

The Impostor Syndrome

Maya Schuldiner
Dept. Of Molecular Genetics



מכון ויצמן למדע
WEIZMANN INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE

The Impostor Syndrome

- ❖ A syndrome where sufferers are unable to internalize their accomplishments.
- ❖ Regardless of what level of success they may have achieved or what external proof they get, they remain convinced internally that they do not deserve the success and are really frauds.
- ❖ Proofs of success are dismissed as luck, timing, or ability to deceive others.
- ❖ This syndrome is typically associated with academics (70%).



Are you an imposter-ist?



- ❖ Do you tend to chalk your accomplishments up to being a "fluke," "no big deal" or the fact that people just "like" you?
- ❖ Do you hate making a mistake, being less than fully prepared or not doing things perfectly?
- ❖ Do you worry that others will find out that you're not as capable as they think you are?
- ❖ When you DO succeed, do you think, "Phew, I fooled 'em this time but I may not be so lucky next time."?

Taken from: Dr. Valerie Young

<http://impostorsyndrome.com/>

Are you an imposter-ist?

- ❖ Do you tend to feel crushed by even constructive criticism, seeing it as evidence of your "ineptness?"
- ❖ Do you believe that other people are smarter and more capable than you?
- ❖ Do you sometimes shy away from challenges because of self-doubt?
- ❖ Do you live in fear of being discovered or unmasked?



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**If you answered yes to
any of these questions
join the club!**



How did this happen?

❖ Parenting modes:

1. A family label of a “smart” child and a “sensitive” child are branded at an early stage and remains fixed in the family no matter what. The so called “sensitive” child will keep on doubting its success and intelligence even when contrasting evidence arises.

2. A child is given messages of being capable of success even without any effort, which is later contrasted later in life by the fact that in order to succeed the person actually needs to invest much effort, thus a sense of inadequacy and of being



How did this happen?

❖ Society's take on psychology.....

our entire approach to psychology is focused is on disease and failure. There are some 40,000 studies on depression on record with the American Psychology Association, and just 14 on joy. That bias translates to the workplace as an obsession with correcting weaknesses, filling gaps, and focusing on the laggards.

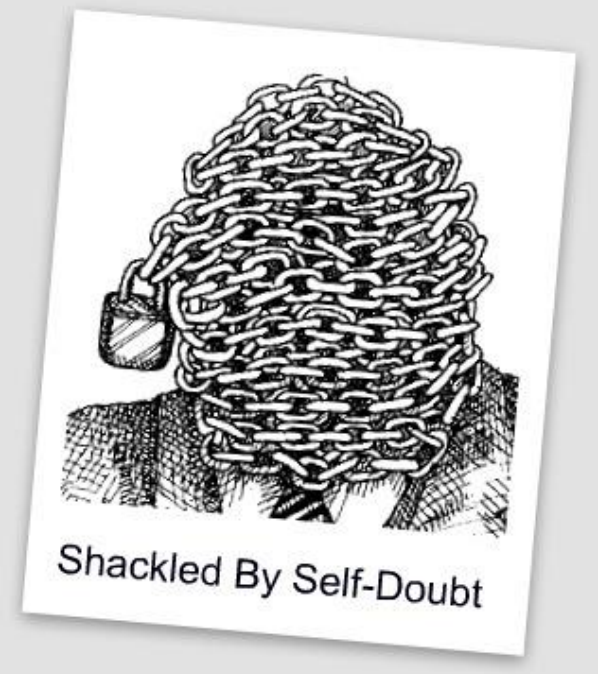
In science this translates to people rarely getting/giving positive feedback....



How did this happen?

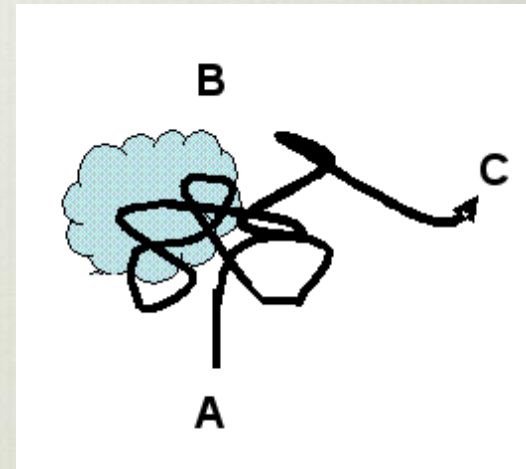
❖ Human psychology

Self-doubt and negative feedback weigh heavily on the mind, but praise barely registers. People tend to attribute their failures to a stable, inner core of ineptness. While discounting successes as accidental.



