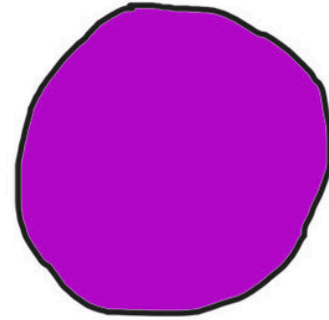


# Impostor Syndrome:

Do you have it,  
and what can you do  
about it.

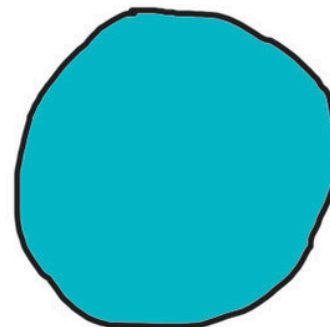
Gwen Rudie  
Johanna Teske  
Andrew Benson

WHAT YOU THINK YOU ARE:



■ A HOT CRAZY  
TRUCK FIRE MESS  
OF A PERSON WHO  
DISAPPOINTS  
IMPORTANT PEOPLE

WHO OTHERS  
THINK YOU ARE:



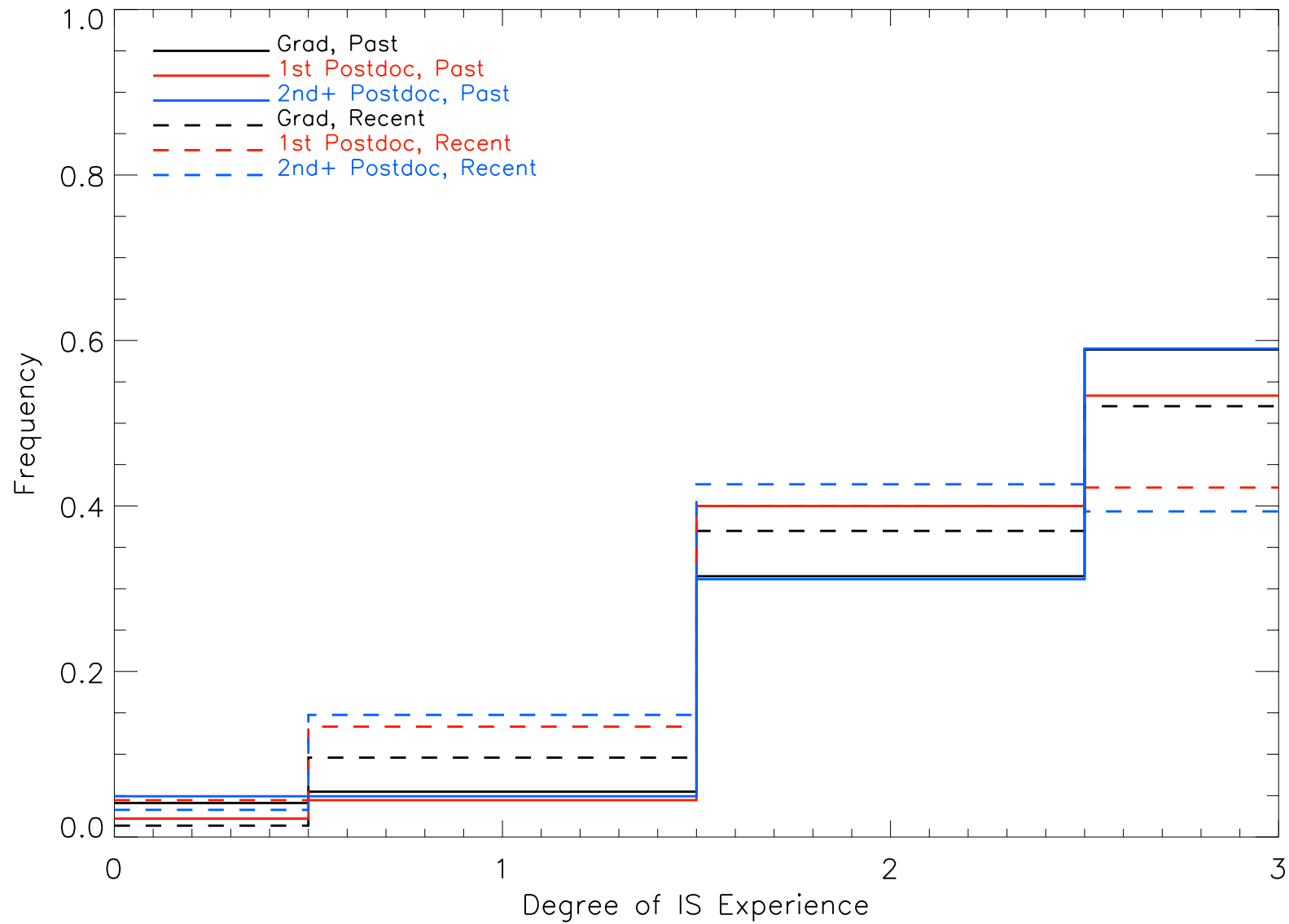
■ COOL  
AND FINE

# Why are we telling you about this?

- Survey of 319 Astronomers conducted on Facebook
- Only 9 out of 319 (3%) said they have never experienced the impostor syndrome.
- 56% of respondents said they are **severely** affected by impostor syndrome.
- 40% of respondents thought that the number of people who are impacted by impostor syndrome is a minority.

