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## Imposter Syndrome Management and Strategies for OT Graduate Students

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# Imposter Syndrome Management and Strategies for OT Graduate Students

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**Presentation by:**

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**In Collaboration with:**

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**UOP Mentor:** Dr. Alexandria Herman, OTD, OTR/L



UNIVERSITY OF THE  
**PACIFIC** | School of  
Health Sciences

# Background

- **Imposter syndrome (phenomenon):**
  - The psychological experience of feeling like you don't belong and undeserving of success.
- **OT Students:**
  - Decreased mental health
  - Maladaptive coping
  - Low performance
  - Maintaining a healthy life-work balance



40-50% of graduate students experience *frequent* imposter feelings

(Clance & Imes, 1978; Kolligian & Sternberg, 1991; Bernard et al., 2002; Gibson-Beverly & Schwartz, 2008; Slank, 2019; Wei et al., 2020)



# Program Purpose

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- **Purpose:**

- Gain insight into the experiences of OT graduate students and new OTR/L during didactics and fieldwork experiences.

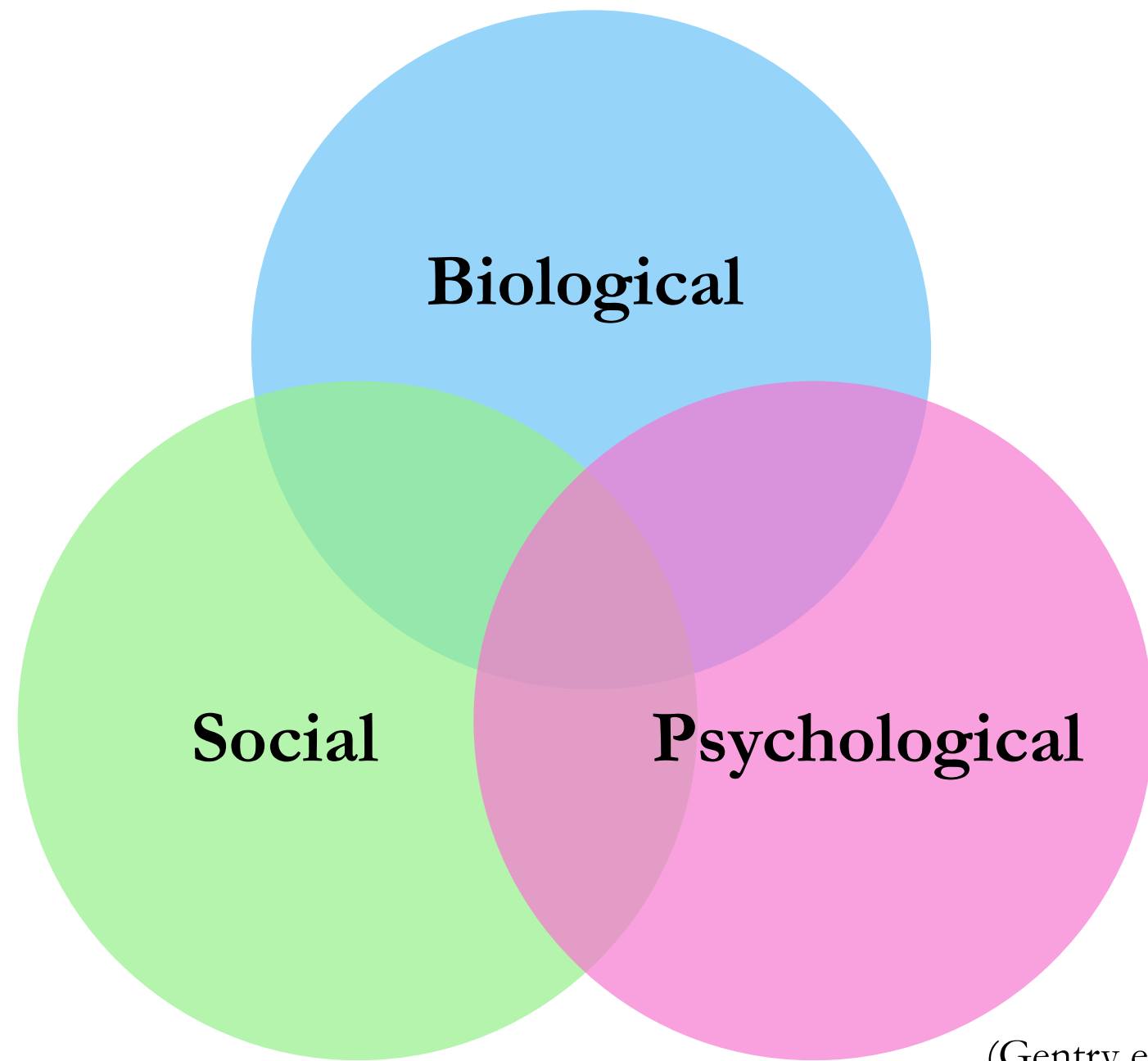
- **Project aim:**

- Education of occupational therapy students about imposter syndrome to facilitate mitigation of imposter feelings to improve graduate school and level II fieldwork experiences & beyond.

