

# Fighting impostor syndrome: Researcher aims to help students struggling with self-doubt

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Jiyun Elizabeth L. Shin has seen the impacts of impostorism—commonly referred to as impostor syndrome—firsthand.

"When I talk about impostorism, students often come up to me after class to talk about their experiences," said Shin, a lecturer at Binghamton University's Psychology Department.

"Students share their experiences of impostorism, especially students from underrepresented groups such as first-generation college students, students of color and students from low-income backgrounds."

Impostorism is understood as the negative self-perception regarding one's competence, ability and deservingness of success. Despite evidence of personal achievement, those experiencing impostorism will doubt their abilities and attribute their success to factors like circumstantial luck. They often believe that others are overestimating their abilities and fear that they will someday be discovered as intellectual frauds.

Shin's latest research examines graduate women in STEM. With women underrepresented in these fields and [negative stereotypes](#) surrounding women's abilities in STEM, Shin was inspired to examine their experiences with impostorism.

"I hypothesized that higher levels of impostorism would lead to greater psychological distress, greater levels of burnout and greater intentions of dropping out of their program," Shin said.

In addition to her research on impostorism, Shin's past research included taking a deeper look into people's theories of intelligence, which is linked to impostorism. "Growth mindset" is the belief that intelligence is malleable and can improve, while "fixed mindset" is the belief that intelligence is innate and fixed.

"Research shows that students who have a growth mindset report higher levels of interest in their field of study and a greater sense of belonging in their academic environment. They view themselves to be more

compatible with their field of study. They're also more likely to persist in their field," said Shin.

On the other hand, students with a fixed mindset tend to have a lower interest in their academic field, less sense of belonging and less persistence in their field. Shin explored students' perception of their professor's mindset as well, finding that students who perceive their professors to have a [growth mindset](#) likely adopt a similar mindset, which leads to positive academic outcomes.

Currently, Shin is going through the peer review process on a research study on the relationship between impostorism and academic help-seeking among undergraduate students. The research potential is great for Shin, who hopes to research direct methods of lowering these effects of impostorism for students.

"I want to develop a social psychological intervention targeting impostorism and, specifically, focusing on students from historically underrepresented groups," Shin said.

"Several years ago, I conducted an intervention study based on role models. In this study, I developed role model biographies that challenged the common stereotypes about STEM, such as the belief that STEM is for men and that in order to be successful, you need to have innate abilities in STEM."

Shin found that when a student is exposed to biographies of [role models](#) who challenge these stereotypes, they have positive outcomes in showing greater interest in STEM. "The intervention was very brief, and did not look at the long-term effects, but the immediate effects were positive."

Shin hopes to expand her research in order to help students.

"There are researchers looking at the long-term effects of these social psychological interventions, which can have years and years of positive impact," Shin said. "My hope is to create an intervention, but this time focusing on impostorism and help those who are struggling with imposter feelings."

Provided by Binghamton University

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