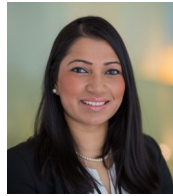


## Early Career Psychologist Column

Destigmatizing Academic Experiences of Tenure-Track Faculty in the Field of IDD/ASD: *Lessons Learned from Junior Faculty*

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It is a truth universally accepted that the first few years of any tenure track job are way harsh. Faced with the reality of navigating a new home/community, new institutional dynamics, new service requirements, meeting new colleagues, students, and staff, building your lab, research program, or developing new courses, one can forget about the most important piece to navigate, YOURSELF! Our careers are helping professions after all, so it makes sense that as psychologists, we want to process everything. However, as academics, we may compromise aspects of ourselves that get lost as a result of being pulled in different directions and our need to conform to unrealistic standards. The field of IDD/ASD in particular is a small one, yet it is a field that includes a wide variety of disciplines and professionals. Yes, YOU'RE the professor now, but our ECPs often wear many hats at their institution. Some may serve as a supervising clinician, direct an ASD clinic or disability center that provides services to individuals with IDD/ASD, work as consultants for schools or community agencies, collaborate with multi-site research centers, engage in cutting-edge biological and medical research, teach courses outside their program area, or serve in two departments altogether (e.g., medical schools or public health departments), thus mentoring a variety of diverse graduate students and research associates. It is this intersectionality and multiple roles that make our expertise and our

research in this field all the more appealing to colleagues, students, and hiring departments. However, this may also require additional work and continued professional development, such as learning new skill sets/methodologies, acquiring specialized training or mentorship, supervision, and development of training programs or courses in IDD/ASD that may not have been offered prior to your hire. While starting a new job can be filled with normal feelings of anxiety and excitement, a wave of self-doubt and uncertainty can also develop as a result of this steep learning curve. We never talk about all the social and psychological aspects of our field and this particular job, that present barriers to our progress or success. It can feel liberating to be in charge of your own research and time, but also paralyzing. As my favorite super hero once said, "With great power, comes great responsibility," and it is that responsibility to ourselves, and our helping profession, that I asked some of our current ECP members to help weigh in and reflect on what they found most helpful during those first few years on the job.

These are obviously based on anecdotal evidence and by no means reflect what we think all junior faculty should do, but these are tips that have helped us avoid the three perils of academia: *imposter syndrome*, *burnout*, and *dealing with repeated rejection* (see Jaremka et al., 2019, in press, for a comprehensive overview just released in *Perspectives on*

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*Psychological Science*). A few questions were asked and their responses were summarized. We had a lot of fun discussing these issues, so hope you have fun reading them!

**Question 1: The first year in a tenure track job seems overwhelming and often involves a steep learning curve. What were your expectations going into your tenure-track job? Did it meet your expectations? If not, how did you navigate this gap between your expectations and your new reality? What strategies/resources did you find helpful navigating this transition from your previous position?**

—Try to meet with as many faculty, staff, librarians, etc. as possible in the beginning.

—Take up offers of help, and don't be afraid to ask questions. Every department/college/school is different, so finding colleagues in your department who are willing and able to answer questions is invaluable. I found that asking people to coffee early on really helped me adjust, and junior faculty who were slightly ahead of me were the most helpful because they were going through the tenure process too.

—Set realistic expectations. For example, if you take on two new course preps, you might have to forgo something else that first quarter or semester. Everything seems to balance out once you are a couple years in. Some of my semesters have been more research heavy, while others have been more focused on teaching or service.

—Be kind to yourself. You may want to hit the ground running and while that is a realistic expectation for some (e.g., those who switched institutions, those with grant funding), that may not be where you are at now and that is okay. Take time to settle in and build your community of colleagues and potential collaborators.

—If you are pursuing a license or transferring your license as a psychologist, be aware of

your state's guidelines, required paperwork and/or testing, deadlines, and applicable practice act, laws, and statutes.

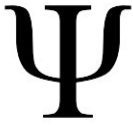
**Q2: For first-year/junior faculty, time management can be a major barrier for productivity. How did you keep yourself from over-functioning in certain aspects of your job? When certain activities are valuable, but the amount of time you are spending on them isn't proportionally aligned with tenure and promotion criteria, how do you navigate this internal conflict and manage to say "no"?**

—Have clearly delineated goals on your annual faculty review, and say no to anything that doesn't directly relate to those.

—Review your tenure requirements as soon as you start, and always keep them in mind. Try to keep track of everything you're doing in an organized way, so it will be easy when you get to your first full review. When asked to do things that don't directly relate to your requirements, consider being honest about the things you are already committed to. You can tell the truth when you just don't have time to do certain things, but there are, of course, some instances where saying, "no," is not an option. Give yourself time to learn about and adjust to the cultural dynamics of your institution, and use honesty about your time commitments when you feel that something is just not beneficial for you.