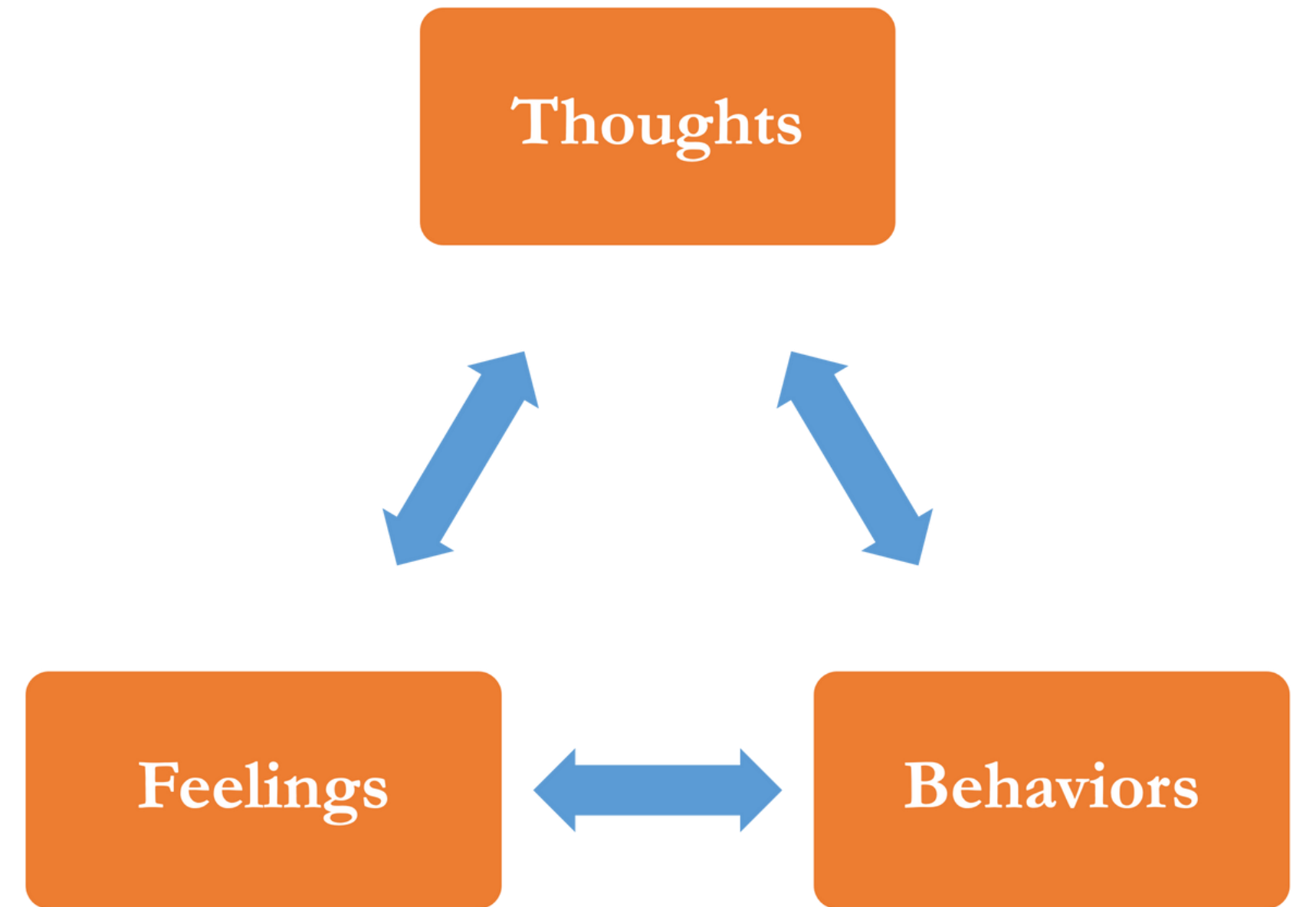


# Guiding Theories

## Biopsychosocial Model



## Cognitive-Behavioral Frame of Reference



(Duncan & Fletcher-Shaw, 2021)



# Literature Review



## Themes:

- Upbringing/Family environment
- Personality/self-concept
- Gender
- Environmental factors
- Mental health



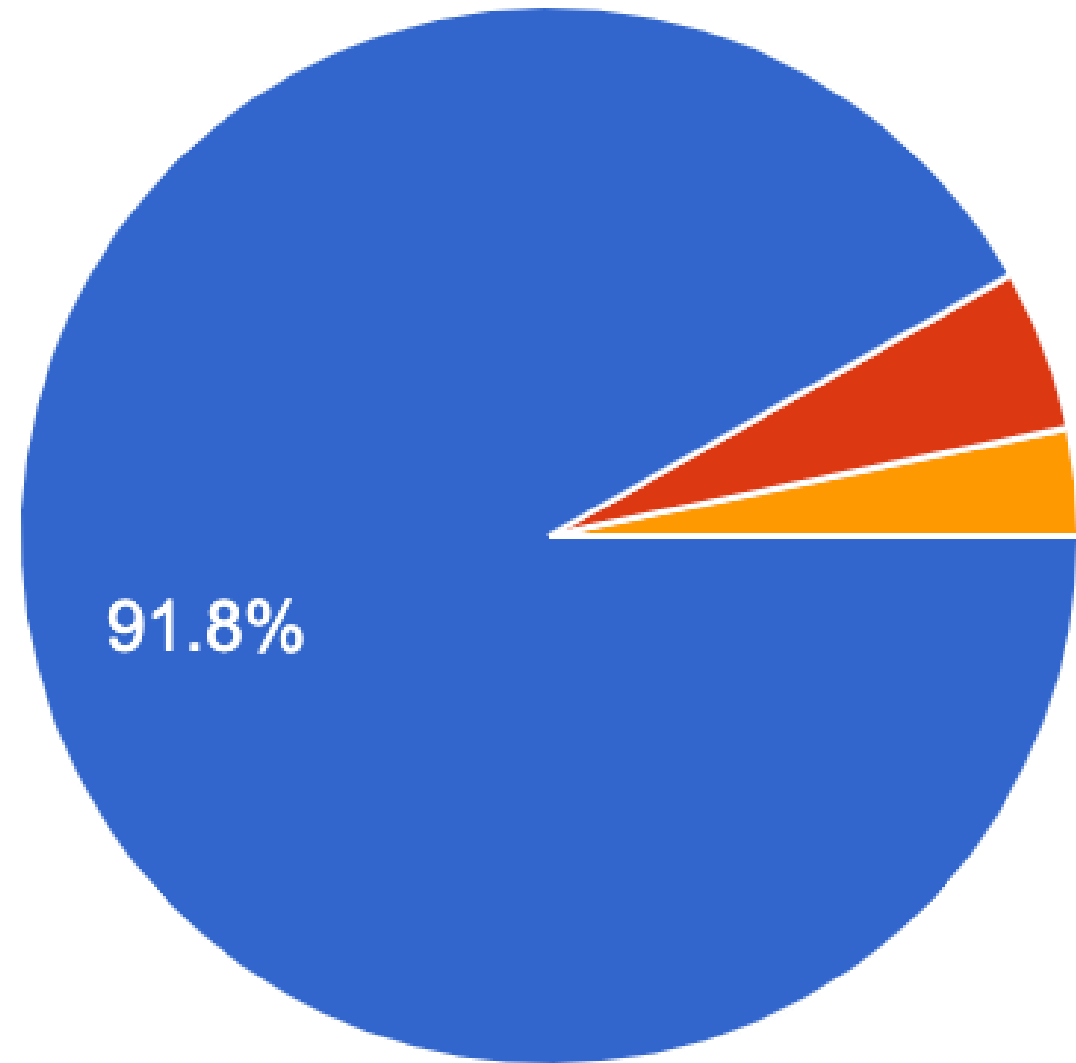
## Interventions:

- One-on-one coaching
- Cognitive Processing therapy
- Interactive workshops
- Therapy/Counseling
- Confidence training

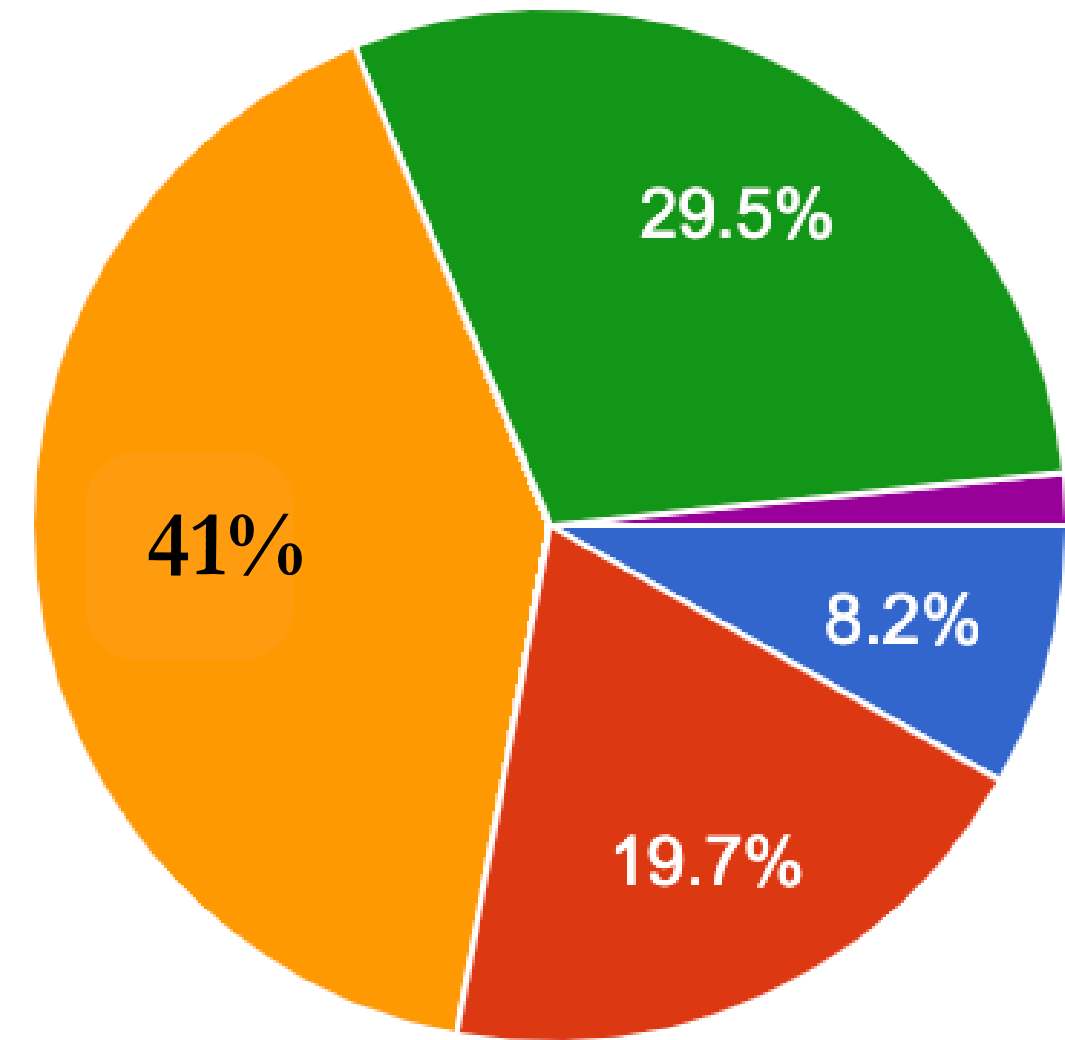


# Needs Assessment

**Method:** anonymous surveys & semi-structured interviews with current students & new OTR/Ls



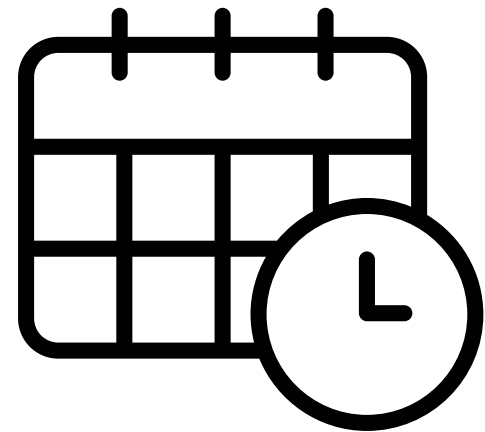
**Experience of Imposter Syndrome**



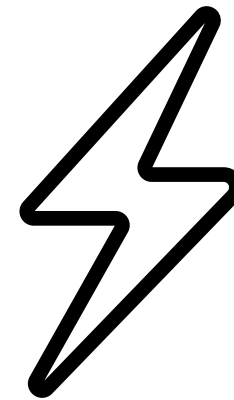
**Frequency of Imposter Experience**



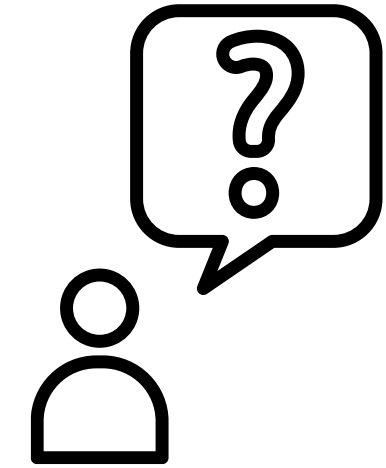
# Needs Assessment



Beginning of didactics  
Beginning of FW Level II  
Times of Evaluation



Unpreparedness  
Inexperience  
Social comparison  
New role/environment  
Negative self-concept



- 1. Limited literature:** Imposter syndrome & OT
- 2. Availability of imposter syndrome resources** for OT students







# Needs Assessment




Strategies & Supports





# Outcomes: Educational Workshop



**TOPIC 1**  
Growth vs Fixed Mindset



**GROWTH MINDSET** | **FIXED MINDSET**

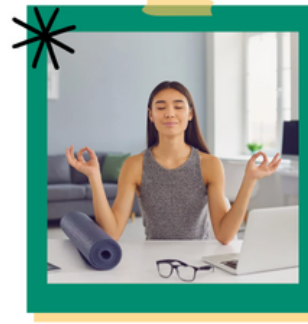
**CONNECTION TO IMPOSTER SYNDROME**

- Stuck in negative headspace
- Limiting their ability to learn or showcase skills