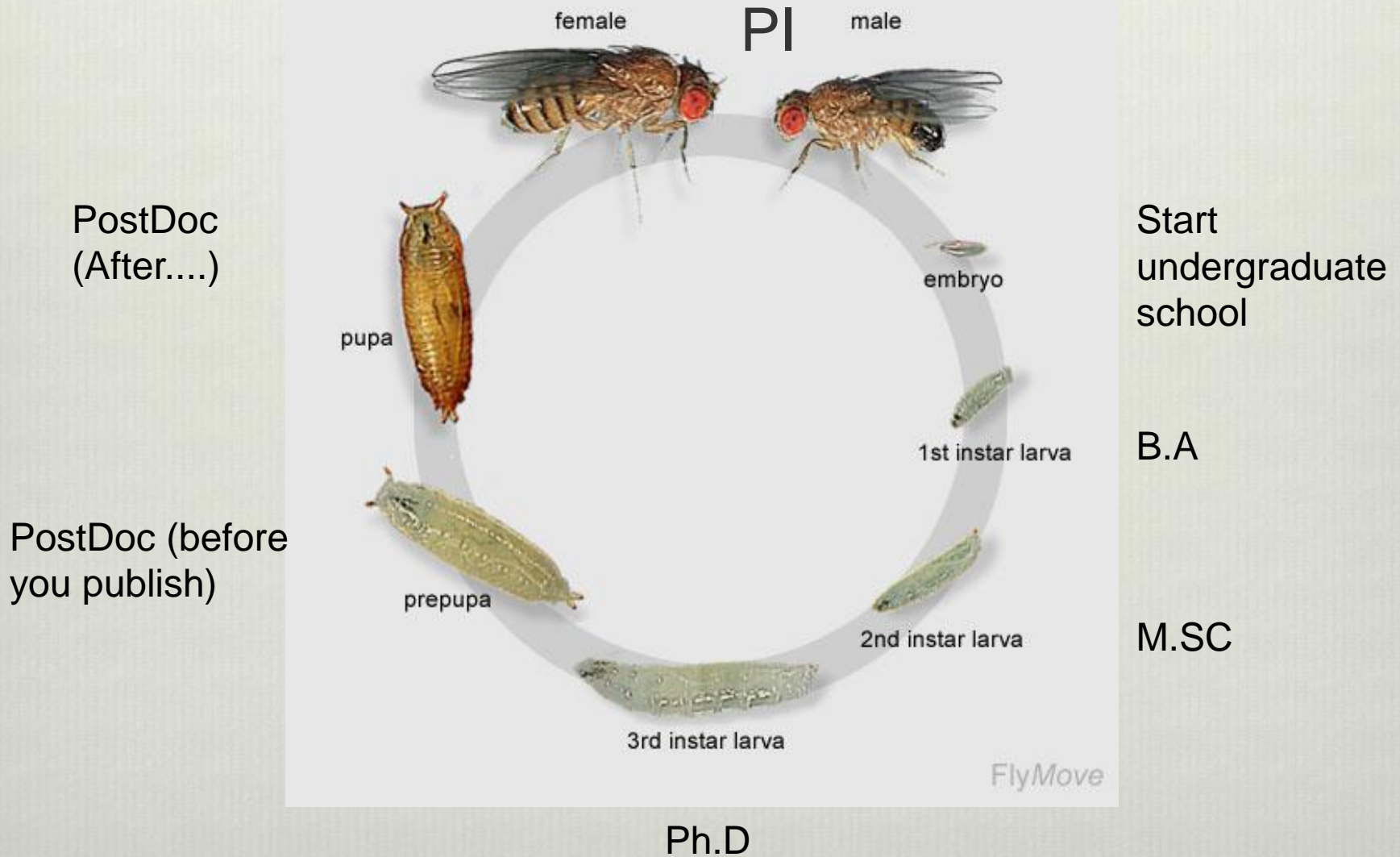
How did this happen?

- ❖ Our distorted take on science
 - We are often taught that Science deals with objective things and absolute truths and think that doing science is the same.
 - When we find that our own discoveries have a big element of randomness we feel that we were just lucky.
 - It can seem like people around us discovered things in a logical way since that is the way papers and seminars are presented.



How did this happen?

