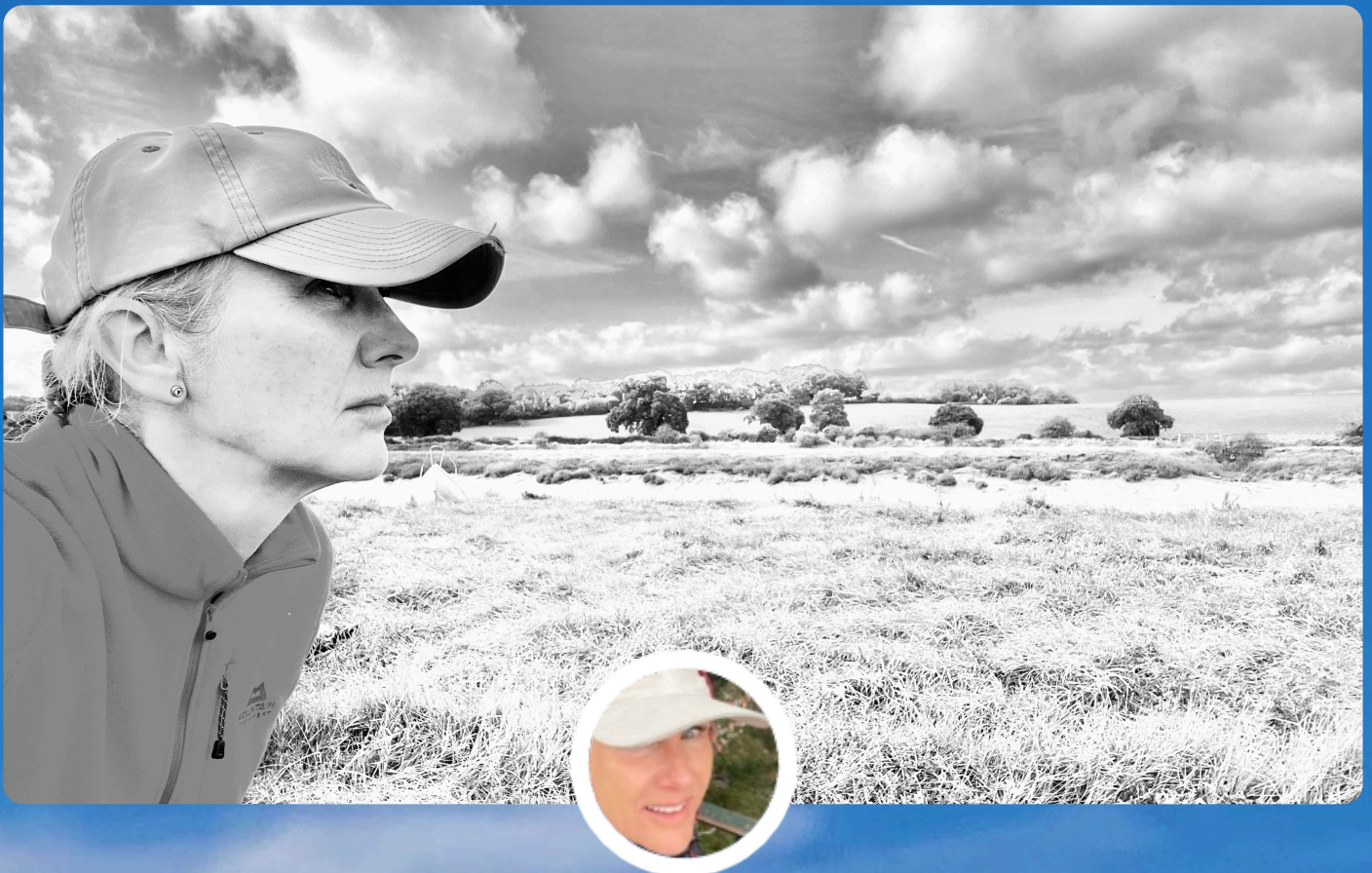


# Imposter Syndrome; a universal human condition?

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Discovered in 1978 and identified first in female high performing executives by two psychologists, Suzanne A Imes Ph D and Pauline R Clance Ph D, Imposter Phenomenon (IP) can be a potentially extremely harmful condition. Nearly all the serious academic studies around Imposter Phenomenon, also called Imposter Syndrome or Fraud Syndrome, cite the condition as being peculiar to high performing individuals.

