

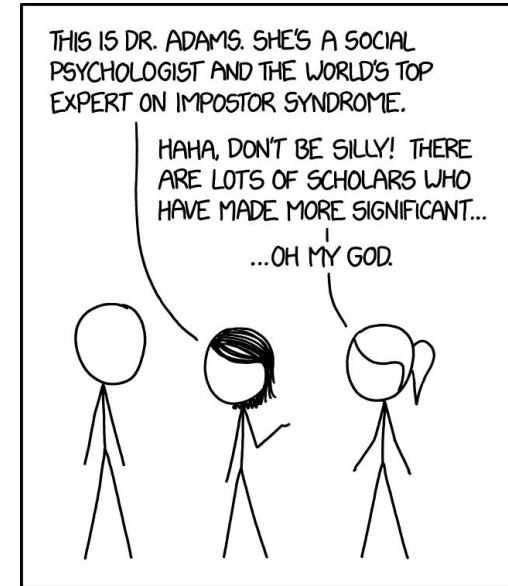
Imposter Syndrome

NSD DEI Council
22 September 2020

Mark Bandstra
Heather Crawford
Tom Gallant
Ernst Sichtermann

What is Imposter Syndrome?

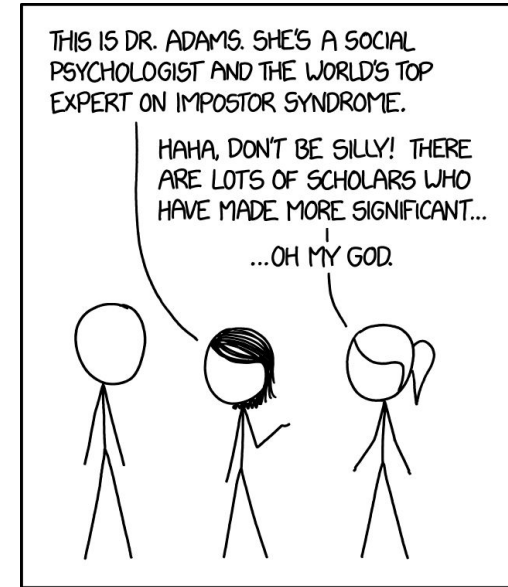
- “Pervasive psychological experience of perceived intellectual and professional fraudulence”
 - Experienced when individuals are specifically faced with achievement tasks
 - Exists *despite evidence of ongoing success*
- A self-reinforcing cycle of negative self-perception:
 - Sense of being a fraud
 - Fear of being discovered/exposed
 - Difficulty internalizing success



<https://xkcd.com/1954/>

What is Imposter Syndrome?

- **“Pervasive psychological experience of perceived intellectual and professional fraudulence”**
 - Experienced when individuals are specifically faced with achievement tasks
 - Exists *despite evidence of ongoing success*
- **Characteristics of “imposters”**
 - Highly self-critical
 - Fear being evaluated, fear of failure and exposure
 - Perceived inability to replicate their success
 - Discount praise from others
 - Believe that others have inflated perceptions of their abilities
 - Attribute their achievements to external factors such as luck, hard work or interpersonal assets, rather than internal qualities such as ability, intelligence or skills - guilt about success
- Not a clinical diagnosis, but it is associated with anxiety, depression and low self-esteem