- Goal: Self-preservation

*bad days don't stay bad forever*

(Chandra et al., 2019; Ng, 2018)

**TOPIC 2**  
Mindfulness Meditation



**MINDFULNESS MEDITATION**

- Being fully present in the present moment
- Slow down and calm your body and mind


**CONNECTION TO IMPOSTER SYNDROME**

- Overthinking and overwhelming thoughts
- Training your mind to work with you, not against you.

*BE KIND TO YOUR MIND*

(Hutchins & Flores, 2021)

**TOPIC 3**  
Self-Reflection




**SELF-REFLECTION**

- Important skill to have as a student & future OTR/L
- Connect to goal-setting

**CONNECTION TO IMPOSTER SYNDROME**

- Ruminating on mistakes
- Low self-compassion
- Break the fixed mindset



(Chandra et al., 2019; Ng, 2018)

**TOPIC 4**  
Talk Therapy



**TALK THERAPY**

- Power of processing out loud
- Can be formal or informal
- Helpful in breaking unhelpful thought patterns

**CONNECTION TO IMPOSTER SYNDROME**

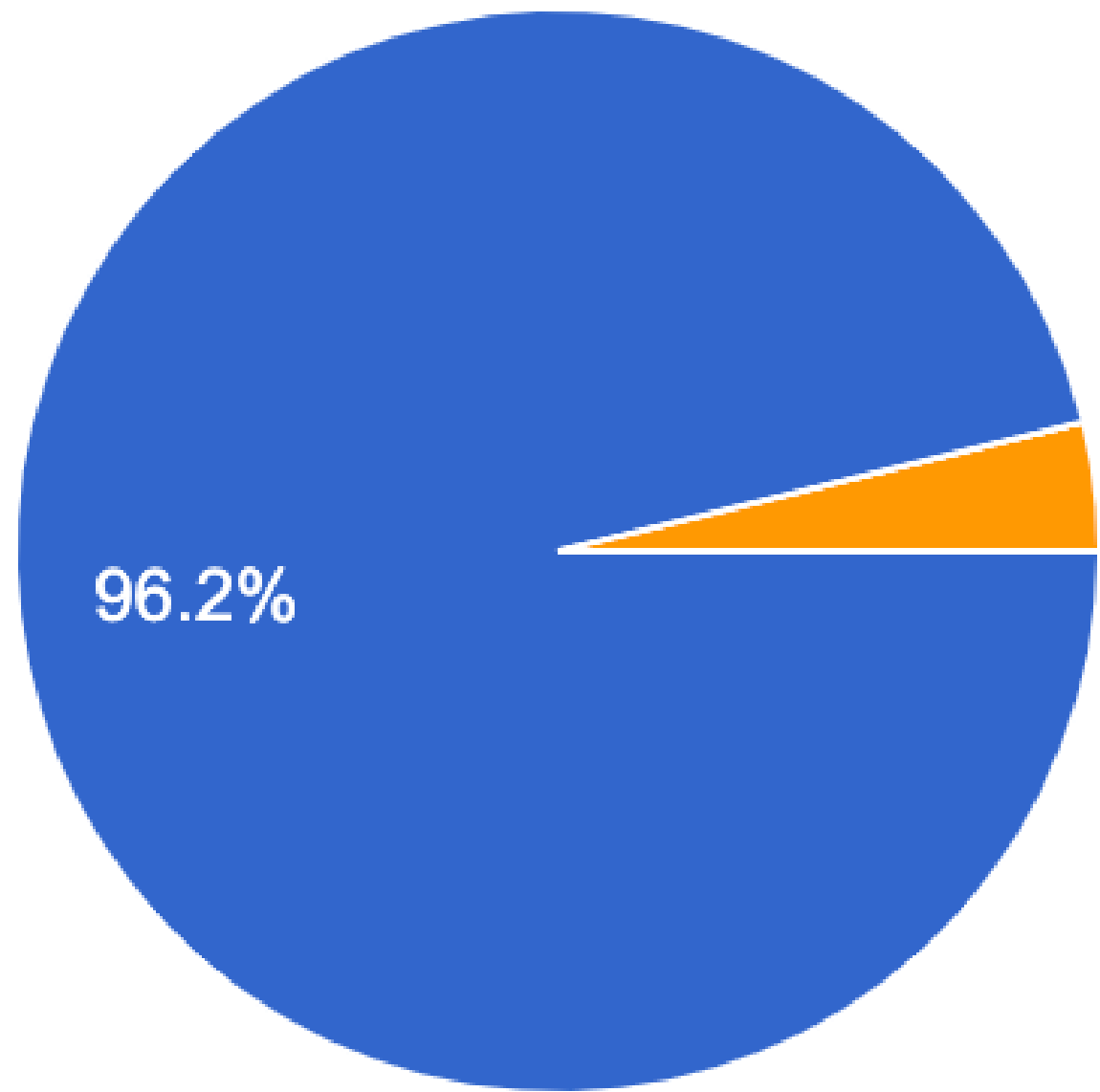
- Imposter syndrome: individual and isolating
- Give a name to the feeling and acknowledge it
- Find 'community' in the experience

