



## **The Role of Personality Traits on Imposter Syndrome and Self-Silencing among College students.**

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### **Abstract**

Ever wondered what compels a student to feel like an imposter and why they remain silent in the face of success. Imposter syndrome and Self-silencing are two prevalent constructs in psychology which can impede the growth in professional and personal settings of a student's life. Imposter syndrome encompasses feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt in one's capabilities, despite the evidence of previous achievements. Self-silencing conversely refers to the propensity to stifle one's own thought and feelings so as to avoid conflicts. Comprehending the influence of personality can help gauge the linkage with the two variables. A sample of 31 young adults was collected and standardized scales were used for the stated variables. Data from the study revealed that personality traits such as neuroticism and openness are significantly positively correlated with imposter syndrome and there exists a significant negative correlation between extraversion and conscientiousness with self-silencing. The findings provide insight to view imposter syndrome and self-silencing from the lens of personality traits. The interventions could include focusing on promoting a growth mindset in college settings instead of setting perfectionist standards. Psycho-

educating the students to help them recognize these patterns. Future studies could focus on collecting a larger sample to consolidate the generalizability. Furthermore, an intervention study could be conducted to aid in mitigating imposter syndrome and silencing the self.

**Keywords:** *Imposter Syndrome, Self-Silencing, Personality Traits and College Students*

## Introduction

College is the time when the individuals are transitioning into being a young adult, which in itself can be a confusing and hard time. As many changes takes place during this time as many individuals move away from parents and their home. For instance, in college they have to juggle between their academic and social life. College is also a competitive and uncompromising environment, where everyone wants to give their best and excel in academics and also enjoy their college life. In college many students try to fit in with the crowd. This environment often leads to students questioning themselves and their values and beliefs. This feeling of self-doubt often leads them to feeling like an Imposter. Imposter syndrome is very prevalent in college students, it often results in students feeling like fraud and that they don't deserve the accomplishments they have achieved with their hard work, they think it's because of luck. The imposter phenomenon give rise to low self-esteem (Alsaleem et al., 2021) and the students also stop voicing their opinions with their friends, classmates and even teachers, which can result in them silencing the self. Self-silencing, or masking personal beliefs, emotions and thoughts, is a coping method that can keep people in a loop of inauthenticity and isolation, exacerbating the negative effects of imposter syndrome (Jack & Dill, 1992).

Silencing the self occurs when the individual fear that sharing their opinion can lead to conflicts and others thinking less of them and may not find them desirable. Which occurs a lot in colleges as students are trying to fit in with their classmates and trying to make new friends. Students risk others disapproving them or judging their opinions. The students who are affected by imposter syndrome may self-silence themselves which might result in decreased self-expression. It may also lead to self-criticism, psychological distress (Sadeghzadeh et al., 2022) and poor adjustment in college (Haemmerlie et al., 2001). The variables that may improve or diminish the probability of self-silencing in relation to imposter syndrome are not well explored, especially the role of personality traits between imposter phenomenon and self-silencing.

Personality traits are our persistent psychological attributes that sculpts how an individual comprehends and acknowledges his/her environments. The Big Five Factor model of personality includes Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism (Costa & McCrae, 1992) is comprehensive enough to help inquire into different responses. Students who are high in neuroticism are usually volatile with their emotions, get easily frustrated and upset, always stay alert for any danger and they always doubt their actions –maybe more susceptible to feeling like an imposter which might contribute to silencing the self.

The study strives to arch the gap between the current literature by assessing how personality can be related with imposter syndrome and self-silencing in college students. As less research exists on the conjunction of these three variables. Most of the researches about self-silencing were also conducted primarily on females. The current study intents to study these factors on both males and females. This study aims for understanding in what way personality act as an intermediary in increasing or decreasing the likelihood to silence the self when suffering from imposter syndrome.

### ***Imposter Syndrome***

Imposter syndrome is also known as Imposter Phenomenon. According to Clance and Imes (1978), Imposter Phenomenon is defined as “the individuals, who are successful by the external standards but have an illusion of personal incompetence.” In this individual feel they are not as witty and capable as others, despite having same accomplishments as others.

According to Sakulku and Alexander (2011), Imposterism is defined as “a pervasive psychological experience of a person believing that they are a self-perceived intellectual fraud and fearing they may be recognized as impostor.”

Maji and Dixit (2023) attempted to study the mediational relationship between imposter phenomenon, self-silencing and gender stigma consciousness and for this they collected a sample of females who were software engineers in India. The result revealed that imposter syndrome does mediate the relationship between gender stigma consciousness and self-silencing. It was also seen that individuals with imposter phenomenon possess an external locus of control, and a significant aspect of self-silencing is the externalization of self-perception.

Personality also plays a role in imposter phenomenon. A study was conducted by the researchers on relating personality traits, particularly big five factor with imposter phenomenon and for the conduction of the research 190 college students were selected. The findings suggested that individuals with high neuroticism and low conscientiousness scored were high in imposter syndrome (Bernard, Dollinger & Ramaniah, 2010).