Thanks to Johanna Teske

# Astronomer Facebook Survey Results

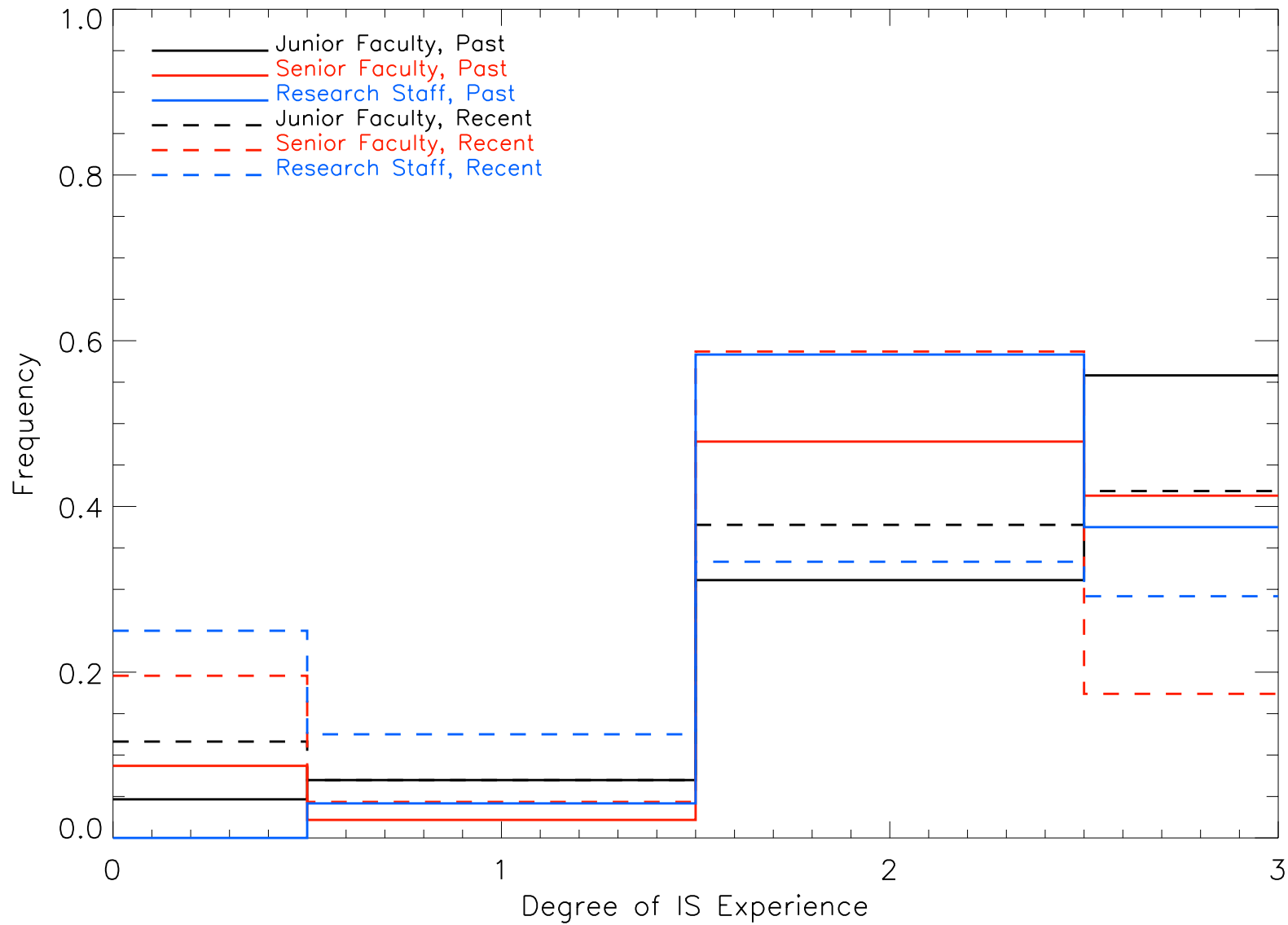


No IS thoughts



Severe IS thoughts

# Astronomer Facebook Survey Results

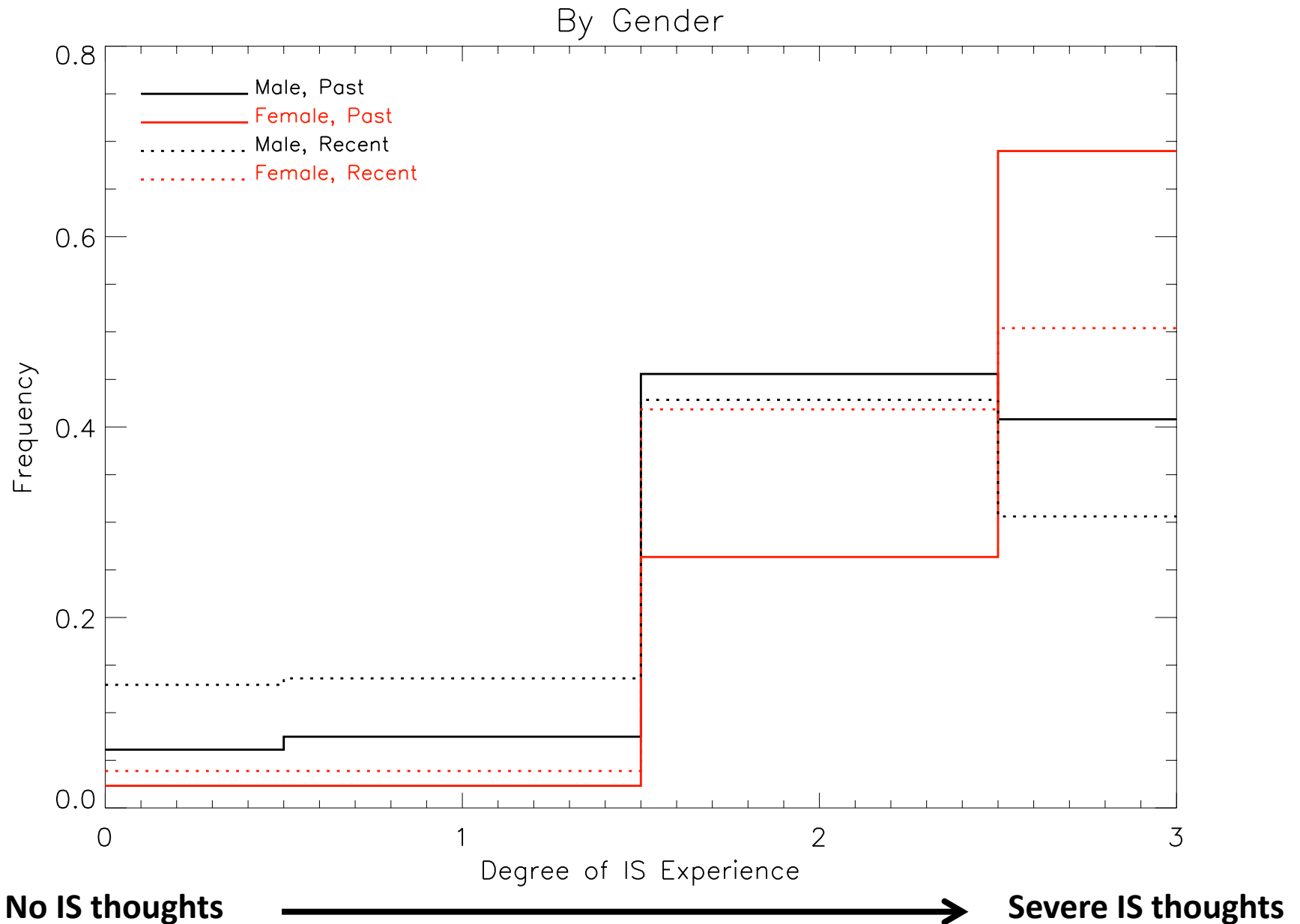


No IS thoughts



Severe IS thoughts

# Astronomer Facebook Survey Results

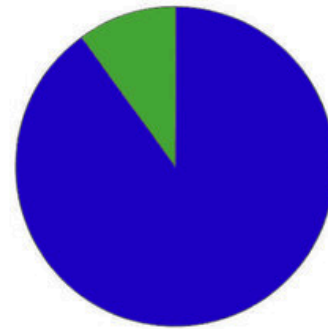


