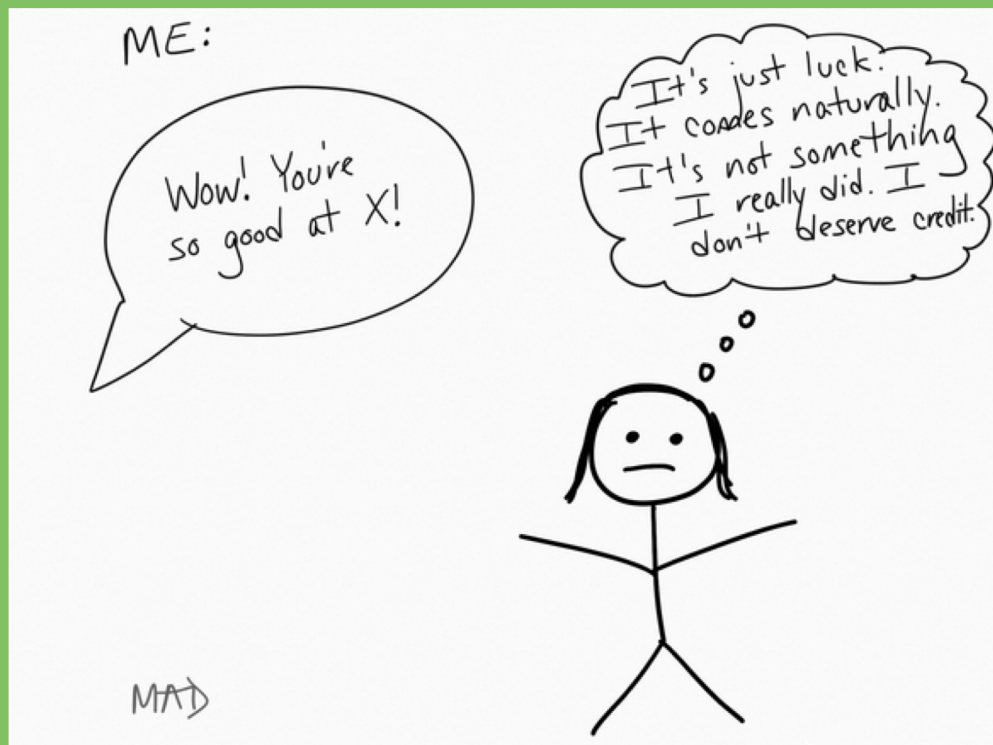


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When high achievers feel like frauds:
The Impostor Phenomenon as an obstacle in
(women's) academic careers?

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When high achievers feel like frauds: The Impostor Phenomenon as an obstacle in (women's) academic careers?

High performing persons, who feel – against all evidence - as „intellectual frauds”, suffer from the so called Impostor phenomenon (IP). Recent studies indicate, that this view can produce decisive negative effects on variables, highly relevant for career development. Furthermore there's ample evidence, that scientists who are highly engaged in academia are affected quite often. And at least some studies implicate, that women are more affected than men. Against this backdrop we present two studies that investigate the contribution of the IP to explain careers in academia.

First, we focus on the relationship between the IP and specific characteristics of academia as a working environment, taking the relevance of different discipline cultures into account (e.g. STEM vs. Social Sciences). Results from a study with 561 PhD-candidates confirm previous findings showing that women suffer more from IP than men and they also reinforce that employees at University are affected more than “external” PhDs. Persons enrolled in University positions, who suffer from IP report relatively less emotional support and more often believe to disappoint their working environment. IP sufferers characterize their vocational situation more often as one with few exchanges on job related challenges and sparse feedback. Second, we present a study in which we examine self-compassion, a individual variable considered to be a potential resilience factor against the IP. Taking gender and gender-role orientation into account we investigated 459 high achieving first-year undergraduate students in an online survey. The results show that female, feminine, and undifferentiated students score higher on measures of the IP and lower on measures of self-compassion than male, masculine, or androgynous students. Higher levels of the IP were associated with lower levels of self-compassion across all students tested.

Based on this research we discuss implications for supporting measures for women in academia - on both an individual and an organizational level.