The life cycle of ~~*Drosophila melanogaster*~~
an academic



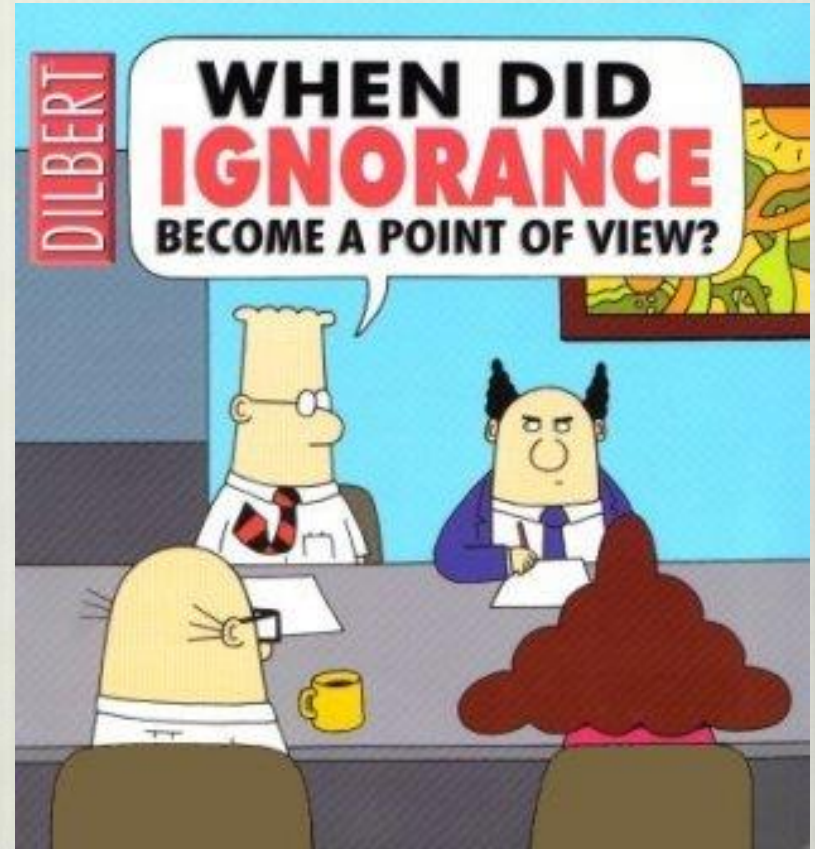
How did this happen?



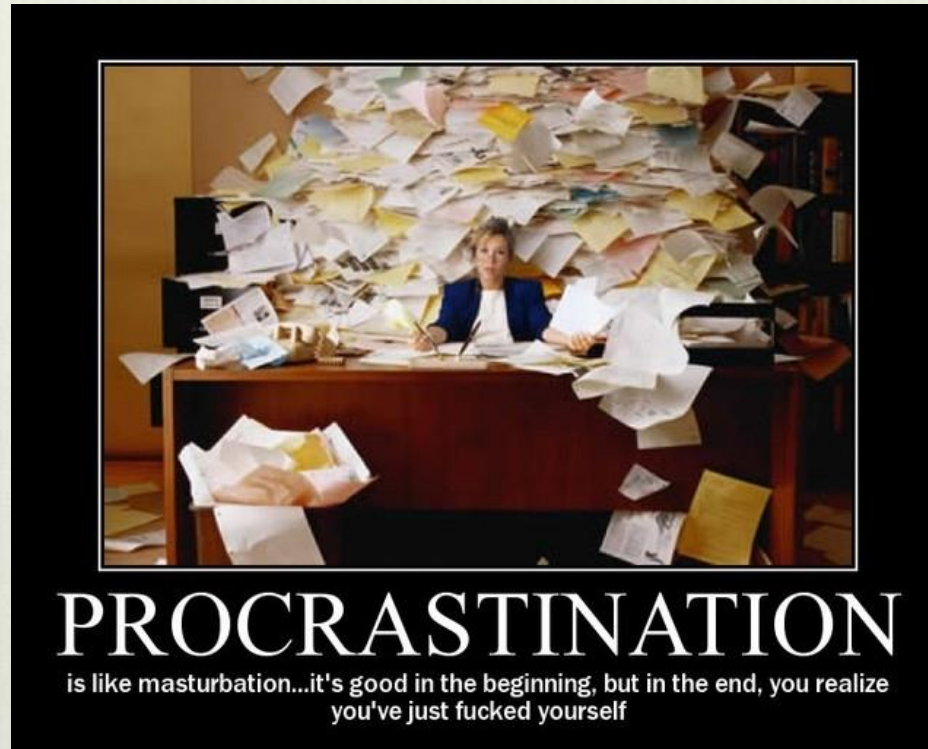
The pyramid effect...

Why it sucks to have the impostor syndrome....

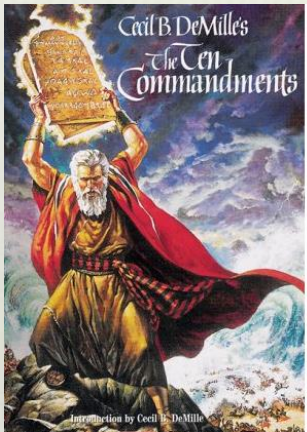
- ❖ It can make you less inclined to compete for advanced positions (such as postdocs or faculty positions).
- ❖ It can instill a fear to pursue new ideas and to take scientific risks.
- ❖ It can make you reticent about offering potentially valuable insights, ideas, opinions and solutions to problems for fear of being wrong or exposing your “ignorance.”



