



Hi graduate friends,

I want to talk a bit about the impostor phenomenon today. The impostor phenomenon is when you think you're not as competent as everyone else thinks you are. You doubt your skills and fear that any day now... the people around you are going to find out that you are a fraud! You don't belong here! Your achievements are not that big of a deal, or they are because of luck!

Well my friends, it's simply not true. You're also not the only one feeling this. Many of the people around you are feeling the same as it's **very common** among graduate students.

It's also not just a feeling. It interferes with your life. For example, it can make you become an overachiever by making you work too much because you think it's never enough, make you become an underachiever by allowing you to set the bar low for yourself, negatively impact your self-esteem, and spike your anxiety. If you want to see how much the impostor phenomenon interferes with your life, you can try taking this [TEST](#).



Now the impostor phenomenon isn't fair either; not everyone experiences it in the same way as a lot of it stems from environmental and societal factors. For example, if you receive low quality mentorships, experience a lot of competition around you, and are more isolated, you could end up with more impostor fears than others (Cohen & McConnell, 2019). Disabilities and demographics also come into play because the costs of your actions and mistakes are/feel very different based on things like your disabilities, gender, family background, and the color of your skin. For example, you might experience more intense and frequent impostor feelings if you're the first in your family to attend graduate school (Sims & Cassidy, 2020). Similarly, if you're a Black student, you may feel the extra pressure of your family and the Black community's expectations on your shoulders along with your awareness of low Black racial representation in academia, which means people might look to you as the spokesperson for the Black community (Stone et al., 2018).

My point is, it's complicated, which means overcoming it isn't easy. But realizing that it's something that the environment and society play such a significant role in, is one big step to fighting it. **YOU are NOT** the problem, but you end up feeling it. I hope you feel a bit better already! 😊



I'm sure we'll get to this topic again in the future. For more, check out this nice podcast episode on [Graduate Student Imposterism](#) by [Student Affairs Now](#).



If you're interested in signing up for our **PhD Planning Buddies group**, where we get together weekly to reflect on your past week and plan for the upcoming week, [register for the PhD group using the link on our website](#).

Best,



Najmeh Keyhani (she/her/hers), PhD, from your [Learning Development & Success](#) team!

References

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- Sims, W. L., & Cassidy, J. W. (2020). Impostor feelings of Music Education graduate students. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 68(3), 249–263. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022429420946899>
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