

Title: Understanding the Impostor Phenomenon

(Research initiated prior to joining IIMA, in-progress)

The impostor phenomenon is experienced by many successful, talented, and high-achieving individuals, leading to anxiety, depression, burnout, perfectionism, procrastination, and other self-handicapping behaviors. Such people usually take fewer risks and seek fewer career development or leadership opportunities. This is a trait more common among women and minorities. Using a mixed-methods approach, this ongoing study examines how the impostor phenomenon develops and manifests across the career spectrum in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and medicine. Data were collected using more than 900 online surveys and 400 one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with students and professionals from more than 80 disciplines and 200 institutions, purposefully snowball-sampled. Open-ended survey items were thematically analyzed to design interviews, that were analyzed qualitatively using a phenomenological approach and analytic induction.

Key findings indicate gender trends where women shared instances of sexism, racism, discrimination, and microaggression, also showing gender-differences in which the impostor phenomenon is experienced.