*it's okay to feel your feelings*

(Chandra et al., 2019; Chang et al., 2022)

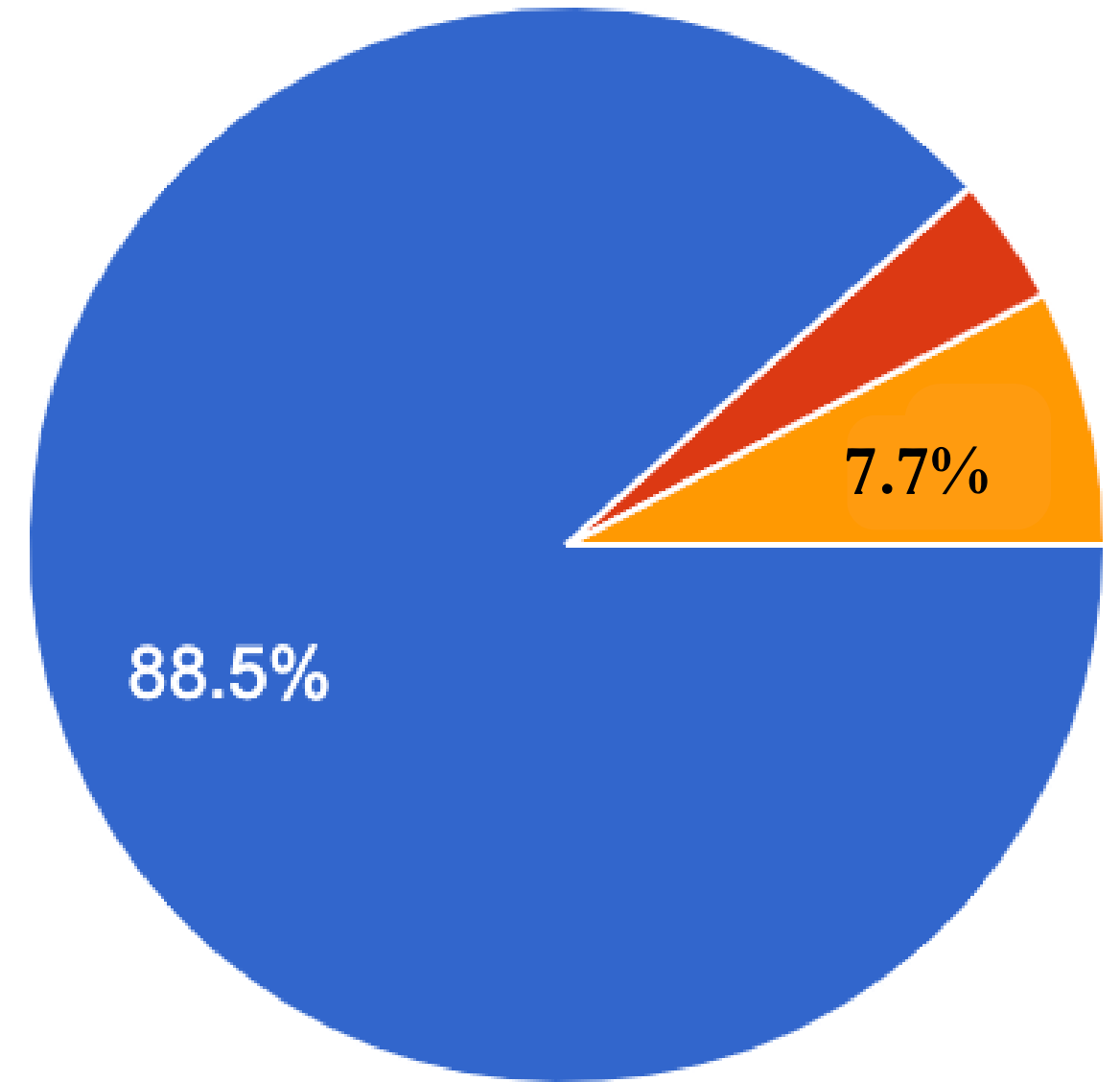


# Outcomes: Post-Survey



**Topic understanding and relevance to OT student experience**

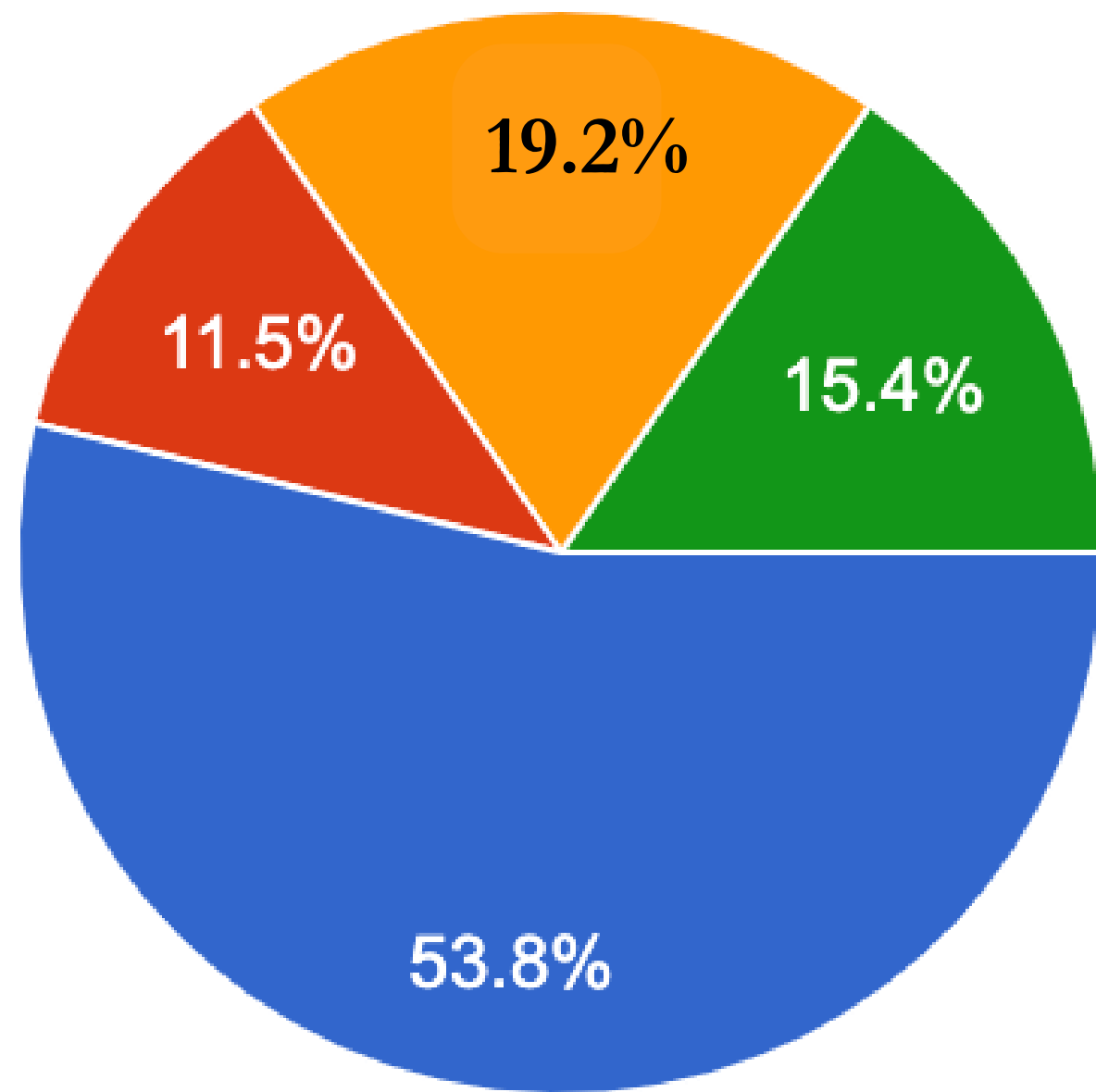
- Yes
- No
- Maybe



**Overall understanding of imposter syndrome management strategies**

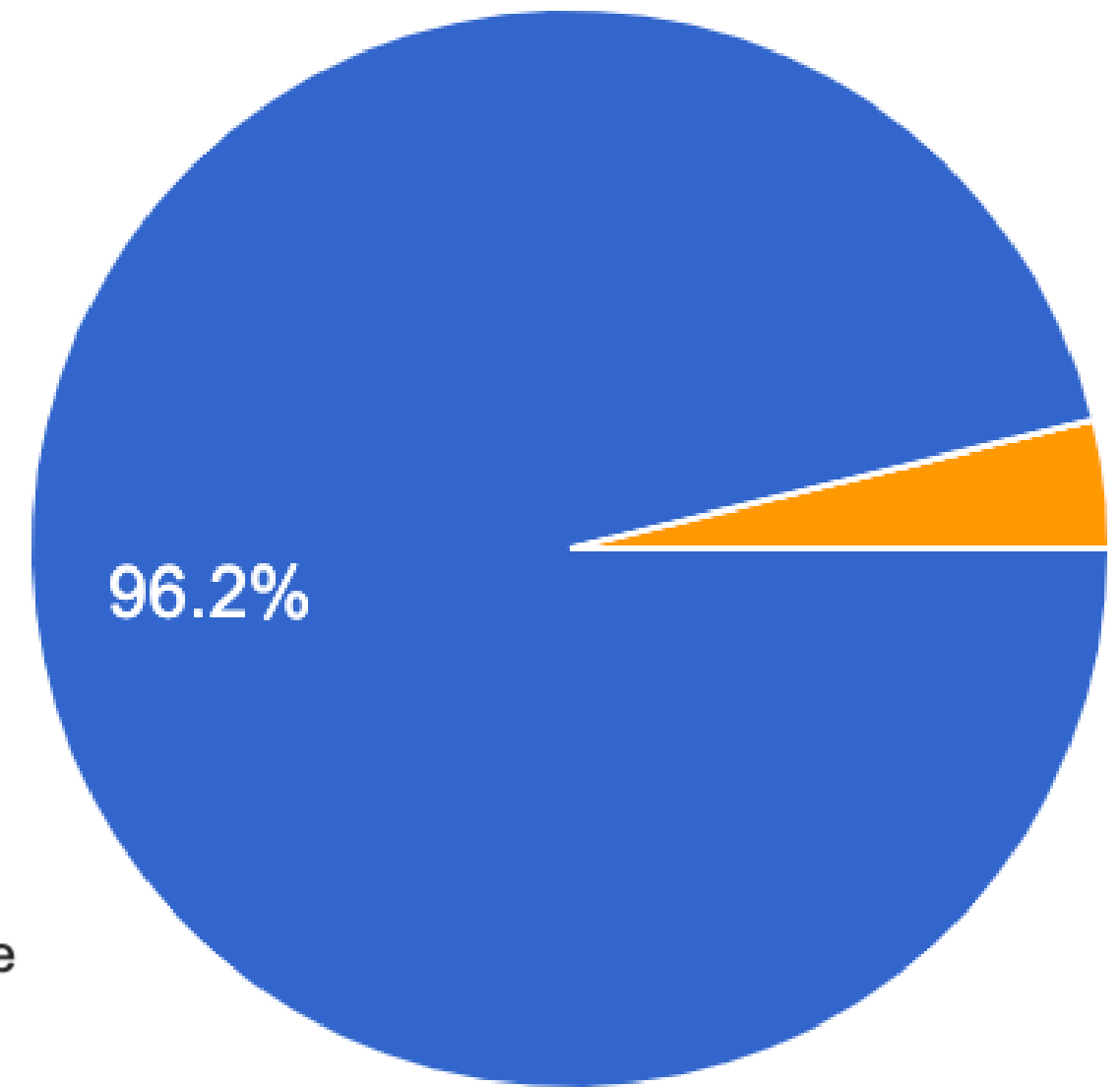


# Outcomes: Post-Survey



Most helpful topic/management strategy

- Growth vs Fixed Mindset (Reframing negative thoughts)
- Mindfulness Meditation (Mantras)
- Self-Reflection (Journaling Prompt)
- Talk Therapy (Action Plan Creation)



Equipped to implement at least one of the management strategies

- Yes
- No
- Maybe



# Outcomes: Resource Page

**Navigation Sidebar:**

- Home
- Discussions
- Grades
- People
- Pages
- Files
- Syllabus
- Modules
- BigBlueButton
- Collaborations
- Chat
- Follett Discover
- Gradescope

**Main Content Area:**

- ▼ Imposter Syndrome Management Strategies
  - 📎 Imposter Syndrome Summary Guide
- Mindset
  - 📄 Growth vs. Fixed Mindset
  - 📎 READ: Chang et al., (2022) -- Intervening on Imposter Syndrome
  - 📎 READ: Noskeau et al., (2021) -- Imposter Syndrome and Mindset
- Mindfulness Meditation
  - 📄 ACTIVITY: Mantra Creation
  - 🔗 WATCH: Grounding Exercise for Racing Minds
  - 🔗 WATCH: 5-Minute Mindfulness Meditation
  - 🔗 WATCH: Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT)
- Self-Reflection
  - 📄 LEARN: Self-Reflection Model
  - 📄 ACTIVITY: Journaling
  - 📄 LEARN: Action Plan
  - 🔗 Resource: UOP CAPS Website