However, the condition does not just affect high performing individuals. It is a widespread condition that can be amplified by gender, ethnicity, cultural and societal expectations.

As with so many psychological conditions, it is helpful if one imagines Imposter Phenomenon to be a condition that sits within quite a broad spectrum. Consider a scale where a zero score is low and the score 100 is high.

But first, what exactly is Imposter Phenomenon?

You could be forgiven that Imposter Phenomenon is almost like **self-loathing**. But it's a bit more complicated than that. Suzanne A Imes Ph D and Pauline R Clance PhD describe the condition as one where **self-doubt reigns supreme** and there's a deep seated **self-perception of inadequacy**. This is where the fraud dimension kicks in. The sufferer believes they will be discovered or found out to be the charlatans they believe themselves to be.

The sufferer believes therefore that they are an imposter.

All of the feelings and sentiments are self-sourced by the sufferer. The imposter dimension is self-imbued and not a result of someone saying that they are incompetent or a fake. This is about people who do not believe themselves to be **worthy** and the serious consequences of a person **taking too much notice of what they think about themselves**.

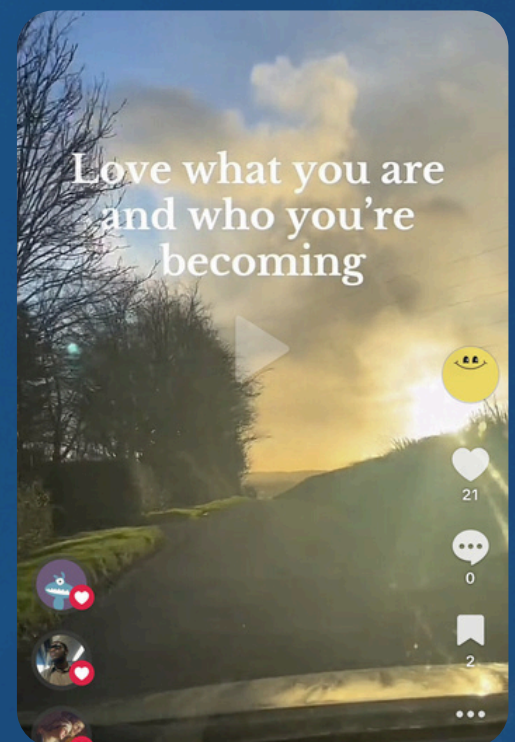
And if you recognise this in yourself then here's a little nudge from NoWorriesApp to contemplate, on how to slow down that thought traffic of self-doubt and reflect self-solutions.

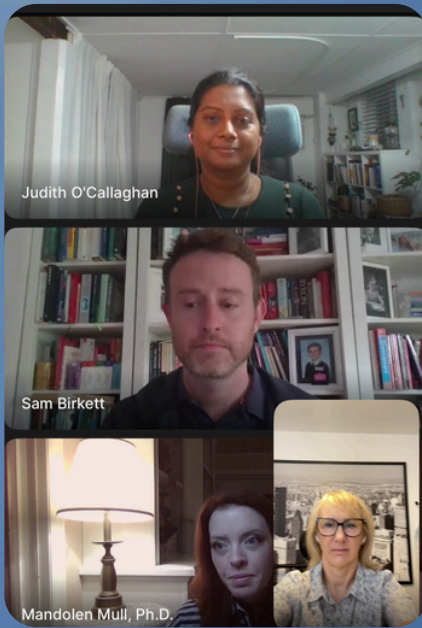
What is the aetiology, or cause, of the condition?

There is **no single cause**. The academics propose that there is a combination of factors that lead to the symptoms which include, in no particular order, family and childhood pressures, personal psychology and social and environmental pressures. Let's unpack some of this.

There are three main spheres of influence operating here: **family, workplace** and the **wider environment**.