A few researchers conducted a study to examine imposter syndrome in first generation and continuing generation college student along with the role of perfectionism and stress. For this study

388 students participated. It was found that imposter syndrome was significantly related to stress among first generation college students (Holden et al., 2024).

### ***Self-Silencing***

According to Carr, Gilroy and Sherman (1996), self-silencing is characterized as “the propensity to engage in compulsive caretaking, pleasing the other, and inhibition of self-expression in relationships in an attempt to achieve intimacy and meet relational needs.” According to Jack (1999), self-silencing is defined as “an inability to express one’s thought, emotions and feelings in an intimate relationship or lack of expression in a relationship.”

The concept of self-silencing earlier was primarily based on women. Duarte and Thompson (1999) conducted a research to examine if there are any differences between sexes in terms of self-silencing. The results indicated that self-silencing is positively correlated in both men and women. The only differences were in the perception of the concept as the scores differed in terms of subscales, the care as self-sacrifice and divided self-subscales exhibited intercorrelation among women but not among men.

However, if few individuals has perfectionist traits it might lead to self-silencing, as individuals might think in order to avoid failure or seem desirable, they need to suppress their own thought. Few researchers did a research on assessing the link between self-silencing, perfectionism and depression and the results indicated the there does exists a strong correlation between perfectionism and self-silencing (Flett et al., 2007)

### ***Personality***

According to Allport (1960), personality is defined as “the way in which their psychophysical systems dynamically organize to determine their behavior and cognitive characteristics.”

According to American Psychological Association (APA, 2020), personality refers “to enduring characteristics and behavior to life, including major traits, interests, drives, values, self-concept, abilities and emotional patterns.”

A study conducted by few researchers on imposter syndrome, five factor model and achievement disposition on college students. The findings suggest that out of the five factors, neuroticism plays a major role in predicting Imposter syndrome (Ross et al., 2001). Kaur and Jain (2022) did a research on examining the association between imposter syndrome and personality traits. the study the personality traits the researchers adopted the construct of big five personality by Goldberg. The findings suggested that imposter syndrome or phenomenon is significantly correlated with neuroticism.

A research was conducted which assessed self-silencing and big five personality traits in women. It was found that individuals high in neuroticism scored high on self-silencing and other personality traits such as openness to experience, extraversion and agreeableness were found to be negatively correlated with self-silencing (Witte, Sherman & Flynn, 2001). Thus, one can conclude personality does play as a contributing factor in silencing the self.

**Purpose**

The purpose is to study the of relationship of Personality traits, Imposter Syndrome and Self-Silencing among college students.

**Hypothesis**

H1: There will be a significant correlation between Imposter syndrome and Self-silencing

H2: There will be a significant relation between Personality traits and Imposter syndrome

H3: There will be a significant relation between Personality traits and Self-silencing

**Methodology****Sample**

A total sample of 31 in the age range of 18-25 years was collected from students attending college from Chandigarh and Jaipur.

**Measures*****Silencing the Self-Scale***

The scale was developed by Jack and Dill (1992). It is a self-report questionnaire. It is used to determine the extent to which individuals can suppress their own thoughts and feelings and even action to not get into conflict or rift with their loved ones. The questionnaire consists of 31 items and is based on 5-point Likert scale with options ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree), 2 (Somewhat disagree), 3 (Neither agree nor disagree), 4 (Somewhat agree), 5 (Strongly agree). The scale the divided into four subtypes and these are:

***Clance Imposter Phenomenon Scale***

This scale was developed by Clance (1985). This scale is used to measure the characteristics of imposter Phenomenon in an individual and to assess the extent to which the individual might be in distress. The individuals might have all qualification they need for success but still feel incompetent. The scale consists of 20 items and it is a 5-point Likert scale. The response style ranges from 1 (Not at all true) to 5 (Very true).

***Big Five Inventory – 10 (BFI-10)***

Big Five Inventory – 10 is developed by Rammstedt and John (2007) and its derived by the long form scale The Big Five Inventory which consisted of 44 items and was developed by John et al. (1991). BFI-10 is of 10-items and is based on 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). The scale assesses 5 personality traits: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism.

**Procedures**

Informed consent, google form, standardized scales were given to the participants and thank participants for corporation. Google forms was created and the scales for each variable were selected after considering their validity and reliability. Informed consent was collected from the individuals. Precise and clear instruction were provided in the description of the google form. Demographic details were also included in the beginning of the paper and at the ending all the participants were thanked for the participation. A link to the form was created and distributed to the participants. They were given clear instructions that there are no right and wrong answers. The collected data was then statistically analyzed.

