

## 2.3 EQ – understanding the inner critic

### Slide 1

Something that affects most researchers is having a very vocal inner critic and imposter voice... the voice that tells us we are not good enough, not qualified for the task or that if we do something it will go wrong, or we will get found out by other people who will realise we are a fraud and shouldn't be here.

Understanding where this voice comes from, why we have it, and what it is trying to achieve is a good way to start being able to tame it.

### Slide 2

The term imposter syndrome refers to a collection of feelings of inadequacy that persist despite evident success. 'Imposters' suffer from chronic self-doubt and a sense of intellectual fraudulence that override any feelings of success or external proof of their competence.

The term itself, actually, dates back to 1978—when psychologists publishing in a Psychotherapy journal recognised the imposter phenomenon in high-achieving women.

It is extremely common amongst high achieving people, so if you suffer from it, then there's some good news: it means you are probably a high achiever!

We all have an inner critic voice, and giving you feelings of being an imposter is just one of many ways in which your **inner critic or pessimist is trying** to 'protect' you

### Slide 3

What is our inner critic trying to protect us from? This will vary for all of us, but in general, it is trying to protect us from emotional or physical harm, humiliation, stress, criticism and so on.

It tends to be at its loudest when we are stretching ourselves. You may recall this figure from the introduction presentation in this online series.

At any one time, we are experiencing a level of challenge, as this increases, we leave our comfort zone and start to stretch ourselves. This is where the learning and high performance happens. If we have too much challenge, we enter the panic zone where our performance dips, and we may make mistakes.

The nature of research is that it stretches us. We must keep learning to be effective researchers and to further our discipline areas.

So, we are often spending time in the stretch zone and getting close to our panic zone. Our inner critic is trying to protect us from being in the panic zone – it knows that we want to avoid being here. The problem is that to stay out of our panic zone, our inner critic tries to keep us in the comfort zone... here we are safe from harm, wrapped in cotton wool, but achieving and learning almost nothing.

### Slide 4

We all have our own set of situations when our inner critic senses danger and appears in our consciousness, telling us how inadequate we are, or how other people will think negative things of us, or that we will humiliate ourselves in some way.

Some situations that researchers have said their inner critic gets noisy include:

1. When sharing work – perhaps in writing or presenting at conferences or workshops.
2. More generally, when sharing ideas in meetings, particularly in the presence of senior people and experts (or those we perceive to be experts).
3. Sometimes our inner critic likes to tell us that we didn't deserve praise or feedback, or if we won something, we were just lucky or the person deciding must have been deceived by us.
4. When we are being seen as an expert ourselves – when we're teaching or supervising
5. When we have to market or sell ourselves at interview or, even before that, deciding whether we are ready to apply for a job or promotion or fellowship.
6. Or starting something new – the first day of a new job, project or collaboration.

We all have our own trigger situations. Notice that all these examples are opportunities for, or evidence of, us progressing, developing or learning something.

#### Slide 5

We all have a unique inner critic voice, telling us a unique set of justifications for why we should do or not do something or why we should or should not believe something.

These beliefs surround us in a thick coat of amour to protect us from being vulnerable to failure or humiliation, but it also keeps us still and restricts us from developing and learning.

Our inner critic has been developing as long as we have and has had the same education as we have had. So, it is as clever as us and very good at giving us a convincing case for why we should listen to it!

There is usually an element of truth in the things it says to us, but its view of the world has been developed to protect us from threats that we have encountered during our lifetime that may not be present any more: for example, a strict teacher, a competitive sibling, a bully at school, an accident or a big failure we had. Our inner critic is trying to prevent us from suffering harm again or from entering into our panic zone.

#### Slide 6

The problem is that the threats that developed our protective inner critic originally are no longer here – we don't have schoolyard bullies any more, and we are not likely to get detention from our teacher. Adopting our inner critic's out of date way of navigating and viewing the world is a little like trying to run a new algorithm on a computer using a decades-old operating system.

So ...we need to find ways of updating our internal operating system so that we can function and develop in current times.

Many of the suggestions and tools presented in this online resource are designed to help you to re-program your operating system to be more positive, resilient and better able to cope.