

# CONFIDENCE IN ACADEMIA

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SAMCRHSS 2019

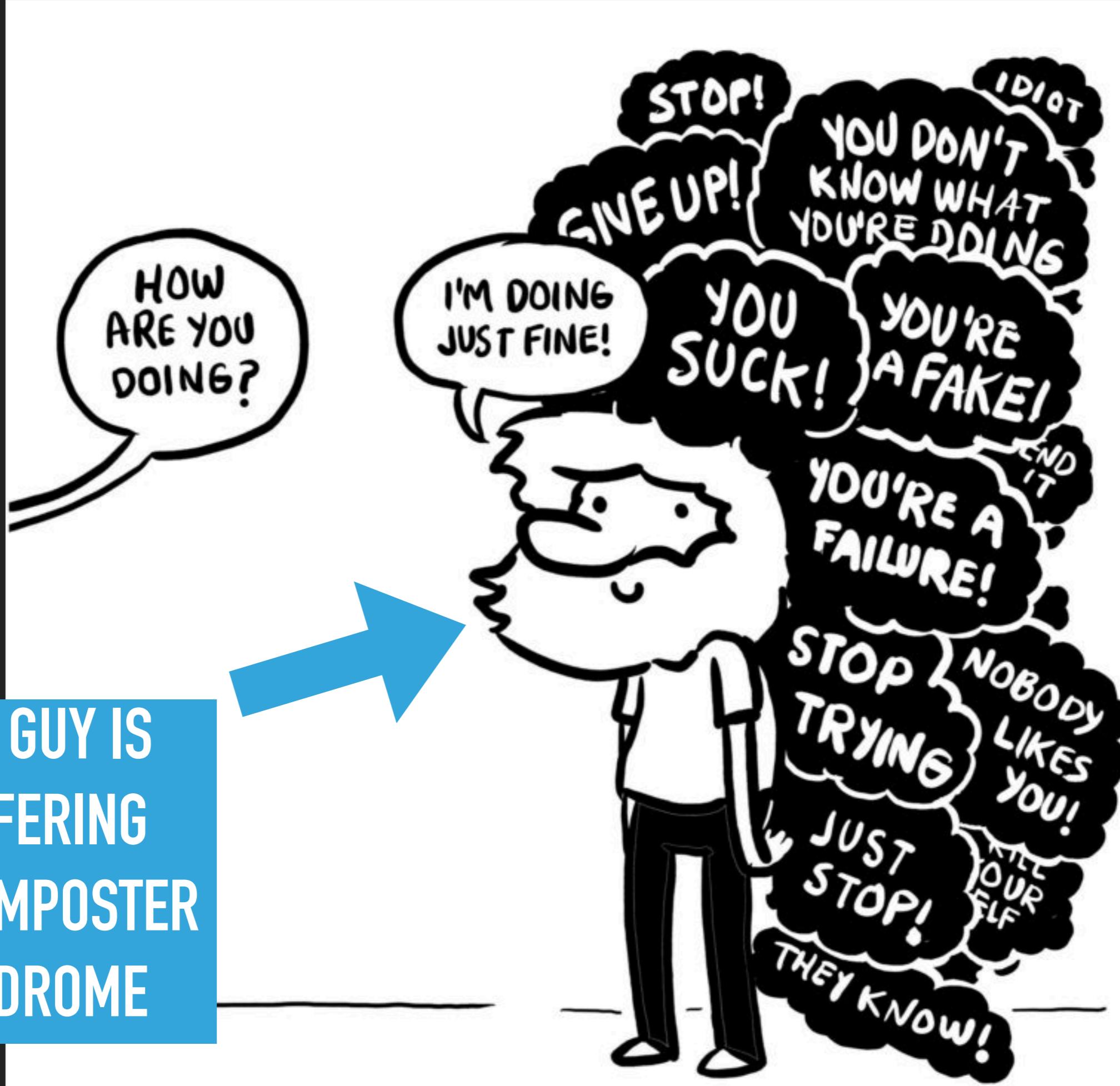


SOME  
TECHNICAL  
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HOW BRAINS  
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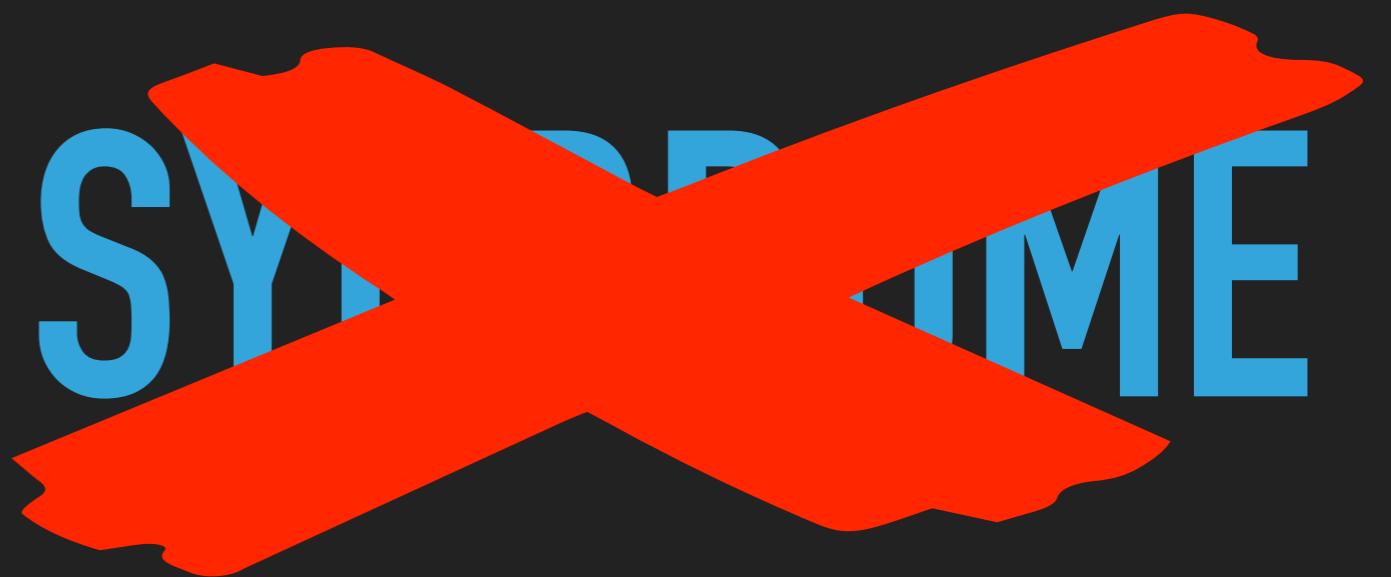


SOME LESS  
TECHNICAL  
STUFF ABOUT  
HOW MY  
BRAIN WORKS

THIS GUY IS  
SUFFERING  
WITH IMPOSTER  
SYNDROME



# IMPOSTER SYNDROME



# PHENOMENON

# WHAT IS IMPOSTER SYNDROME?

“A collection of feelings of inadequacy that persist despite evident success”

# WHAT IS IMPOSTER SYNDROME?

People who suffer from imposter syndrome are convinced that they have fooled people into thinking that they are capable...

# WHAT IS IMPOSTER SYNDROME?

...they feel that their achievements  
are due to luck or external factors...

# WHAT IS IMPOSTER SYNDROME?

...and they have a fear that eventually  
someone will discover that they are  
imposters

# WHAT IS IMPOSTER SYNDROME?

- ▶ An estimated 70% of people will suffer with imposter syndrome at some point in their career
- ▶ It is particularly prevalent in academia
- ▶ Can be triggered by a new transitional experience such as a new job

# COMMON THOUGHTS ASSOCIATED WITH IMPOSTER SYNDROME

"It's all down to luck"

"I feel like a fake"

"I must not fail"

"I don't know enough"

"Success is no big deal"





FAKE BAR

# WHAT CAUSES IT?

It's hard to know what causes it...

...but people who suffer with imposter syndrome often have unrealistic notions of what it means to be competent - they set this internal bar exceedingly high

REALITY STRIKES

[dstraley.com](http://dstraley.com)

BUT . . .