Firstly, within a family setting there might be much praise heaped on the family members that achieve the most. Effort being considered as worthy, up to a point, but it really is the results that matter. From such settings labels emerge such as *"She's the clever one"* or *"He's the practical one"*. One child may frequently be told that they will *"Go far"*. That child may later feel they have not gone far enough, or they could never achieve to the level expected by parents and siblings. What we're seeing here is the seed of Imposter Phenomenon that is frequently sown in childhood and the sense of being **inadequate** extending into adulthood.





OK so what about at work?

Some of the causes are similar to those that arise in the family setting. One that manifests itself in a workplace is negative attribution bias. This is where a person credits their own success to other factors such as luck or timing. They can also credit success to other people or other teams. If you hear such credits being given at the office, or on the factory floor, there may just be a bit more to it than a person being generous to colleagues or being modest.

Still in the workplace, there are other forces that operate on the sufferer. If a person frequently engages in private or articulated self-denigration, they will reinforce the imposter psyche. Such thoughts are termed as cognitive distortions. There really are people who simply are unable to take credit for an outstanding achievement. Whatever they achieve, and however high they fly, they will not believe in their own talent. Also found in the workplace, those with Imposter Phenomenon, are people with low-efficacy who seek external validation to feel worthy. But, again, here these are individuals who have to been told they are inferior or lacking, it is they that believe themselves to be so.

The prevailing wider work culture offers little refuge to those with Imposter Phenomenon. When people ask each other how work is going, the inevitable answer is "Oh, great" even when the factory has just burned down or the office has a rat infestation. People routinely lie save face and protect ego.

The last in this trio are the cultural, societal and wider environmental factors that impact on the Imposter Phenomenon sufferer.



If the wider personal network is made up of high achieving people – whatever high achieving means – this can trigger Imposter Syndrome. If all of those around you are wealthy, high profile, easily recognised or similar, and in professions such as medicine, tech, and academia, then the environment is daunting and the risk of being exposed as **not being their peer**, but quite the reverse, is heightened.

Our ubiquitous friend **social media** plays a significant role.

You could say that people are **nudged to believe themselves to be failing**. Everyone on all of the platforms, posts “highlight reels” showing glitzy lifestyles, incredible holidays, outstanding restaurant meals, glorious parties – we’re running out of superlatives here – dazzling friendship experiences and exquisitely romantic moments. Of course that’s going to make other people feel **inadequate**. But if you feel inadequate anyway, and you’re starting from an ultra-low self-esteem base, then these fantasy stories are going to make you feel a whole lot worse. It just exacerbates the resident chronic Imposter Phenomenon internal feelings and beliefs.

OK, so we now know that Imposter Phenomenon is real and what causes it.

Who suffers from it?

Imposter Phenomenon is a subject area that is regularly researched across the world. This is fertile PhD territory. Lots of the academic papers on the subject suggest that people in Healthcare and Academic communities and people from professional services such as lawyers, consultants, and accountants are prone to Imposter Syndrome. But high achieving individual are not the only sufferers.



This is the interesting bit.

Factors that increase the risk of being affected by Imposter Phenomenon fall into five core categories.

Firstly, gender and sexual orientation. Women and people in the LGBTQIA+ experience, and certainly report, a disproportionately higher rate of experience of Imposter Phenomenon.

Ethnicity plays a role here too. Ethnic minority groups and women of colour, particularly black women, face higher risks due to systemic oppression and negative societal narratives. If the numbers are correct, and there is no reason to suspect otherwise, racial equality has some way to go in this domain.

Age too operates as a major influence. Younger generations, such as Gen Z and Millennials, experience higher rates, potentially due to increased pressure for academic and career success in the modern digital age. Older workers will feel uncomfortable too as their digital skills are, as a rule, behind those of their younger colleagues. They will ask themselves *“Do I know enough about this to be in the room?”* and *“Do I understand enough about the workplace to be in it?”*

Occupational and academic settings that provide confrontational environments, such as case conferences in law firms, academic debates, seminars, and conferences will frequently present risk of exposure, ridicule and being shown to be inadequate.

Personality trait is the last category of factors. the personality traits and orientations of the individual and the propensity to seek **perfection** and understand every granular detail of a project, idea or concept. The assumption that without a complete mastery of the subject, and no one has that as there is always much more to learn, an individual can be prone to feeling and believing themselves to be the imposter.