Why it sucks to have the impostor syndrome....



- ❖ It can make you prone to procrastination. This often causes delays in graduation of students.
- ❖ It can cause stress-related problems leading to disease. M.Sc and PhD students are under VERY high risk for psychological stress
- ❖ It makes you more likely to see constructive criticism as proof of your ineptitude, rather than using it to improve skills and knowledge.



How can you deal with your syndrome?

1. Break the silence. Knowing there's a name for these feelings and that you are not alone can be tremendously freeing.

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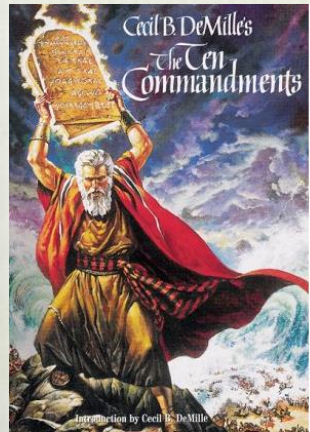
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How can you deal with your syndrome?

1. Break the silence. Knowing there's a name for these feelings and that you are not alone can be tremendously freeing.
2. Separate feelings from fact. Realize that just because you may feel stupid, doesn't mean you are.
3. Instead of taking your self-doubt as a sign of your ineptness, recognize that it might be a normal response to being a beginner – which you will often be in an academic environment..
4. Accentuate the positive. **Forgive** yourself when the inevitable mistake happens.
5. Develop a new response to failure and mistake making. Henry Ford once said, "Failure is only the opportunity to begin again more intelligently." (PI's – remember this when talking to your students....)

Taken from: Dr. Valerie Young

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How can you deal with your syndrome?

6. Right the rules. person to be wro
 7. Develop a new s
“Wait till they fi
“Everyone who
may not know a
 8. Visualize succes
successful preser
 9. Fake it ‘til you r
your ineptness le
 10. Reward yourself
dismissing valid
on the back.
- 
- The image shows a hand being patted on the back. It features several promotional overlays: a red diagonal banner in the top left corner with the text '\$1.49', a red starburst graphic in the bottom right corner with the text 'NEW', and a black horizontal banner at the bottom with the text 'Pat on the Back' in white. The background of the image is a person's hand and arm in a blue shirt and patterned tie.

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Rewarding ourselves in science

- ❖ We often feel like we get very few moments of happiness in science (people often say it's a “thankless” job) but it is only because of the way WE choose to view it.
- ❖ For example – when you get a good PCR to work – you will never stop to celebrate (it seems SO trivial to have a PCR work – anyone can do it – right?) but when you have run it for 10 times without success you will SURE beat yourself up about it...
- ❖ SO – learn how to give equal weight to your failures and successes.



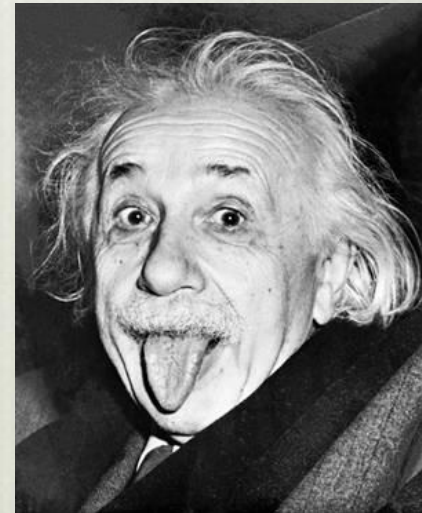
Rewarding ourselves in science

- ❖ We never celebrate when we send a paper/grant/PhD proposal out because we fear it still might get rejected or criticized
- ❖ By the time news of the submission comes back you can only feel relief.
- ❖ If you learn to measure yourself and celebrate your OWN finish lines you will increase your own self assessment skills.



What famous impostor-ists have to say about it...

- ❖ Perfectionism is a refusal to let yourself move ahead. ~ Jennifer White
- ❖ I use not only all the brains I have but all that I can borrow. ~ Woodrow Wilson
- ❖ The secret of creativity is knowing how to hide your sources. ~ Albert Einstein
- ❖ Everybody is ignorant, only on different subjects. ~ Woodrow Wilson
- ❖ I was gratified to be able to answer promptly. I said, I don't know. ~ Mark Twain



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Some of the materials in this presentation were also taken from:

John Gradem

webpage: <http://www.johngraden.com/impsyn.html>