# WHAT CAUSES IT?

Two factors  
contribute:  
the subject and  
the environment



# WHAT CAUSES IT?

Imposter syndrome  
is a response  
to stimuli

- it is situational



# WHAT CAUSES IT?

It is not a mental  
disorder or  
syndrome

# UNDER-REPRESENTED GROUPS

While anyone can experience imposter syndrome, it is more likely to be suffered by people from marginalised groups

# UNDER-REPRESENTED GROUPS

“PEOPLE WHO SUFFER INSTITUTIONALISED BIASES  
OFTEN REPORT LOWER SELF-CONFIDENCE - A  
CONSEQUENCE OF LIVING A WORLD WHERE YOUR  
EXISTENCE AND YOUR VOICE ARE CONSISTENTLY  
UNDERVALUED AND/OR WHERE YOU ARE MADE TO  
FEEL UNWELCOME, AND SOMETIMES UNSAFE”

# UNDER-REPRESENTED GROUPS

Feelings of belonging foster confidence

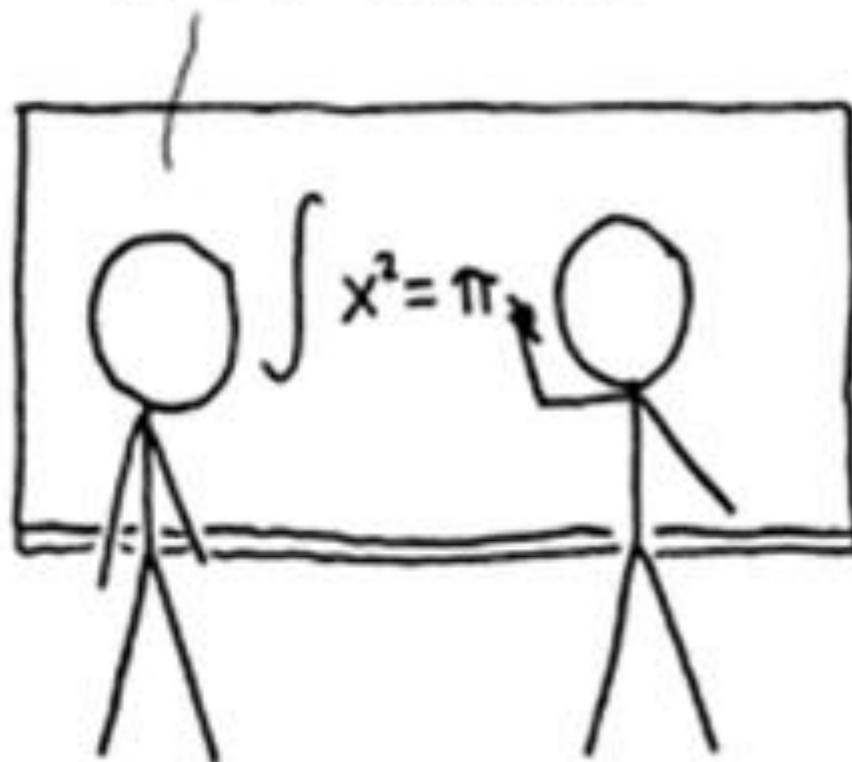


# STEREOTYPE THREAT

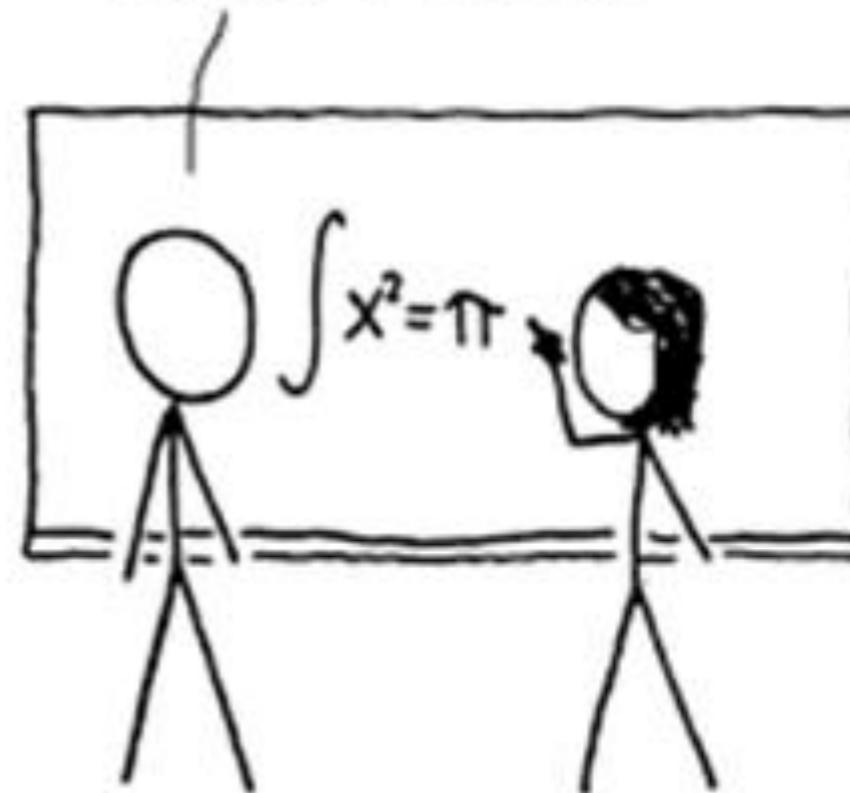
Stereotype threat is the feeling of anxiety  
that you get when you are in a position to  
confirm a negative stereotype