## IMPOSTER SYNDROME MANAGEMENT & STRATEGIES FOR OT GRADUATE STUDENTS (A SUMMARY)

OTHR 397A: COMMUNITY CAPSTONE EXPERIENCE | CREATED BY: LAUREN MAGAT, OTD/S | JULY 2024

### TABLE OF CONTENTS:

- What is Imposter Syndrome?..... Page 2
  - Background
  - Common Traits & Behaviors
  - Risks
  - Imposter Cycle
- Imposter Syndrome Statistics..... Page 3
  - Graduate Students
  - Gender
  - Ethnic Background
- Contributing Factors of Imposter Syndrome.....
  - Transitions/Expectations
  - Environmental
  - Personal
- Management Strategies:
  - Definitions
  - Connections to Imposter Syndrome
  - Strategies to Try
- Mindfulness Meditation.....
  - Why is it Helpful?
  - Connections to Imposter Syndrome
  - Strategies to Try
- Talk Therapy.....
  - Why is it Helpful?
  - Connections to Imposter Syndrome
  - Action Plan Creation
  - Resources
- Self-Reflection.....
  - Why is it Helpful?
  - Connections to Imposter Syndrome
  - Self-Reflection Model
  - Strategies to Try

References.....

## IMPOSTER SYNDROME STATISTICS

### GRADUATE STUDENTS

40-50% of graduate students experience frequent imposter feelings

Prevalence among graduate students & young professionals ranges between 56%-82%. 70% of the population experience imposter feelings at least once. (Brawata et al., 2020)

### GENDER

Imposter syndrome affects both men and women. However, women are often noted to experience imposter feelings more often due to the frequency of reporting feelings & attributions of success.

### RACIAL/ETHNIC BACKGROUND

- Asian Americans
- Latinx
- African Americans
- Other Minority Students
- European (White) Students

