Beating the imposter syndrome
I am not as capable as people think I am

and they will find out sooner or later
Those around me are more able than I am
I will disappoint my advisor
It is more luck than talent that got me where I am.
If I get a compliment on a job well done

I think the person is just trying to be nice
YOU ARE NOT ALONE
Stanford Survey

Conducted via Facebook friends and emailing lists

220 responses in 24 hours (80 male, 140 female)

Biases in population? unknown

Answers >90% from engineering/earth sciences
Survey questions

This applies to me never, rarely, sometimes, often or always:

2. I’m afraid of disappointing my advisor(s)
3. I often succeed on a task, even if I’m afraid I will not do well before I undertake it
4. I think it was luck more than talent that got me into grad school
5. I am afraid that my advisor(s) and peers will find out that I am not as capable as they think I am
6. I give the impression that I am more capable than I really am
7. When I get complimented on a job well done, I often feel the person giving the compliment is merely trying to be nice
8. I am afraid that others will discover my lack of ability and/or skills
9. I compare my abilities to those around me and think they are more able than I am

10. (If you answered often/always to any): Do these factors affect your performance at school? What, if anything, can your instructor(s)/advisor(s) do to help you deal
I’m afraid to be found out

I think that ....

often/always
43% male, 62% female

never/rarely
30% male, 15% female
I am afraid to disappoint

I think that .........

Often/always
40% male, 60% female

Never/rarely
18% male, 6% female
Others are more capable

I think that .........

often/always
50% male, 71% female

never/rarely
22% male, 6% female
More by luck than talent

I think that ..... 

often/always
30% male, 36% female

never/rarely
42% male, 34% female
Compliment = being nice

I think that ....

often/always
21% male, 33% female

never/rarely
47% male, 25% female
If you have such feelings, is performance affected?

**Male**
- 52% yes, negatively (“scared”, “avoidance behavior”)
- 27% yes, positively (“work harder”)
- 21% no

**Female**
- 87% yes, negatively (“scared”, “avoidance behavior”, “exhaustion”, “negative impacts on personal life”)
- 7% yes, positively (“work harder”)
- 7% no
Can anything be done?

Male
- 45% advisor/mentor/instructor can help
- 5% nothing can be done by anyone
- 50% I need to do this myself

Female
- 76% advisor/mentor/instructor can help
- 2% nothing can be done by anyone
- 11% I don’t know
- 11% I need to do this myself
What can be done to help?

Frequent suggestions for advisors

Male
- Give honest and regular feedback
- Give students a sense of importance of their work
- Be more involved

Female
- Set students up for (small) confidence building successes
- Be open about stress, I.S., own failures
- Give regular encouragement and positive reinforcement
“Well, others may feel like fakes,
or may have felt like fakes,
but I really am one”

Or are you?
You are where you are for good reasons

You were admitted because you are good
You earn a Ph.D. because you earn it
You got a job because you can do it

People that select/judge you are not stupid
A small mishap is not proof of being a fake

One C-minus after twenty B-plusses or As
does not mean you can no longer do it

A wrong tangent or misunderstanding
does not mean you have lost the ability
Feeling like a fake? \textbf{GOOD!}

It might just mean that you are

a little out of your comfort zone

Is that really a bad thing?

Maybe we can embrace it

It shows we challenge ourselves, we learn