















Have you ever suddenly felt a wave of uncertainty and insecurity that borders on shame for misrepresenting or deceiving people about your knowledge and competence? Although the feeling tends to appear, disappear, and reappear depending on the specific context, the experience can be quite debilitating and unsettling. If this ordeal sounds familiar, you have probably already dealt with imposter syndrome.

Imposter syndrome is a group of psychological symptoms that include feelings and beliefs that one's skills and competencies are not real and having the fear of others exposing them as a fraud. Drs. Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes first named imposter syndrome in an article titled, "*The Impostor Phenomenon in High Achieving Women: Dynamics and Therapeutic Intervention*" in 1978.<sup>iv</sup>

It is only when the fear and doubt become debilitating in limiting or derailing competence growth that it is unhealthy. In such cases, external pressure or manipulation may be involved, such as marginalizing or ridiculing a person based on a different quality (or group membership) than their knowledge, competence, or potential. Nevertheless, by identifying the source of the feelings, a person can begin to identify measure that are in their control to manage or change. Whether it is about different thinking patterns, changing environment, support, or resources, or utilizing coaching, mentoring, or training, impostor syndrome does not have to be a lasting burden.

An affected person can start by analyzing their feelings of insecurity and fear to determine their expectations and needs that underlie the distress.

### *Different Types of Imposter Syndrome*

Dr. Valerie Young, an expert on imposter syndrome, has divided the syndrome into five types of people.<sup>v</sup>

1. **The perfectionist** sets unrealistically ambitious goals. As a result, they are likely to fail. They have an obsessive need to control everything. They even view success as inadequate because they did not set goals properly and missed greater opportunities.
2. **The superhuman** works harder than anyone else and tries to compensate for perceived shortcomings. They desperately seek validation and are overly sensitive to criticism.
3. **The natural genius** relies on being independent and expects great successes to come in quick succession, setting themselves up for unnecessary disappointments.













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- <sup>i</sup> Kavis, M. (2015, October 21). The four stages of cloud competence. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/mikekavis/2015/10/21/the-four-stages-of-cloud-competence>
- <sup>ii</sup> Dunning, D., & Kruger, J. (1999). Unskilled and unaware of it: How difficulties in recognizing one's own incompetence lead to inflated self-assessments. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *77*(6), 1124-1134. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.77.6.1121
- <sup>iii</sup> Pafitanis, G., Nikkhah, D., & Myers, S. (2020). The Dunning–Kruger effect: Revisiting “the valley of despair” in the evolution of competency and proficiency in reconstructive microsurgery. *Journal of Plastic, Reconstructive, & Aesthetic Surgery*, *73*(4), 783-808. doi: 10.1016/j.bjps.2019.11.062
- <sup>iv</sup> Clance, P. R., & Imes, S. A. (1978). The imposter phenomenon in high achieving women: Dynamics and therapeutic intervention. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research & Practice*, *15*(3), 241-247. doi:10.1037/h0086006.
- <sup>v</sup> Young, V. (2011). *The secret thoughts of successful women: Why capable people suffer from the impostor syndrome and how to thrive in spite of it*. New York: Crown Business.