## IMPOSTER SYNDROME

### DEFINITION

The internal and psychological experience where high-achieving individuals are unable to internalize their success and attribute their success to external sources (chance, luck) rather than to personal ability or merit.

(1978) Dr. Pauline Clance & Dr. Suzanne Imes

Originally termed 'imposter phenomenon'

Fear of being discovered as a 'fraud'

### COMMON TRAITS

- Psychosocial challenges:
  - Mental Health conditions
  - Low self-esteem
  - Self-doubt
  - Shame
  - Isolation

### BEHAVIORS

- Maladaptive behaviors:
  - Self-handicapping
  - Self-sabotage
  - Procrastination
  - Perfectionism
  - Self-monitoring
  - Low self-compassion

### RISKS

- BURNOUT
  - Worsening mental health
  - Missing out on valuable learning opportunities
  - Low self-efficacy
  - Low job satisfaction & performance

### CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

- Transitions/Expectations
  - Example - moving to a new city, gaining a new role in the world
- Perception of Competence - higher level arena and should be compared to self-imposed, placed by family, and/or social comparison - self-imposed, placed by family, and/or social comparison to peers (friends in careers of where one thinks s/he should be vs where s/he is)
- Environmental Factors
  - Culture - reward and praise for academic achievement; reframing of academic culture to one of valuation - of merit and ability which is the norm lead to the internalization of feedback
  - Support - from faculty/program, peers, supervisor or field
  - Course work - rigor of program; comfort

