

Argument 1: For Conspiracy Theories – NOTE: The argument structure is the same for Impostor Syndrome, yet the successful cover-up can be *knowingly or unknowingly*.

## Argument 1

1. If there is a successful cover-up, then both this will be difficult to detect and occasional anomalies will have heightened epistemic significance.

$$\exists cSc \rightarrow (Dc \wedge \exists a(Oa \wedge Eac))$$

- 2.

$$\exists cSc$$

Therefore,

$$Dc \wedge \exists a(Oa \wedge Eac)$$

Argument 2: Distrust

## Argument 2

1. If some official sources of information have been co-opted to assist with covering up the truth, then all of them are not trustworthy.

$$\exists s \exists c((Os \wedge COOPT(s, c)) \rightarrow \forall s(Os \rightarrow \neg Ts))$$

- 2.

$$\exists s \exists c(Os \wedge COOPT(s, c))$$

Therefore,

$$\forall s(Os \rightarrow \neg Ts)$$

**Cross-Fertilisation of Study between Practices:**

P1: While there are differences with specific content, the pattern of belief formation and maintenance are epistemically nearly identical.

P2: Conspiracy is perceived to be socially more dangerous than imposter thinking (easily spread, undermines trust in democratic institutions)

P3: The default mainstream response to Critical Theorists is critical or dismissive, whilst to the impostor thinking it is more sympathetic.

**Neutral vs Pejorative Debate:**

Hawley saw a value in advancing the discussion of whether 'imposter thinking' should have a neutral vs pejorative connotation. This mirrors the one had about conspiracy theorists (theoretically neutral, pragmatically pejorative).

Proposed Ameliorative Definition: Imposter thinker's beliefs have a specific content, and [their inadequacy in their position] is unjustified.

Counterexample:

Imagine someone who is generally good in their job – gets fair compensation and (justifiably) good reviews, and she knows she is more than capable. However, she messes up one week (emailed all of her clients an email meant for her dentist) and shoulders this 'distinctive content.'

- Is it justified or unjustified that she now feels inadequate in her job? Justified in that she messed up, or unjustified in that she is generally very capable and this practice is not *habitual*?

**Further Reading:**

Calvard, T. (2018). Impostor syndrome as a way of understanding gender and careers. In A. B. Broadbridge & S. L. Fielden (Eds.), *Research handbook of diversity and careers* (pp. 211–222). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Cassam, Q. (2016). Vice epistemology. *The Monist*, 99, 159–180.

Clance, P., & Imes, S. (1978). The impostor phenomenon in high-achieving women: Dynamics and therapeutic intervention. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice*, 15(3), 241–247.

Olberding, A. (2018). The outsider. *Aeon*. <https://aeon.co/essays/how-useful-is-impostor-syndrome-in-academia>.

Conspiracy Theories, Imposter Syndrome, and Distrust  
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