academia. And I'm not saying that that was the end of it, you know, I still suffer even to this day, occasionally from imposter syndrome. That feeling of just, you know, someone's going to find me out. I now managed 240 staff and I absolutely and actively encourage them. I think that a few sort of have disbeliefs about imposter syndrome, that people think it's only for women and it's only women who suffer from it. Well, obviously that's not the case. A male just admitted to it today, and many of my colleagues think that it's a sort of an early mid-career student phenomenon as well in academia. But again, speaking to many of the senior management that I interact with on a daily basis, you know, there's many of them male, female, senior managers who suffer from this as well. And so, no, it's not just a student thing at all. And it's not a female thing. It's not in one particular part of society. I think it's across society. I think it's how you deal with it that makes the difference. And you know, the hints and tips that we will probably give you today, and, as many as we can, and that maybe we just come to terms with it. And I don't know that there's many people in society that can say

that they absolutely have never suffered from it. And I think it's particularly true, that there is a little bit of it in everybody.

Lucy [00:13:14] So I've suffered from imposter syndrome both personally and academically since I was very little. I think the other thing I've mentioned kind of to add is that I've had it like socially as well as just with my academics. So I'm neurodivergent and I've always felt like for me, imposter syndrome feels like not fitting in, not belonging and then not being adequate. So I always felt that throughout my childhood in school and then when I got to university, that was like exemplified, like amplified way out of proportion. I went to a different university for undergraduate, but undergraduate, I definitely felt it the most, especially since a lot of the people around me were privately educated and I was a state school student who'd had a really bad time during sixth form, and so basically the way I got into university was, I missed my grades, but I had this form that basically said all the things that had gone wrong during my sixth form experience with lack of teachers, etc, and they let me in on that. And everyone else had these super high grades where I went and I was just sat there like, I'm literally a fraud, I didn't get the grades, I shouldn't be here. And it took a lot of persuading from my professors and a very senior member of my university telling me, no, you're meant to be here, for me to get over that. But it was months before I even accepted that I was supposed to be at university. And it wasn't until I actually got my first year results that I finally accepted it fully, that I was supposed to be there. And it was the same as socially in first year of university. I missed so many opportunities to go to clubs or societies because I felt like I wasn't good enough to be there. I didn't get involved with the LGBTQ community because I felt like I wasn't gay enough to be there. So I've experienced it kind of in all aspects of my life, and I know a lot of people have as well. And it's put a lot of people in my life off of doing things because they felt they're not adequate. So I really want to kind of explore this and give some tips and tricks because I don't want anyone else to not do something because they feel like they've got this, this imposter syndrome going on.

Bekah [00:15:26] Thank you so much, guys, for sharing those experiences. So interesting to hear your stories and it's something that I suffered with a lot when I did my undergraduate degree, when I was at school, even through sports clubs and stuff. Feeling that you're not good enough to be part of that team or to perform that routine. And I had a very similar experience in my undergraduate degree. I got into university through college, so I did like a two plus two, and I certainly felt that I wasn't as smart as other people in my course because they came straight from high school and they had all those grades that they needed to get in, whereas I didn't get those grades. So I had to go down another route. So I always had that doubt that I'm just not good enough. I'm not going to pass. And even within my day job now, like even preparing for this podcast, it's quite ironic that I was like, I don't think I'm the right person to be hosting this episode, like, why am I doing this? So, it's really ironic that it's the sort of feelings that we have all the time. And as you say, it's so interesting. It's not just females at a given point in their career or at university, it can happen to anyone. And I think the interesting thing is that can happen to everyone at any level of their career as well. And that's something that does really help me to understand that it isn't just me. There are other people who are maybe further down in their career who are experiencing it as well and I think just kind of talking about it a little bit more can just make you feel a little bit better about it. So I think now we've kind of discussed what imposter syndrome is. I think it would be good to talk about where that comes from. So does it come from our personality traits? We've kind of touched on it a little bit, but does it come from our family backgrounds and our upbringings? Or is it a learned behaviour? What are your thoughts on where it comes from, is a combination of all three or is one more prevalent than the other? I'd be interested to hear what you guys think.