# Definition of Impostor Syndrome

People with Impostor Syndrome are “high-achieving individuals marked by an inability to internalize their accomplishments and a persistent fear of being exposed as a “fraud” ...

- Wikipedia

THOUGHTS YOU HAVE ON  
THE FIRST DAY OF A NEW JOB:



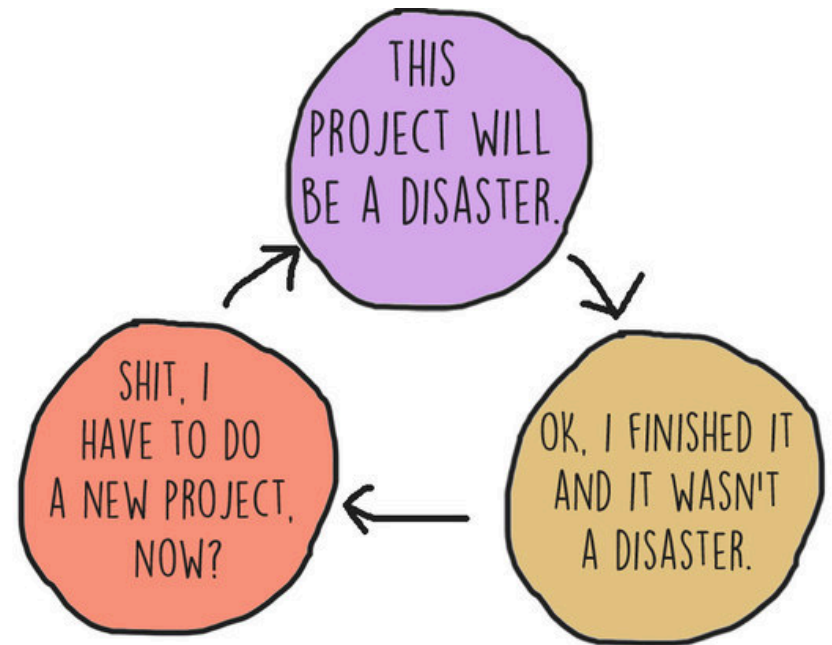
- MY BOSS IS GOING TO REALIZE I WAS A HUGE MISTAKE.
- MY BOSS IS GOING TO REALIZE I WAS A HUGE MISTAKE.