# STEREOTYPE THREAT

WOW, YOU  
SUCK AT MATH.



WOW, GIRLS  
SUCK AT MATH.



# WHY IS IMPOSTER SYNDROME A PROBLEM?

**“ALTHOUGH IMPOSTORISM IS ASSOCIATED WITH HIGH ABILITY AND PERFECTIONISM, THE CONSTANT SELF-DOUBT AND RESULTING EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION IS IN NO WAY AN ASSET.”**

**- David Walker in THE**

# WHY IS IT A PROBLEM?

- ▶ Imposter syndrome can stop you from experiencing joy in your accomplishments and achievements
- ▶ Imposter syndrome can prevent you from taking opportunities and make you retreat from your goals e.g.
  - \* not applying for jobs/grants
  - \* not submitting talks/papers
  - \* not advertising your own achievements
- ▶ Some people with imposter syndrome will push too hard and burn out

# A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

- ▶ Maths degree, now an astrophysicist
- ▶ Monte Carlo radiative transfer code
- ▶ Bayesian inference
- ▶ Supernova observations & data reduction
- ▶ Mentoring and mentoring schemes
- ▶ Welfare/equality & diversity committees and talks
- ▶ 1752 Group - campaign to end sexual misconduct
- ▶ Outreach

**WHAT I'VE LEARNED... .**

THE PEOPLE WHO SEEM TO  
SOUND MOST IMPRESSIVE  
OFTEN UNDERSTAND THE LEAST

Thought #1

“the kinematically driven anti-neutrino barrage of magic”

- undefined terms

“When the QBF jumps over the LD”