## Analysis of the Result

### Results

|             | <b>Imposter Syndrome</b> | <b>Silencing the Self</b> | <b>Extraversion</b> | <b>Agreeableness</b> | <b>Conscientiousness</b> | <b>Neuroticism</b> | <b>Openness</b> |
|-------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| <b>N</b>    | 31                       | 31                        | 31                  | 31                   | 31                       | 31                 | 31              |
| <b>Mean</b> | 65.9                     | 98.0                      | 5.77                | 7.55                 | 6.16                     | 6.52               | 6.58            |
| <b>SD</b>   | 12.9                     | 11.3                      | 2.38                | 1.48                 | 1.27                     | 1.91               | 1.71            |

Table 1 demonstrates the descriptive statistics (N, Mean and Standard Deviation) for the variables namely – Imposter Syndrome, Silencing the Self and Big Five Factors which includes Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism.

|                           | <b>Imposter Syndrome</b> | <b>Silencing the Self</b> | <b>Openness</b> | <b>Conscientiousness</b> | <b>Extraversion</b> | <b>Agreeableness</b> | <b>Neuroticism</b> |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Imposter Syndrome</b>  | —                        |                           |                 |                          |                     |                      |                    |
| <b>Silencing the Self</b> | 0.525**                  | —                         |                 |                          |                     |                      |                    |
| <b>Openness</b>           | 0.396*                   | -0.253                    | —               |                          |                     |                      |                    |
| <b>Conscientiousness</b>  | -0.334                   | -0.438*                   | 0.032           | —                        |                     |                      |                    |
| <b>Extraversion</b>       | -0.121                   | -0.481**                  | 0.518**         | 0.145                    | —                   |                      |                    |
| <b>Agreeableness</b>      | 0.144                    | 0.300                     | -0.249          | -0.458**                 | -0.276              | —                    |                    |
| <b>Neuroticism</b>        | 0.378*                   | 0.209                     | -0.166          | 0.143                    | -0.355              | 0.120                | —                  |

**Note.** \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Table 2 displays the correlation of variables under study on 0.05, 0.01 and 0.001 significance level.

### Discussion of Results

This study focused on examining the relationship between personality traits, Imposter Syndrome and Self-silencing, directing at understanding the impact of Personality Traits on Imposter syndrome and Self Silencing.

The results indicated a significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.525$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) between Imposter Syndrome and Self-silencing. This demonstrates that college students who have high tendencies of Imposter Syndrome are more prone to silence themselves. It means those who feel like imposters will be more likely to suppress their thoughts and opinion in the presence of other to avoid conflict.

It was found that there exists a significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.378$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) between neuroticism and imposter syndrome. This indicates that individuals who score falls higher on emotional instability trait are more likely to encounter feelings of an imposter. These findings are consistent with previous research that have also indicated a strong positive correlation between neuroticism and imposter syndrome (Sheveleva, Permyakova & Kornienko, 2023). Hence, the college students who have increased susceptibility to stress and negative emotions and more prone to feeling like they're frauds and internalizes self-doubt.

The results also indicated significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.396$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) between openness and Imposter syndrome. It suggests that openness can also include enhanced self-awareness and introspection, which in high achieving circumstances may result in overthinking and feeling of inadequacy. Although these findings are inconsistent with the previous research

conducted by Kaur and Jain (2022) as no significant correlation was found between openness and imposter phenomenon. Extraversion ( $r = -0.121$ ) and conscientiousness ( $r = -0.334$ ) are found to be negatively correlated with imposter syndrome but no significant correlation was found between them. Agreeableness and imposter syndrome were positively correlated ( $r = 0.144$ ) but no significant correlation was present.

It was also found that extraversion and self-silencing are significantly negatively correlated ( $r = -0.481$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The result demonstrates that students who scored low on extraversion are more probable to suppress their opinions and feelings in-front of others in order to avoid upsetting them and getting involved in a conflict with them.

It was also found that there exists a significant negative correlation between ( $r = -0.438$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) between conscientiousness and self-silencing. This indicates that students scoring low on conscientiousness might find it difficult to put forward their opinions assertively which leads to high self-silencing. Agreeableness ( $r = 0.300$ ) and neuroticism ( $r = 0.209$ ) were found to be positively correlated but no significant relationship was found between them. Openness was negatively correlated with Self-silencing ( $r = -0.253$ ) but the variables did not show any significant correlation.

### Conclusion

The study assessed the relationship between personality, imposter syndrome and self-silencing among college students. The finding revealed that personality traits like neuroticism and openness have significant positive correlation with imposter syndrome, while extraversion and conscientiousness have a negative correlation with self-silencing. The results aids in understanding

that way personality traits can impact our ability to feel the inadequacy in oneself and to suppress our opinions just to avoid conflicts or to seem less desirable.

This study provides valuable information regarding the interconnections between the personality traits, imposter syndrome and self-silencing among college students, it isn't without limitations. Firstly, the sample collected was small. So, future studies could focus on collecting a large sample that helps in generalization. Self-reported questionnaires were used that might have contributed to social desirability. The future research could further explore the effectiveness of intervention in mitigating the imposter syndrome and self-silencing in college students.

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