Kristin Chirico / BuzzFeed

# Definition of Impostor Syndrome

... Despite external evidence of their competence, those exhibiting the syndrome remain convinced that they are frauds and do not deserve the success they have achieved ...

- Wikipedia



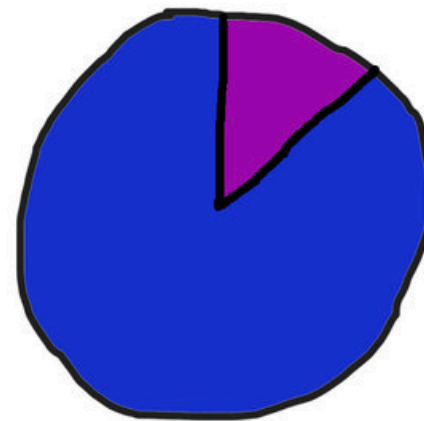
Kristin Chirico / BuzzFeed

# Definition of Impostor Syndrome

...Proof of success is dismissed as luck, timing, or as a result of deceiving others into thinking they are more intelligent and competent than they believe themselves to be.”

- Wikipedia

REASONS WHY YOU WON AN AWARD:



AWARD WAS  
EXTREMELY EASY  
TO WIN

AWARD WAS FOR  
PARTICIPATION

# The Imposter Phenomenon in High Achieving Women: Dynamics and Therapeutic Intervention

1978

Pauline Rose Clance & Suzanne Imes

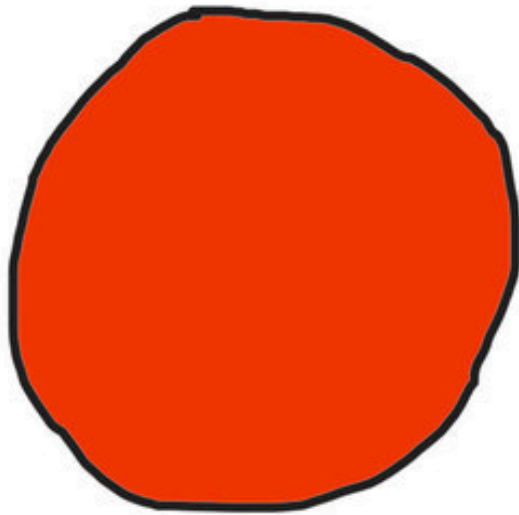
*Georgia State University  
University Plaza  
Atlanta, Georgia 30303*

**Abstract:** *The term imposter phenomenon is used to designate an internal experience of intellectual phonies, which appears to be particularly prevalent and intense among a select sample of high achieving women. Certain early family dynamics and later introjection of societal sex-role stereotyping appear to contribute significantly to the development of the imposter phenomenon. Despite outstanding academic and professional accomplishments, women who experience the imposter phenomenon persists in believing that they are really not bright and have fooled anyone who thinks otherwise. Numerous achievements, which one might expect to provide ample object evidence of superior intellectual functioning, do not appear to affect the imposter belief. Four factors, which contribute to the maintenance of imposter feelings over time, are explored. Therapeutic approaches found to be effective in helping women change the imposter self-concept are described.*

In the past five years we have worked in individual psychotherapy, theme-centered international groups, and college classes with over 150 highly successful women -- women who have earned PhDs in various specialties, who are respected professionals in their fields, or who are students recognized for their academic excellence. However, despite their earned degrees, scholastic honors, high achievement on standardized tests, praise and professional recognition from colleagues and respected authorities, these women do not experience an internal sense of success. They consider themselves to be "impostors." Women who experience the imposter phenomenon maintain a strong belief that they are not intelligent; in fact they are convinced that they have fooled anyone who thinks otherwise. For example, students often fantasize that they were mistakenly admitted to graduate school because of an error by the admissions committee. Numerous women graduate students state the their high examination scores are due to luck, to misgrading, or to the faulty judgment of professors. Women professionals in our sample feel over evaluated by colleagues and administrators. One women professor said, "I'm not good enough to be on the faculty here. Some mistake was made in the selection process." Another, the chairperson of her department, said, "Obviously I'm in this position because my abilities have been overestimated." Another women with two master's degrees, a PhD., and numerous publications to her credit considered herself unqualified to teach remedial college classes in her field. In other words, these women find innumerable means of negating any external evidence that contradicts their belief that they are, in reality, unintelligent.\*

If you're an "impostor",  
you're in good company

TYPES OF PEOPLE WHO CAN  
HAVE IMPOSTOR SYNDROME:



■ ALL THE SMART, SUCCESSFUL  
PEOPLE THAT YOU THINK  
HAVE THEIR SHIT TOGETHER

# “Impostors” in their own words:



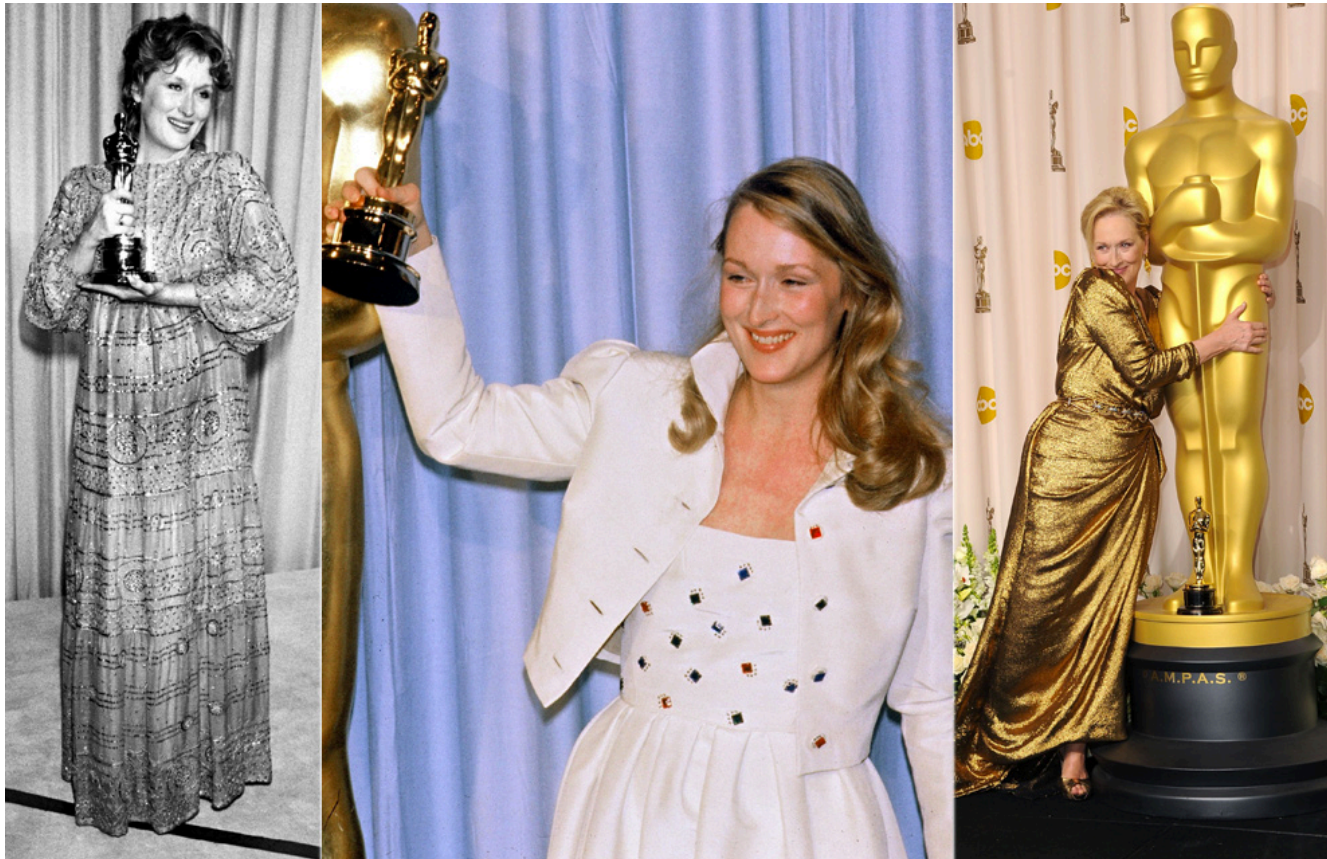
I thought it was a fluke. I thought everybody would find out, and they'd take the Oscar back. They'd come to my house, knocking on the door, 'Excuse me, we meant to give that to someone else. That was going to Meryl Streep.'

- Jodie Foster



Why would anyone want to see me again in a movie? And I don't know how to act anyway, so why am I doing this?

- Meryl Streep

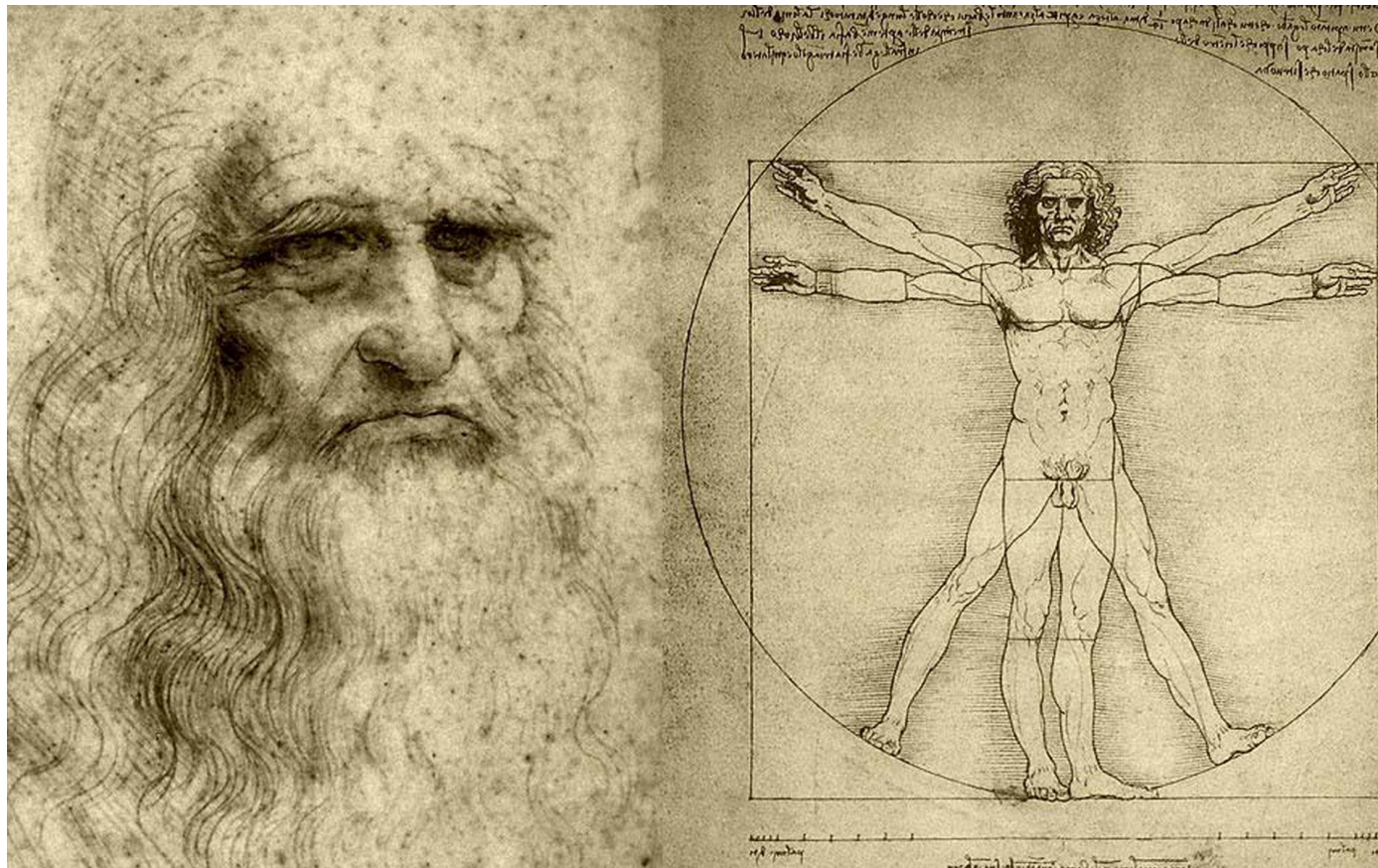






I was too embarrassed and too intimidated to ask questions. I'm always looking over my shoulder wondering if I measure up.

-Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor about her first year at Princeton



I have offended God and mankind because my work did not reach the quality it should have.

-Leonardo da Vinci on his death bed

# “Impostors” in *our* own words

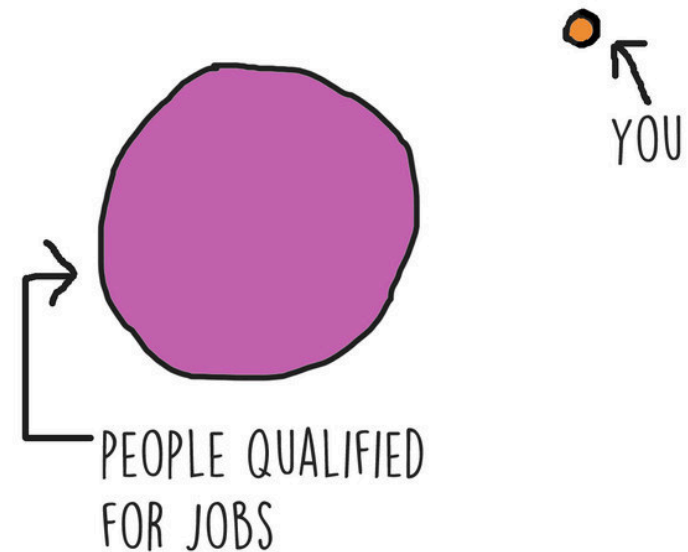


Kristin Chirico / BuzzFeed

# Who is Most Susceptible?

From Valerie Young's *The Secret Thoughts of Successful Women*

- Students (especially in graduate school)
- Academics and people employed in other creative fields
- Highly successful people and those with unusually early career success
- First generation professionals/college/graduate school students
- Those who took atypical routes to their position



Kristin Chirico / BuzzFeed

# Who is Most Susceptible?

From Valerie Young's *The Secret Thoughts of Successful Women*

- Under-represented groups
  - Women in male-dominated fields
  - Men in female-dominated fields
  - Minorities
  - LGBTQ+
  - Younger or older than is typical in your environment
  - Those with disabilities
  - Those from under-represented socio-economic backgrounds
  - Those from under-represented religious or cultural traditions
- Those with high-achieving parents.
- People who are self-employed or otherwise work alone.

# Common Traits of “Impostors”

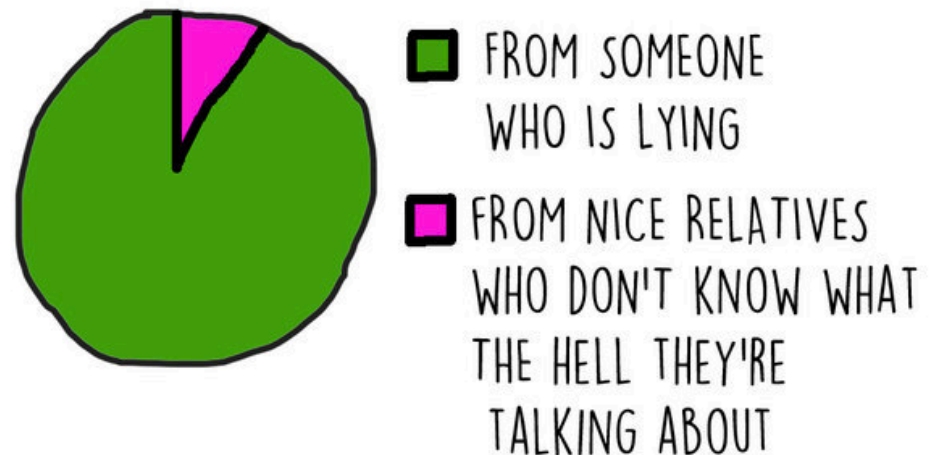
From Valerie Young's *The Secret Thoughts of Successful Women*

# Common Traits of “Impostors”

From Valerie Young's *The Secret Thoughts of Successful Women*

- Explaining away their success...
  - They must let anyone in.
  - Someone made a terrible mistake
  - I had a lot of help.
  - I had connections.
  - They are just being nice.
  - They felt sorry for me.

ALL COMPLIMENTS YOU RECEIVE:



Kristin Chirico / BuzzFeed

# Common Traits of “Impostors”

From Valerie Young's *The Secret Thoughts of Successful Women*

- Explaining away their success...
  - I got lucky.
  - I was in the right place at the right time.
  - Its because they like me.
  - If I can do it, anyone can.



Kristin Chirico / BuzzFeed

# Other Common “Impostor” Thoughts

- I don't belong here/don't deserve my success
- I shouldn't need help, I should be able to do it myself.
- I should be able to get it right the first time.
- If I'm not perfect, then I am a failure and a fraud.
- People who complement me are either just being nice or don't really understand that I have failed.
- Any criticism is proof that I am a fraud and a failure.
- Soon someone will figure out I don't know what I am doing and kick me out.
- I have no talent, I just work harder than other people

# Ways that Impostors Persist and Protect Themselves

From Valerie Young's *The Secret Thoughts of Successful Women*

- **Over preparing and over working themselves**
  - You may succeed but your work-life balance will suffer
- **Holding back**
  - At least then if you fail, you can tell yourself you *might* have succeeded if you had put in the effort
- **Use charm, humor, or niceness to win approval.**
  - You credit your success to your behavior instead of your competence

# Ways that Impostors Persist and Protect Themselves

From Valerie Young's *The Secret Thoughts of Successful Women*

- **Procrastinate**
  - Your work doesn't reflect your true capability because you didn't put your all into it
- **Never finishing**
  - If you don't finish something, no one can judge it
- **Self-sabotage**

# Healthier Ways to Deal with IS

- **Accept that you aren't an Impostor – you have IS**
- **Make a “self-esteem” CV**
  - Write down all of the accomplishments you are most proud of – reread this when you doubt yourself
  - Don't explain away or otherwise “qualify” these accomplishments
- **Give yourself a reward for tasks accomplished so you recognize your successes**

# Healthier Ways to Deal with IS

- **Change your internal monologue**

- Be kinder to yourself
- If you wouldn't beat someone else up over something, why are you beating yourself up over it?

THINGS YOU BEAT YOURSELF UP FOR:



- STUFF OUT OF YOUR CONTROL
- STUFF EVERYONE HAS LITERALLY ALREADY FORGOTTEN ABOUT
- STUFF NOBODY ELSE EVEN NOTICED

Kristin Chirico / BuzzFeed

# Healthier Ways to Deal with IS

- **Change your internal monologue**

- Anytime you catch yourself thinking impostor thoughts – Yell “STOP” in your head (or out loud if you’re with friends)

YOUR THOUGHTS WHEN SOMEONE SAYS THAT YOU WOULD BE GOOD FOR A JOB/ROLE/TEAM:

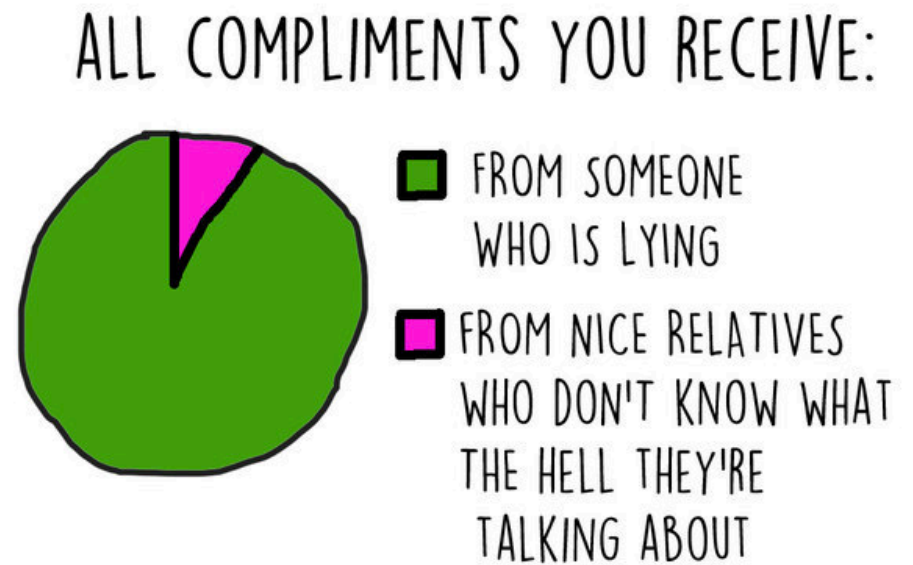


- WHAT?
- WHY?
- HAVE YOU MET ME?
- MAYBE THEY'RE JUST TRYING TO BE NICE

Kristin Chirico / BuzzFeed

# Healthier Ways to Deal with IS

- **Set a goal to start accepting compliments graciously**
  - It's actually kind of insulting to your complement-er when you disagree with them.



Kristin Chirico / BuzzFeed

# Healthier Ways to Deal with IS

- **Keep a “happy file”**
  - Re-read evidence of your competence when you aren’t feeling it
- **Set a deadline if you procrastinate and work to the goal**
  - Then celebrate the completion of your goal
- **Find a kind mentor**
  - Try to see yourself through their eyes

# Healthier Ways to Deal with IS

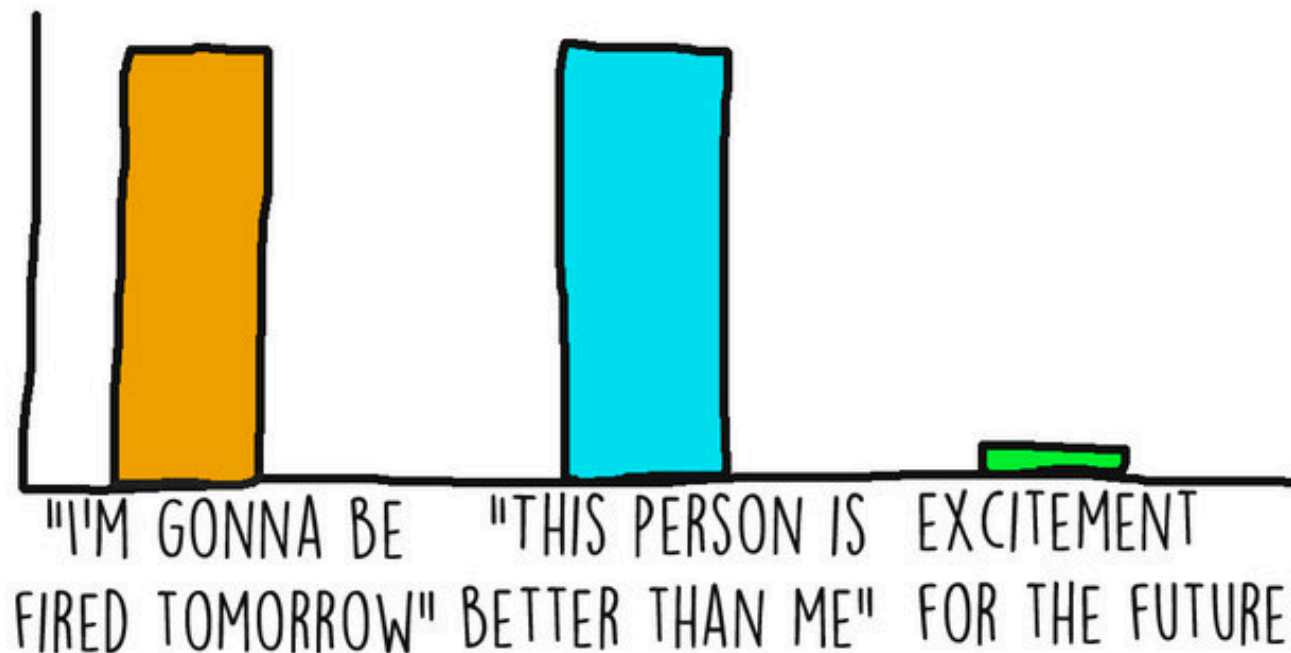
- **Redefine success**
  - What accomplishments give you the most satisfaction?
  - Work towards those career options/goals
- **Stop unrealistic comparisons**
- **Self care**
  - Take time to do the things that make you happy

# Healthier Ways to Deal with IS

- **Fake it 'til you make it**
  - The field rewards confidence
  - Sometimes you have to feign confidence when you don't have it
  - Eventually, you will *feel* more confident by acting more confident
- **Learn to be your own advocate**
  - If you don't tell people about your accomplishments, how will anyone know about them

# Our Own Healthier Ways to Deal with IS

THOUGHTS THAT KEEP YOU UP AT NIGHT:



Kristin Chirico / BuzzFeed

# More Information

- “The Secret Thoughts of Successful Women” by Dr. Valerie Young, and her website [www.impostorsyndrome.com](http://www.impostorsyndrome.com)
- IS reference list -- [http://paulineroseclance.com/impostor\\_phenomenon.html](http://paulineroseclance.com/impostor_phenomenon.html)
- “Mindset: The New Psychology of Success” by Dr. Carol Dweck
- Dr. Sarah Ballard’s website and podcast, “Self-care with Drs. Sarah” (on iTunes!)
- Women in Astronomy Blog
- Professor Jason Wright’s talk (<http://sites.psu.edu/astrowright/presentations-and-videos/>)
- 21 Ways to Overcome Impostor Syndrome (Google it)



I wasn't lucky.

I deserved it.

-Margaret Thatcher