- undefined acronyms

“obviously”  
- let me tell you how clever I am

**EVERYBODY MAKES IT UP**

Thought #2

THE PEOPLE YOU ADMIRE ARE  
PEOPLE TOO

Thought #3

IT'S HARD TO BE VULNERABLE

Thought #4

**OF COURSE IT'S MONDAY...**

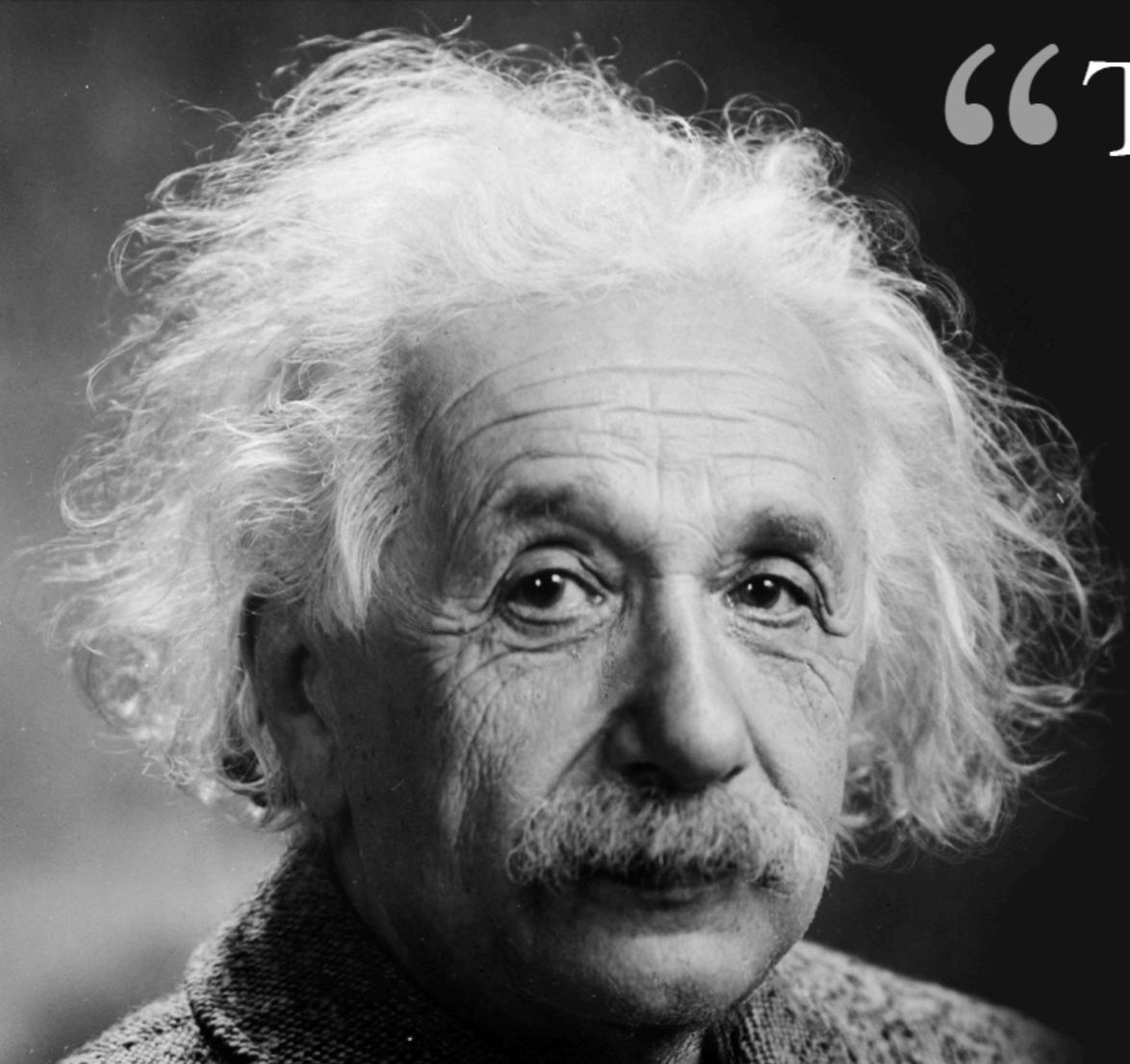


**...DOES THIS LOOK LIKE MY  
FRIDAY FACE?**

THE SYSTEM DOES NOT  
ENCOURAGE US TO BE OPEN

Thought #5



A black and white portrait of Albert Einstein, showing him from the chest up. He has his characteristic wild, white hair and a well-groomed, light-colored beard and mustache. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a thoughtful expression.

“The exaggerated esteem in  
which my lifework is held  
makes me very ill at ease.  
I feel compelled  
to think of myself as  
an involuntary swindler.”  
Albert Einstein

**YOU ARE IN GOOD COMPANY**

EVERYBODY FEELS LIKE AN  
IMPOSTER SOMETIMES

Thought #6

**WHAT CAN YOU DO?**

# HELP YOURSELF

- ▶ Recognise imposter feelings when they happen
- ▶ Things to remember:
  - \* it's normal not to know everything - you will learn more as you progress
  - \* the people who got you here are incredibly competent - they did not make a mistake
  - \* all of your achievements!
- ▶ Focus on the outcome not on your self-doubt



# HELP YOURSELF

- ▶ Take a risk - what would you do if you weren't afraid?
- ▶ Write your story down - try writing a recommendation for yourself
- ▶ Try mentoring
- ▶ Be kind to yourself - we all make mistakes
- ▶ Seek support