Ben [00:17:36] At least for me, I notice two main sources of the imposter syndrome just in my own experience, the one you mentioned earlier, neurodiversity, and for me, one of the things that really led to imposter syndrome when I was younger was masking, and that's something that I didn't even know was a thing until like last year. When I was young, I just figured, okay, I am just too weird and awkward, and people just don't really seem to know how to communicate with me, or maybe I just can't communicate with anyone else. So I'm just going to try and observe and copy behaviours. And oh, this person seems like they're getting what they want so maybe if I act like this, and I remember describing it to my parents and my friends as I just I don't feel like a person, I feel like my personality is something that I've just assembled and I'm pretending to be a person. And that kind of followed me along, you know, early on, because I never felt like my taste in anything was my own because it was just an amalgamation of the people around me. But more recently, I think the big driver and the big cause of imposter syndrome, or the perpetrator of imposter syndrome is what we face with social media. And there's this culture of selfless self-promotion, and it seems to be no matter what industry you work in, no matter your field, everyone has to be a either an entrepreneur or like a character in this story of social media. Even if you work a nine to five job and you have a clearly defined role, you go on social media and you see your colleagues and your co-workers, saying oh, I just completed this big project. Or maybe it's in their personal life, you know, these fantastic achievements and you're equal parts happy and excited and maybe a little envious, but then you kind of have to look at yourself and say, oh god, I mean, I would love to have appreciation for what I'm doing, but at the same time, how on earth can I put something out there and expect people to like it and appreciate it? And then I mean, for people like myself that are essentially self-employed or are going to have to be, you know, self-employed or reliant on ourselves to secure work in the future. It's so daunting to go up to people and try to sell myself. And I've heard equal parts good and bad advice about that, I've heard some professionals in my field say, you need to be just shameless. You need to have all these great things to say about yourself, and you need to walk into the room confidently, shout your name, make an impression and say that you are the greatest thing since sliced bread, and they will believe it and they will want to invest in you. And I have other friends and colleagues that have said the complete opposite. No, no, no, no, no. You don't want to do that; you need to be very humble. You let your work speak for itself, and you just do it that way. And then I end up doing both. I come in, I shout my name and then I don't leave my work behind for them to find, or I'll send them something but not follow up. Or it's just a terribly awkward situation to face in my own life or in my own work, a situation where I'm very clearly aware that I need to paint something as successful in a different light. If I completed a piece of work and I'm really proud of the accomplishment, I have to put it out there in a way that makes me seem financially successful because nobody wants to, you know, work with someone who isn't publishing a lot and selling a lot and getting a lot of work that way. They don't want someone who just writes a lot and puts a bunch of work out there, but it's never looked at, and it feels so, again, it feels like masking. It brings me right back to that for me to say, okay, well, I'm self-publishing this piece that I just finished. I probably will never hear it recorded or performed. Nobody might ever look at it again. But you know what? I self-published it, and I spent all this time editing it and making it look pretty. So I'll put a screenshot up and I'll type up a post and make it seem like it's going to sell really well or like it's very professional. But deep down, I know that I had to facilitate that, and I also feel like I'm the only one who ever has to do that. And everyone else has other people, you know, supporting them and other people singing their praises.

Lucy [00:23:26] I absolutely agree with everything Ben just said. I think LinkedIn is the most horrible thing in the world. Every time I go on there for, like when I was looking for

jobs before I started my Ph.D. and it was awful, just all of my friends posting these things about all these fabulous things they were doing, you know, the type of, I just started this, look where it's got me, aren't I great but also doing it humbly, so you can't really criticise them. I think that's something that I really struggle with especially because I'm not going down that path. I'm going down my own kind of academic roots, very niche and a bit weird to a lot of people because I do archaeological science which most people haven't even heard of. So I feel like I'm not supposed to be within these crowds because I'm not like them. And I think it's so much socially mediated. It's like social media, as Ben said, is such a big influence. Even just society, like when I was little, you expect to do certain things and to be popular, you expect to be a certain way. So all the way through life we have these expectations, and we feel like we're never meeting them. And then that kind of goes into university life because, you know, with your academics, your sat there like, I've got to get straight A's. I've got to do so well. I know no one could achieve that because, no one's perfect, but we've conditioned to think that we have to be perfect all the way through. And I think that it's a real struggle, but I think there is a level of personality to it as well. I've met people who've struggled less with imposter syndrome and people who struggle more, and it very much varies just on individuality how much we experience it. Everyone experiences it to some degree, but especially when you are neurodivergent. When I was little, I was very anxious, but I used to think that I just wasn't coping well with situations that everyone else copes with well, so I thought I didn't belong in that situation because I was just inadequate. And I think a lot of people feel that way as well, but don't necessarily realise it. So, yeah, I think it's personality, its societies, it's all of those thing's kind of combining to make this horrible situation.

