



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? 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