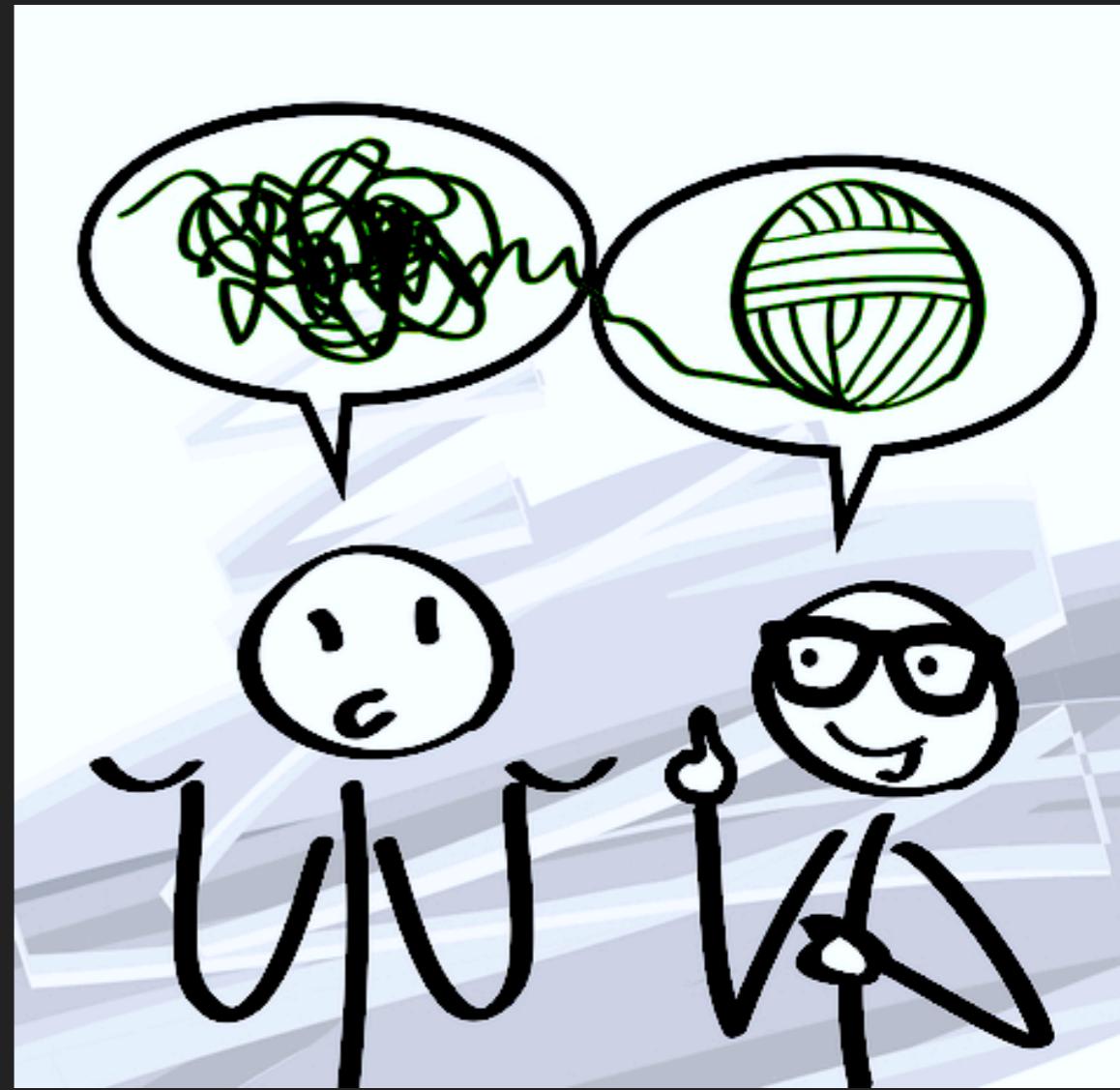


# MANAGE YOUR ENVIRONMENT

- ▶ Acknowledge the ways your environment may have led to imposter syndrome:
  - \* In what situations do you feel most fake?
- ▶ Manage your environment to lessen impacts
  - say no to things that aren't important
- ▶ Become part of the solution, not the problem
- ▶ Find mentors who believe in you

# HELP OTHERS

- ▶ Remember that someone might be struggling even if you're not (and it can be anyone)
- ▶ Challenge negative self-talk with evidence
- ▶ Affirm, encourage and credit
- ▶ Normalise these feelings by being open
- ▶ Be aware of different experiences
- ▶ Counteract stereotype threat







**GOOD LUCK!**