Amanda [00:25:41] I think I would agree with that, I think trying to figure out where it comes from and whether it comes from one particular place is really difficult because I think there's a lot of confusion about what it is in terms of, you know, some people perceive it as, is it a lack of self-confidence or is it a lack of self-doubt? But it really goes a bit more deep rooted in that. And its that whole belief that you really aren't as good as everyone else thinks you are and so it prevents you from reaching your full potential kind of thing. And you know, we can have this sort of lack of confidence in certain things and when being put into unfamiliar situations and things. But as I say, I think it's more deep-rooted than that. So I think taking on board what other people have said that it's a whole combination of things. I think it can come from that whole childhood messaging or parenting and signals that you get from them, or if you've got an older sibling or another sibling that's excelled in something and you know, you're always trying to strive to that level, whether that's academic or not. And then how your parents then, you know, sort of react to that and what type of signals and messages they give you. I think society is absolutely, you know, fundamental. The messages that society give and lack of role models, I think as well, you know, in your early years and years of early career as well, I think has something to do with it, you know, if you can really identify an actual role model. However, whether that's within academia or out with academia, you know, I think that really helps as well. So, yeah, I completely agree. I think it's a whole range of things and there's not that one that I can put my finger on. I think it's different across different people as well.

Meghan [00:27:17] I completely agree that social media definitely has enhanced it so much more. So I think that while university students aren't the only ones that can experience imposter syndrome, I think that we're subjected to it in ways that like perhaps older generations are not, which is quite ironic because social media is also one of the ways that's kind of helped me overcome imposter syndrome over the last few years. I think for me, it was just kind of internalised perfectionism and that's just all where it started. I

didn't really have any older siblings or felt as though I was in competition with anything, or any extra pressure, it was this perfectionism that's always been there. I've always done well in school, and I think that I love the feeling of that, and I've continued to raise the bar and that, that was my way of like proving my self-worth and value for academic success. I think that because that was something I could control and manage. It just started this endless cycle that has kind of stuck with me and grown since starting my undergraduate degree. But I definitely think that LinkedIn and social media in general is kind of today's version of that becoming a lot worse.

Bekah [00:28:20] Yeah, I completely agree that I do think it's a variety of a lot of factors and it's not some maybe more prominent for others, but it's definitely not one factor in isolation, certainly for me. I would say it's a lot to do with my personality and being a bit of a perfectionist. I always want to try and do the best I can and make people proud, make myself proud and then often feeling that I haven't done enough to warrant that praise. That's something I've struggled with quite regularly, and it's something that I shouldn't be struggling with in this stage in my career, and I should be confident in my abilities and what I'm doing. Others think that, but it's a thought within yourself that you feel like, oh, hang on, I'm not quite sure I'm getting this or where I'm going. So definitely, I feel it's got a lot to do with personality as well as the background as well. Certainly, for me, I came from like a more, not deprived background, but you know, I wasn't from an affluent background. I came from like a council estate, and where not a lot of people that did well academically or maybe went to university. So that was always in the back of my mind, that's where I shouldn't be, you know, striving to go to the university because that's out with my capabilities and that's not what I should be doing. So that was always really hard for me to kind of think, well, actually, no, I can, and I want to, like no one told me to go to university but I wanted to create a good life for myself, and I wanted to learn more, but I did always struggle with that. I think at this point in the podcast, it would be really good if we could talk about how we've dealt with imposter syndrome ourselves and if we have any advice for any of our listeners or any kind of like self-help tips that we've used and anything that has helped us reduce those feelings and symptoms of imposter syndrome.