—Time management has always been a struggle for me, especially when writing is a solo process with no firm deadline. I joined a writing circle on campus that meets once a week with other faculty to write. We set goals and monitor our progress. I managed to find some friends in the process.

—Align your time with your priorities, personal and professional. Schedule times for tasks that may otherwise not have built in accountability, such as writing, just like you would other appointments in order to make



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slow and steady progress toward those tasks and goals.

**Q3: As junior faculty, we often receive messages on the work we need to prioritize that may conflict with our values or things we want to prioritize in our personal lives (e.g., starting a family, relationships, our health and well-being). What boundaries do you set for yourself and how do you know when these limits have to be set? What strategies have you found helpful in achieving work-life balance and avoiding burnout?**

—No work on the weekends. I only respond to emails/work on Sunday night and make a point to not respond to emails during dinner time. Then I start working again at 8:30pm.

—There is so much autonomy in our jobs that it can be easy to either procrastinate or become a workaholic, so finding a balance in the middle is key. With the exception of my first year, I rarely work on weekends. I make exceptions the weekends before exams or major assignments, when I will monitor my email. I also try to write times into my schedule during regular work hours for research/writing, teaching/grading, and other commitments beyond required class time, office hours, and meetings. To be most productive, I find that going into the office is better than working from home. I typically only work from home 1 day/week. My goal is always to have enough time in the evenings to spend them with my family.

—I need to have one activity (physical for me) that is just me and I can interact with people outside my work life. When I am overwhelmed, I start losing focus and tasks start taking longer to complete, the mental fatigue settles in and I find it difficult to concentrate or put my best effort. That is usually my cue to step away, go on a hike, or a weekend getaway to reset. I also started therapy. It helps me compartmentalize and see the bigger picture; how to break things

apart without letting everything hit me at once and impact other areas of my life that are equally important to me.

—Become aware of your personal stress signals including cognitive, physical, emotional, and behavioral signals so you can start to address them in ways that fit your signals and help you regulate. I created a personalized self-care plan based on what mattered to me and what my metric of success was. Making a list of goals was helpful to me so I could figure out if they were realistic, what supports I needed to accomplish them, and prioritizing goals. I also created a schedule and included breaks and downtime to recharge and reconnect with myself and my family. Self-care is individualized, but does not need to be expensive or time consuming.

**Q4: What advice would you give first-year/junior faculty who are struggling with imposter syndrome and may be questioning institutional fit/capabilities versus challenges that are to be expected those first years?**

—Imposter syndrome never really goes away. It comes in different gradients at different times of your career.

—It helped to find other junior faculty that were in similar stages of transition or senior mentors that were willing to talk about these issues. My postdoc mentor and I had a very open relationship and she is someone I felt very comfortable reaching out to for those “reality checks;” she helped normalize those first-year jitters. Conversations with colleagues/mentors can be validating and allow you to see the spectrum of experiences and realize it’s not just you feeling this way.

—As faculty of color, this feeling may be exacerbated even more. I often questioned whether I was hired because of my actual skills/work or the “diversity” I brought to the table. It is important to gather evidence, from

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your peers, colleagues, or mentors when you're doubting yourself. You can only compare yourself to you, so do your bit and take it one day at a time. I try to set up meetings with colleagues to get an objective view on my work or questions when I can't see past my own evaluative lens.

—Consider creating a support network for yourself as well as for your work. This network can help to provide some support through trials and tribulations during difficult periods as well as help celebrate successes.

**Q5: What are some of the things junior faculty can look forward to as they start their new positions? What are the positive aspects you enjoy from this career?**

—Stability is a wonderful thing, and moving for grad school, followed by postdoc, and then the uncertainty that came with interviewing at different places was anything but stable. For me, once I got a faculty position, I found a great sense of relief knowing I wasn't going to be moving anywhere. I was anxious to start, but it was very nice knowing that I had a "real" job with a "real" salary and that I wouldn't have to move anytime soon, or possibly ever

again.

—As new faculty you finally have the opportunity to research what you want and craft your own research program. I loved having the freedom and flexibility to work on research that I wanted to pursue.

—For me it has been the mentoring of students. Helping in their development as researchers or practitioners has been very rewarding. I find that positive relationships with students can make all the difference in their academic experience and sense of community. Throughout my training, I never had someone who looked like me in an academic position, and to finally be in a position where I can serve as a role model for other students of color who are pursuing academic careers and want to do the research that I am doing or take classes I am teaching, that is something far greater than myself or my personal contributions to the field. I finally get to do the research I want and have a positive impact, not everyone gets to have that opportunity, so I am very grateful and fortunate to be in a position that allows me to have both.

### SAVE THE DATE:

