

## DO I BELONG HERE? IMPOSTER SYNDROME IN THE ACADEMY

This *Faculty Matters* virtual session took place on April 19, 2021.

127 participants shared their thoughts and ideas which are summarized and paraphrased below, as captured from the event's chat section.

### ACADEMICS ARE ONLY HUMAN

Learning about Imposter Syndrome allows a person to recognize, understand, and *put a name to their feelings* of insecurity.

One reason to feel as imposters is being in an *environment where everyone is criticized constantly*. (Journal reviews, grant applications, etc.) Criticism may turn *vidious*. Another reason is the feeling that *people don't value what you do*. (hiring processes, evaluating grad students).

Lack of information about peers makes it hard to know where *the bar for "good enough"* is. *Cultural expectations of excellence* lead to feelings of shame, inadequacy, and *even loneliness* upon failure or mistakes.

Sharing failures with *students* may seem acceptable, but it feels terrifying to acknowledge them to *colleagues*.

While everyone is at risk of feeling as an imposter, some are better at *hiding or denying* it.

Successful people may be very competitive and sometimes appear *ruthless*. They are very good at *selling themselves*, which doesn't necessarily sit well with everyone.

Imposter syndrome can lead to doubts about *applying* for a job, as well as pondering *quitting* a job. It can also lead to missed opportunities because nominating oneself for an award may seem unthinkable.

### MENTORING & VALIDATION

Mentorship and *social interaction* are ways to address imposter feelings exacerbated by *isolation*.

Mentoring young faculty is essential for a successful academic career. Mentors deserve *recognition* for investing a significant amount of time in helping junior faculty. Mentoring could be recognized as "service" at promotion.

Mentees should be able to learn from their mentors' *failures and struggles*, and not only see them as models of expected success to achieve.

Learning about a renowned senior colleague's imposter feelings and *shared concerns* about performance helps normalize the experience. There is *value and humanity in sharing struggles* and not just success stories.

## THE GENDER DIVIDE

It is telling that 99 out of 127 participants in the session are women. In general, men are not *socialized to show vulnerability*. Men are just as likely to experience imposter syndrome, but it may not affect them the same way, or they may *manage* their feelings differently.

Despite widespread awareness, imposter syndrome is a reason *why women leave junior faculty positions*. They are still viewed as undeserving by those who believe women and minorities are given preference "nowadays".

It is important to reiterate the message that imposter feelings are *not unique* to women or minorities. Imposter syndrome is not just personal either, there are structural elements to it.

## SUGGESTIONS

If it is difficult to advocate for yourself, advocate for *your former self*, i.e., your grad students.

Having students do a peer review exercise on one of *your own* first drafts and only telling them it is their professor's work after they've found all weaknesses is a powerful way to teach them about imposter syndrome.

Persons in positions of power can drive a *change in culture* by modeling vulnerability and discussing failure. Engaging and safe spaces for genuine discussion are needed.

Chairs need to protect junior faculty from all the university demands. They should discuss what responsibilities should be agreed to and which responsibilities may be *reasonably postponed*.

Junior faculty need to learn how to navigate *imposter syndrome vs time management*. It is very hard to "say no" to request and they may agree to take on more time consuming responsibilities to "make up" for other "weaknesses".

Mentoring for faculty lecturers should be considered.

## RESOURCES

### CV of Failures

Johannes Househofer

[https://www.uni-](https://www.uni-goettingen.de/de/document/download/bed2706fd34e29822004dbe29cd00bb5.pdf/Johannes_Haushofer_CV_of_Failures[1].pdf)

[goettingen.de/de/document/download/bed2706fd34e29822004dbe29cd00bb5.pdf/Johannes\\_Haushofer\\_CV\\_of\\_Failures\[1\].pdf](https://www.uni-goettingen.de/de/document/download/bed2706fd34e29822004dbe29cd00bb5.pdf/Johannes_Haushofer_CV_of_Failures[1].pdf)

### Contextualizing the Impostor “Syndrome”

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