Meghan [00:30:27] I think there's a lot of reassurance just in knowing that most people experience it during their lifetime and it's not just students. I think the people starting new jobs and moving into new places, like it can happen and hit you at any point in your life, even if you've never suffered with it before. I remember seeing an interview where Emma Watson was talking about it, which kind of struck me because I don't think we believe that, like people like famous people would suffer with something like that. But she said that, receiving any kind of recognition for her work, makes her feel really uncomfortable. So, you know even though that's quite sad, I actually thought it was also quite comforting to see. And just remembering that we're not all impostors, so it's important to acknowledge yourself and redefine your own capabilities, realising that not everybody thrives in an academic environment as well, such as the classrooms like perhaps your greatest strength is that you are a people personal and that you're creative. So success is relative as well. And I think, no one has walked in your shoes so I think it's important to remember that everyone kind of becomes successful in their own capacity, and I kind of love the phrase like, fake it till you make it as well. I think that that is there for a reason. I think that even if you are experiencing imposter syndrome, I think by doing that, you're practising something that you eventually still want to accomplish. So I think that practicing that is still a really great way to overcome it. Just expressing your feelings and thoughts, for me, I think, is such a minefield of like undesirable thoughts and emotions. And I think while university can be a really great opportunity and place to thrive and it's, you know, it's a really great stimulating opportunity, I think it can also be quite demanding if you're not in the right

headspace. I think it's such a basic point to make, but just open up to somebody because most people do experience that at some point.

Amanda [00:32:14] You know, I think talking to people, because I think as soon as you start the conversation, they're probably going to give you some examples of how they felt it and when they felt it, no matter who you speak to. I think one of the things we're talking about is this perfectionism. And I think one of the other things is just, you know, really try and accept that nobody, not even you, are perfect all the time. And so to apply the 80 percent rule, that sometimes 80 percent is good enough. There'll be times when you know you want to go for the highest and that, but, you know, many times over 80 percent is probably good enough. I think there's the thing about your conversation and how you speak about things. So, you know, things like saying, well, I just got lucky, you know, and I was in the right place at the right time for this to happen. When something positive happens to you, you try and sort of, you know, downplay it a bit and just put it down to pure luck instead of thinking, actually, you know, I worked hard for that, and I deserve that. And you know, that, give yourself a pat on the back kind of thing and being kind to yourself. And I think, you know, actually knowing your strengths and playing up to your strengths and knowing your own skills and the limits of your own worth and abilities. And so again, you know, not putting it down to good luck or timing. Finding a mentor, I think, you know is something that I know many, many of my colleagues and something that I certainly recommend to people, no matter what level they are at. And you know, it's not a mentor for life. I mean, sometimes you just need a mentor for a certain phase of your life after six months of a year or whatever. So there's no time limit to it. And so, you know, across my academic career of thirty odd years, you know, I've had three or four different mentors, males and females, academic and non-academic just for different parts of my career. Take in positive feedback, I think that's another thing that we just really need to get better at, you know, no matter who you are. And actually, you know, when someone says you did a good job, actually say, thanks for that, not, oh well, you know, so and so helped me and you know, and really again, downplaying it. And I think the other thing is accepting that some things just won't work. You know that you will fail and there's nothing wrong with that and it's not a dramatic fall flat on your face fail, but you know, there will be certain things that won't work. Just keep it into perspective and you know, think many times over, no one's died or anything, you know, and that piece of work wasn't particularly your best piece, but whatever. You know, and again, it's not perfectionism thing, you know, just keep it in perspective. And one of the things that's on the recent impostor event I was at, Kate Atkin, who's a speaker on this, it just sort of resonated with me, she said, you know, we all just need to be more like a zebra. You know, the herd of zebras basically they're on the Serengeti, were all sitting, you know, munching grass or whatever, they were attacked by a whole pride of lions, one of them dies or whatever, two minutes later, what are they all doing? They're the back, eating grass again, you know, kind of thing. And yes, maybe one of them has died, but the rest of them just get on with life and move forward, and that's something that, really at the time, you know, I thought, that's actually something I'm really going to sort of keep at the back of my mind now, is for all of us to be more like a zebra.

Ben [00:35:19] For me, I feel like I'm kind of the outlier in this. Perfectionism is not something that affected me in the typical way. I guess, I kind of had an inverse reaction. I don't know if other people experience this. I also came from a very difficult neighbourhood and school system, and again being neurodivergent and not having any diagnoses or help really kind of made me struggle through school. I actually had really terrible grades both through high school and my undergraduate and I remember my guidance counsellor in high school sitting me down and telling me, I don't think you're going to graduate high school, I don't think college is in your future. And I mean, I barely skated by. I don't know if

I actually failed a course in undergraduate, but I think I might have and had to retake it. But the issue with that is because I was so disconnected from the idea of perfectionism and getting good grades, it just didn't really seem to matter to me. People would look at me and say, okay, well, you have bad grades, but you're doing these things, so there's got to be something else there. Maybe it's your intelligence, or maybe it's your talent, or this or that. We have this habit of assigning, especially to like children, this idea of genius or prodigy. And we slap that label on the kid, and we change our expectations enormously. And the kid changes their expectations enormously and I mean, that created its own spiral and cycle for me later on in life, because then, you know, I can look at my work now and say, okay, well, I'm creating this work, but you know, I used to get bad grades and maybe I'm really struggling in the more logistic and administrative parts of my life. And yeah, I might be happy with this piece of work that I put out but at the same time, I missed all these deadlines, and I haven't been able to follow up on these things and have been letting a lot of people down. And you know what, maybe I really don't deserve to be here because my whole life I've been told that, oh yeah, it's your intelligence, you're smart, you're bright, and that's going to take you far, and I allowed myself to not work on the things that I should have been working on because I was expecting something else to carry me. So for the solution that I've tried to implement in my life, I think it all comes down to authenticity. I mean, that's the antithesis of imposter syndrome. And I think for everyone, if you can define authenticity for yourself because we're all going to have our own qualifications and definitions, etc. But if you can isolate and even write down your specific definition of authenticity and then really use that as your measure and start to try and identify what someone else's measure of authenticity is, because then, at least for me, I find when I look at someone that I'm comparing my work to or comparing my success to or whatever. It's a really, kind of illuminating moment, if I say to myself, are they creating something that is authentic to themselves? And I really quickly can start to sort out who might be, you know, trying to jump on a trend or trying to imitate something that they don't feel is their own voice. They're trying to create work that they think is going to be successful because this other stuff is successful. And you will also find people that have found success that are creating things that are very authentic to themselves, and that's really helped me sort through it. And then when I push it further and I create work, I can look at it and say, is this piece of work authentic to me? And if you judge it by that alone and you take away what kind of success it finds in any other measure then you can't say that you are an imposter because you are creating something that is authentic. And at least for me, at the end of the day, if I've created a body of work that meets that definition of authenticity for me, it's okay if it doesn't achieve any kind of commercial success or any kind of success in those other measures because with time, all of the facade starts to fade. All of the work of the people that I was comparing myself to starts to get grouped into, oh, well, this is a trend, or this was the style, and they were imitating this one person. But you know what, this one piece or this one thing that they were imitating is really the thing that's going to stand the test of time because it was in and of itself authentic. So all the imitations fade away and what we're left with is the work that is authentic, whether or not it's notable to some people or to others is up for debate. But that's what we do in academia is we debate the merit of those things. But we only debate what is authentic because if it's not, it's not worth talking about. So I mean, it's really, really, really, really, really difficult, especially at this time in my life, I'm thirty now, but to create something, and everyone I show it to might say, I don't know, have you tried this? I don't really like it, whatever. But if I can sit down and I go through phases of hating my work and then liking it and hating it, but if in six months I can look back on it and say, you know, I feel like this is actually me, then I have some ground to stand on.