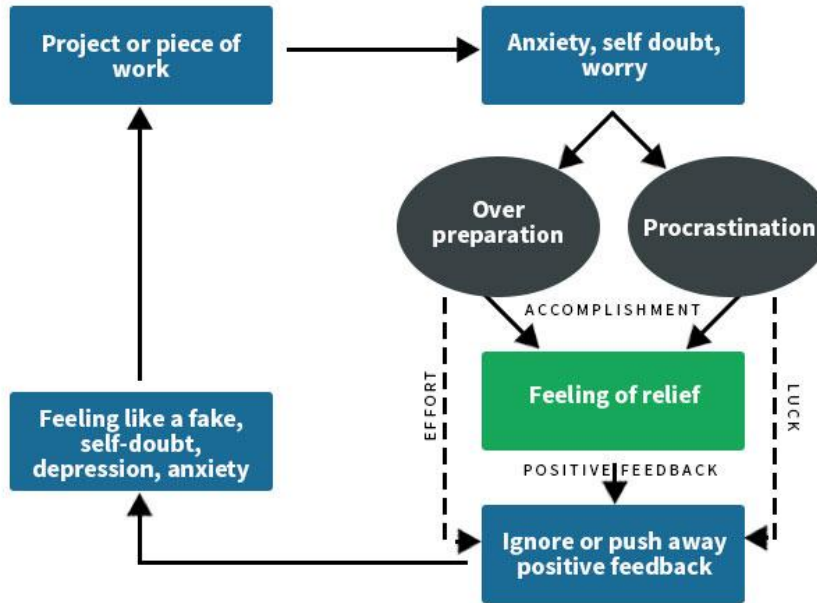


<https://xkcd.com/1954/>

The Imposter Cycle

These cognitive distortions are perpetuated in a closed, self-reinforcing loop

The Imposter Cycle



Source: <https://womenaccelerators.org/2069/>

Stereotype Threat and Imposter Syndrome

- Both stereotype threat and imposter syndrome can cause individuals to feel like frauds, affecting success, retention and well-being
- While stereotype threat is connected to broad generalizations, there are common threads with imposter syndrome

The tendency to attribute success to temporary causes such as luck or effort can often be understood in the context of social stereotypes, which induce individuals to find explanation for their accomplishments other than their own intelligence, explanations better in line with the (negative) social stereotypes.

Not surprisingly, imposter syndrome is most prevalent in under-represented groups.

The feelings of being an imposter are amplified (if not rooted) in feeling like an outlier in aspects of your life, professional or otherwise. And these feelings are reinforced by common stereotypes, microaggressions and the like.

- First recognized among high-achieving women, but now thought to be prevalent among both men and women
- “individuals who are first in the family to exceed norms or expectations for success in career, financial, and educational goals”
- Minority groups are hit harder - impostorism can augment discrimination these groups may already feel, adding to the stress

Parkman, “The Imposter Phenomenon in Higher Education: Incidence and Impact,” *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice* Vol. 16(1) (2016).
<https://articlegateway.com/index.php/JHETP/article/view/1936>

Cokley, Smith, Bernard, Hurst, Jackson, Stone, Awosogba, Saucer, Bailey & Roberts (2017), “Impostor feelings as a moderator and mediator of the relationship between perceived discrimination and mental health among racial/ethnic minority college students”, *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 64(2).
<https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000198>

Imposter Syndrome - Strategies for overcoming it

- Acknowledge the feelings and know that everyone can feel this way
 - According to the APA, approximately 70% of people will experience imposter syndrome at some point in their lives
- Identify and talk to mentors
- Engage with your community and peers
- Try not to compare yourself to others
- Track your successes
 - Keeping a journal or a log of success and achievements can help you to recognize them, and realize that you cannot attribute success to outside factors or flukes
- Advocate for yourself
 - Don't use words like "just" or "only" when discussing your work and achievements
 - Don't apologize for yourself
- Practice daily affirmations



Self-assessment:

The Clance Imposter Phenomenon Scale

<https://paulineroseclance.com/pdf/IPTestandscoreing.pdf>

Articles:

“The Dangers of Feeling Like a Fake” by Manfred F.R. Kets de Vries, Harvard Business Review (2005).

<https://hbr.org/2005/09/the-dangers-of-feeling-like-a-fake>

“Feel like a fraud?” by Kirsten Weir, American Psychological Association,

<https://www.apa.org/gradpsych/2013/11/fraud>

“Dealing with Impostor Syndrome When You’re Treated as an Impostor” by Kristin Wong, NY Times (2018).

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/12/smarter-living/dealing-with-impostor-syndrome-when-youre-treated-as-an-impostor.html>

“Imposter syndrome hits harder when you’re Black” by Jolie Doggett, HuffPost (2019).

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/imposter-syndrome-racism-discrimination_l_5d9f2c00e4b06ddfc514ec5c

“Imposter Syndrome -- Why It’s Harder Today Than Ever” by Jeanne Croteau, Forbes (2019).

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jeannecroteau/2019/04/04/imposter-syndrome-why-its-harder-today-than-ever/#654a756c9ac5>