

The roots of the Imposter Syndrome lie in our childhood

The tendency towards feeling like an imposter is a matter of both nature and nurture.

Nurture

There are many factors that contribute to the tendency to experience feeling like an intellectual Imposter. The three main factors are:

1. Perfectionist parents.

Perfectionists gauge everything in context of the ideal. They focus on the gap between that ideal and current delivery, whatever the situation is, and find current performance just not good enough. It doesn't measure up. We take that on board as part of our identity. And it reinforces our feeling of not being good enough.

2. Labels.

Quite often in families, children are given labels. You're the clever one, the creative one, the pretty one, the athletic one. You're the troublemaker. You're going to be successful. You're the next prime minister.

We take those labels onboard and again identify ourselves both by the labels we're given and by the absence of other labels. In other words, if I'm the intelligent one, in my mind that means I'm not athletic, good looking, charming or any other characteristic with which we could label ourselves. Labels define us ... and confine us.

Therefore, we may feel like fakes and frauds if we experience success in these areas which are outside our label(s).

3. Belonging.

If a child is different to the rest of the family, he or she may feel that they don't fit in; that they're on the outside. This lack of belonging may come from a different appearance, personality, from hobbies or talents, as examples. They feel like the cuckoo in the nest.

If you have experienced one or more of these factors, then you probably have the tendency to feel like an imposter.

Nature

Scientists have now proven that more than 50% of our personality comes through DNA.

Two personality factors from the Big 5 (that measures personality) have been found through research to play a role in the presence of the Imposter Syndrome: neuroticism and conscientiousness.

Neuroticism relates to emotional sensitivity and focus on self. It refers to that tendency to think everything in the world centres around me. In Chronic Imposters - those who experience the syndrome frequently and intensely - the level of neuroticism in their personality profile is high.

The second of the Big 5 personality factors that has an impact on the tendency to experience the Imposter Syndrome is conscientiousness - the degree of discipline and order we seek and live by.

Chronic Imposters experience low levels of discipline and can seem ungrounded.