Lucy [00:42:22] I think, absolutely that this idea of kind of setting your own success and what it means for you is something that's really important to me in a similar way. I used to set goals, I think, for other people. And now, especially coming to Aberdeen and starting my Ph.D. I've said, no, this is what success means for me, and it's not necessarily getting the best grades or doing everything. It's if I can get out of bed, read two papers today, maybe have a shower, I've succeeded. It sounds really stupid, but like, actually, that's really helpful because when you think, no, I've done the best that I can do today, regardless of what anyone else has done, and that starts to help you feel less like an imposter because you realise you're still getting by and then you realise that's me being myself, doing what I can do, and I'm still fine. I think another thing I've had to do is challenge those thoughts. And you really have to be strict with yourself. So I imagine it, for me, it's my mum's voice going, no, actually, you are meant to be here, carry on, do that thing anyway. Sometimes she'll actually tell this to me, she's very good as a kind of mentor person, but kind of making sure you have that strict voice that says, if you going to stop doing something because you're worried that you're not good at it, and that means that you can't do it, actually, no, you can go ahead anyway, and it will be fun. And even if you're rubbish at something, that doesn't mean it's a bad thing, which comes on to another thing I've learnt, which is kind of practising failure. And this is something like I would never recommend this to a student. But once I had a therapist who told me miss a deadline and it was an essay that didn't count towards any grade and I did it, and it kind of changed my whole perspective because the world didn't end. Everything was fine. But don't miss deadlines. But also, for me, that was a really big deal and practising those kinds of things. So going to something, you know, you're not going to be very good at and enjoying it and having a laugh, even though you're not good at it is something that I find quite funny. So I went on the hike on the weekend. I'm really slow, but I had a good time anyway. No one judge me for being slow and it was fine. And that's something I never would have done even six months ago, and that's to kind of challenge those behaviours. Yeah, and the fake it until you make it honestly is the biggest thing. I pretend I have confidence in every situation, even if I don't. And eventually you kind of do because you're just getting used to doing it even when you haven't got confidence, so it becomes something you've practised. And I think it is very much practising those behaviours that challenge your thoughts and kind of, make you feel like you do belong, and I think for me, imposter syndrome is never going to be something I get over, but it's something I can deal with. But I think if you recognise that if you're still going to potentially feel that way, but that you can still do stuff and get over it. That was a big step for me as well. But yeah, definitely kind of challenging your thoughts and just kind of trying to get on with life a little bit, if you can.

Bekah [00:45:43] Thanks, guys. That's some really, really helpful advice that I know that I'm going to be able to use and challenge in the feelings that I have with my imposter syndrome. So thanks so much for that. I'm sure we've helped some of our listeners as well, but you've definitely helped me. So I call that a success. One of the things I would definitely say in terms of helping you deal with how you're feeling with imposter syndrome and trying to overcome it. The biggest thing I can say is to be kind to yourself. It's really easy to be your own worst critic, isn't it? But try, try so hard to think of, even like when you were back in primary school, my school certainly did like two stars in a wish. So two good things about something that you've done and then one thing that can be improved, similar to that like feedback sandwich that you would give someone, start with the positive what can we improve then end on a positive. And I think it's really easy to do that when you're speaking with someone else but not when you're having your own internal thoughts, that's certainly something I try to do. It is very hard to do with yourself. But I'm getting a little bit better at it. And also just to reach out if you are feeling like you don't belong and feelings of self-doubt, reach out, speak to someone because as we've kind of discussed throughout

the episode, there's so many people that have experienced these feelings or will be experiencing these feelings and even people that you feel, you know, they look like they've got it all together and they're so competent, and you might even aspire to be that person, they have most likely been in the situation you are with these feelings too. So I would definitely encourage you all to reach out. I would just like to thank you fabulous guests for coming along to discuss imposter syndrome with me today, it has been a fabulous episode. I've certainly enjoyed our discussions. So thank you so much for giving up your time. To any of our listeners, if you are struggling or want to explore any of the themes that we've discussed in this episode, a little bit more. If you just go to the University of Aberdeen website and search BeWell, you'll find a list of resources there. And thank you so much for listening, guys. Take care and I'll see you next time.

Voiceover [00:48:09] his podcast is brought to you by the University of Aberdeen.