### Factors

- Perception of the amount of experience, or preparation for response to stress, feedback, failure, and growth or fixed mindset in one's ability to succeed and skills
- Preparation - in skills/knowledge due to preparation
- Isolation - maladaptive (play not to lose, rather than to win)
- Relearning - relearning how to learn/study
- Stress/Habits - exacerbation of existing difficulties

### MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES: SELF-REFLECTION

#### Self-Reflection

- An important skill to have and practice as an OT student and future OTR/L.
- Will be asked to self-reflect throughout fieldwork experience to develop clinical reasoning and growth as a clinician
- Important to connect self-reflection with goal-setting for follow-through
- Opportunity to take stock of accomplishments and progress made
- Begin to claim your successes for yourself
- Opportunity to recognize feelings and name them
- Start focusing on what you can control and managing your expectations of current status/skill level

#### Connection to Imposter Syndrome

- Imposters tend to ruminate on mistakes and fall into a negative thought spiral when mistakes are made. An opportunity to focus on what you did well.
- Imposters practice low self-compassion, it is an opportunity to practice more self-compassion
- Begin to break the fixed mindset, and start working towards a growth mindset thought process
- Tend to get lost in big idea of success and loses sight of the small successes along the way

#### Self-Reflection Model

- Description**
  - What happened? Just the facts, no interpretation or emotions involved
- Feelings**
  - Thoughts & feelings experienced by you and others involved
- Evaluation**
  - What went well/didn't go so well; How did you contribute to the situation (+/-)?
- Analysis**
  - What were the results? What could be changed?
- Conclusion**
  - What did you learn?
- Action Plan**
  - Steps for next time: How to prevent negative outcomes again and apply insights gained.

#### Strategies to Try:

##### Redefining Success for Yourself: Ask yourself...

- How would I define success?
- How would I define success as an OT student/future OTR/L?
- Why is it important to talk about success and imposter syndrome?
- What are 1-3 successes that I accomplished that I am proud of?

##### Journaling:

- An easily accessible tool that can be done anywhere and anytime
- Helps you to sort through and process feelings, track emotional patterns over time, gain insight into triggers, and boost problem-solving
- Great method to practice gratitude
- Can use guided prompts or can be free thought

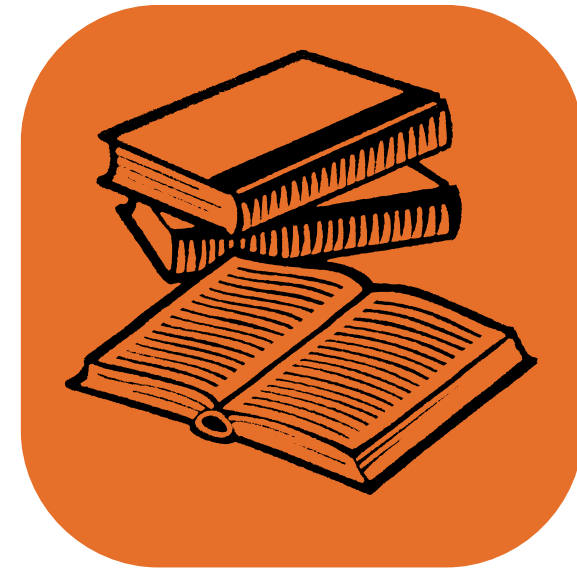
##### Journal prompts:

- What are 3 things I am grateful for today?
- What is making me feel anxious?
- What did I learn today?
- What are three wins I had today?
- What do I need to feel calm and at peace?



# Discussion

Limited research about  
OT & imposter syndrome



Workshop beneficial for students  
Coping strategies, self-care, &  
occupational balance promotion

Continued programming  
→ Institutional level



Research article (JOTE)  
Presentation at future conference

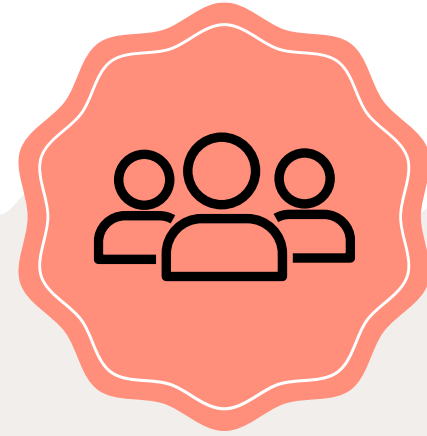


# Impact



## Personal

- Self-reflection
- Connection with peers
- Validation of experiences



## Population

- Increased awareness & discussion
- Promotion of peer-to-peer support
- Positive self-management



## UOP

- Acknowledgement of student experiences
- Increase student support



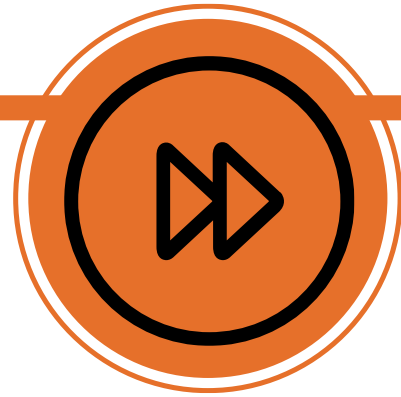
## Profession

- Job performance
- Clinician longevity
- Quality of care





# Future Implications



Continued  
research  
Development of  
new  
programming



Future  
collaboration with  
CAPS



OT education  
Self-advocacy



Continued  
awareness  
Student mental  
health & support



# Acknowledgements

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*Thank  
You*

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Dr. Kathryn Wise, OTD, MHSc, OTR/L

**Participants**

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SJSU MSOT Cohorts  
AOTA CommunOT Forum

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