This is indeed a cruel condition.

Indeed this **universal human condition** is widespread. This is not a condition that, despite the key early academic research is particular to women or as suggested in some research findings, that affects higher performers.



## Possibly we all experience a form of Imposter Phenomenon in our lives?

What can I do?

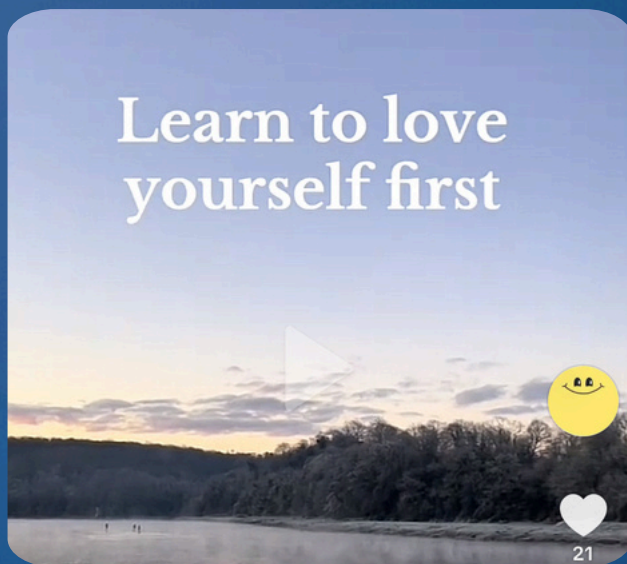
1. We know that the cognitive symptoms are chronic and primarily **self-doubt**. This is where the NoWorriesApp can help. Use the app to recognise, manage and ease self-doubt with small intentional decisions to think about things in a **more helpful way**.
2. The internalising of all failures and the externalising of all successes is a clue. These are not easy to recognise in one's self and even harder for others to observe which makes it difficult to offer help. Use the NoWorriesApp for **self-reflection** and ease your feeling of Imposter Syndrome with an intentional decision to take action to manage it, for example speak to others for support. You'll quickly find you're not alone. And if you share your anonymised worries with your community via our Digital Dashboard, you'll be giving back and supporting others.
3. The behavioural symptoms are easier to spot in a colleague than in one's self. By regularly minimising or dismissing personal accomplishments and downplaying performance, may point to past exposure to negative messaging. Use the NoWorriesApp to reflect and possibly make a small change to how you feel about **perfectionism**. Perhaps good is good enough?
4. Similarly, over preparation, particularly when working alone or at home, the taking on of excessive extra work, the avoidance of opportunity, and seeking excessive information prior to starting a task could be seen as markers. So take 5 and use the NoWorriesApp to make an intentional decision to manage **procrastination** and to act.

When we start to look at the emotional symptoms that accompany Imposter Phenomenon, we can see why this is so important and that it must be addressed.

Imposter Phenomenon can ruin a person's Wellbeing and holds them back from achieving their true potential. The depression, anxiety and stress caused has the potential to cause truly tragic outcomes. And that's not good for you and it's not good for your employer.

There is an opportunity here for **Policy Makers and HR Leaders** to shine a light on the effects of Imposter Syndrome in the workplace.

The key to understand what holds individuals back from being the best version and most productive version of themselves, is to be in touch with Sentiment Analysis in Real-Time©. Sentiment right across the employee and other stakeholder communities.



There's a new opportunity here and this is where NoWorriesApp.com can help. Understanding Sentiment Analysis in Real-Time© via our community specific Digital Dashboard can shine that light on what interventions are needed to support employee **Holistic Wellbeing** and understanding that can have an impact on the **bottom line**.

Perhaps it's time to try Sentiment Based Leadership© and to stop being imposters. Time to be our real selves, to reach our true potential without fear or self-doubt, to recognise, manage and ease Imposter Syndrome intentionally.



Visit [www.NoWorriesApp.com](http://www.NoWorriesApp.com) and follow the links to

**Contact Us** or click below

<https://www.noworriesapp.com/contact-us/>

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