

CONFIDENCE IN ACADEMIA

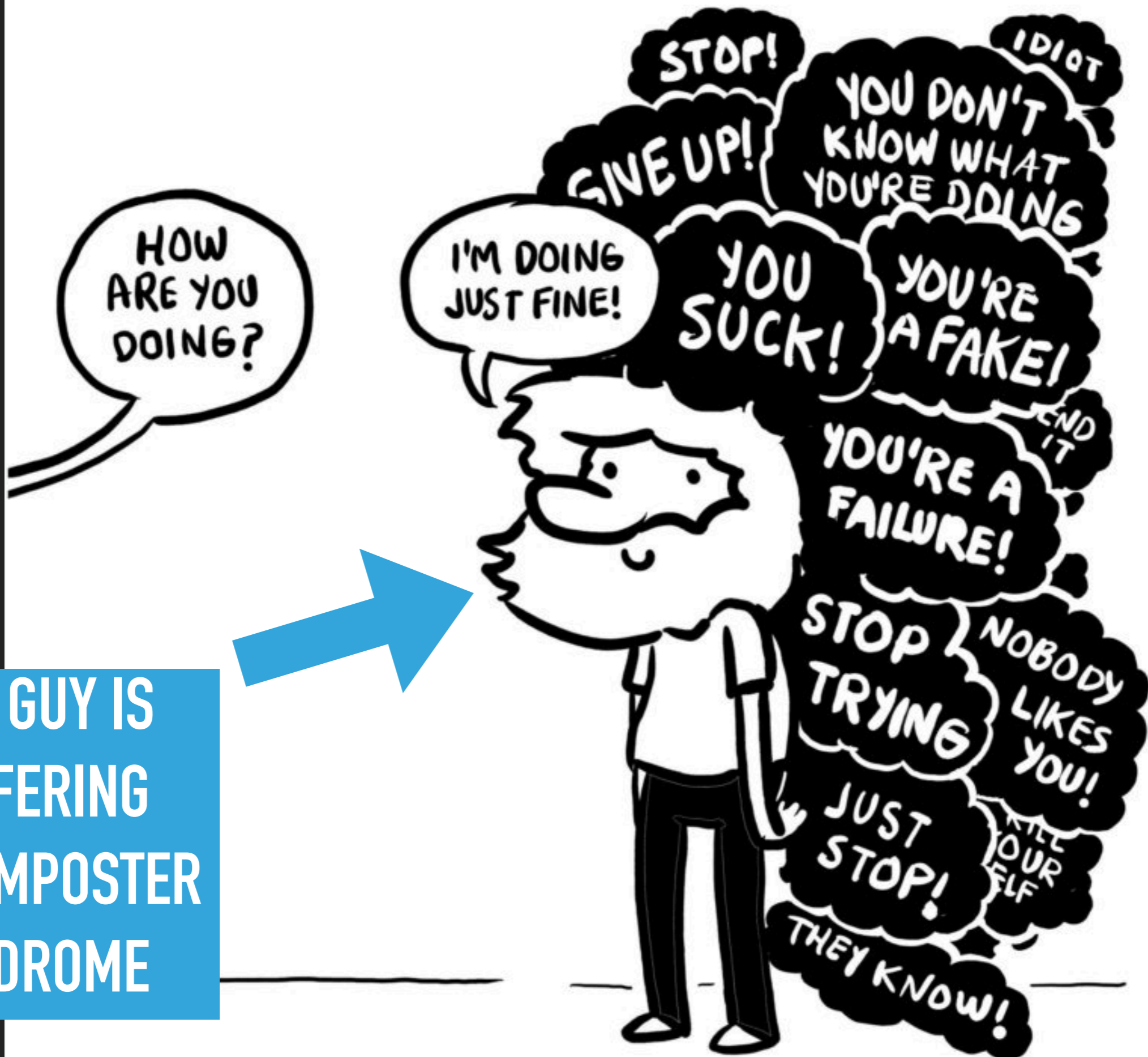
SAMCRHSS 2019



SOME
TECHNICAL
STUFF ABOUT
HOW BRAINS
WORK

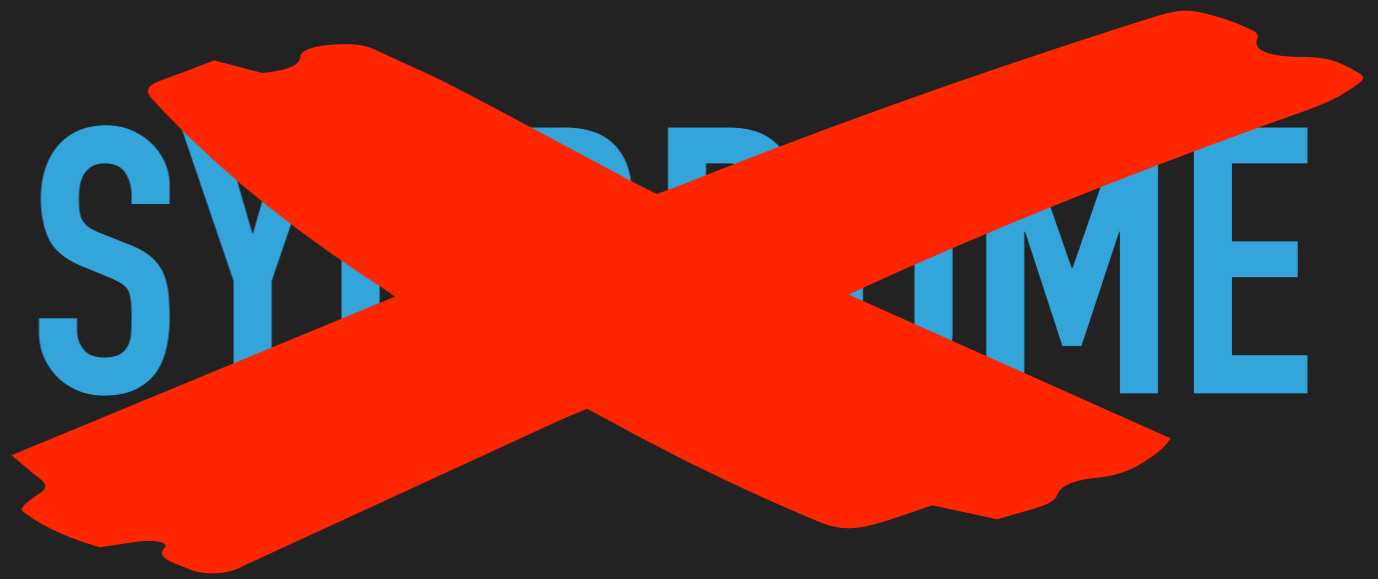


SOME LESS
TECHNICAL
STUFF ABOUT
HOW MY
BRAIN WORKS



**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"





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

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

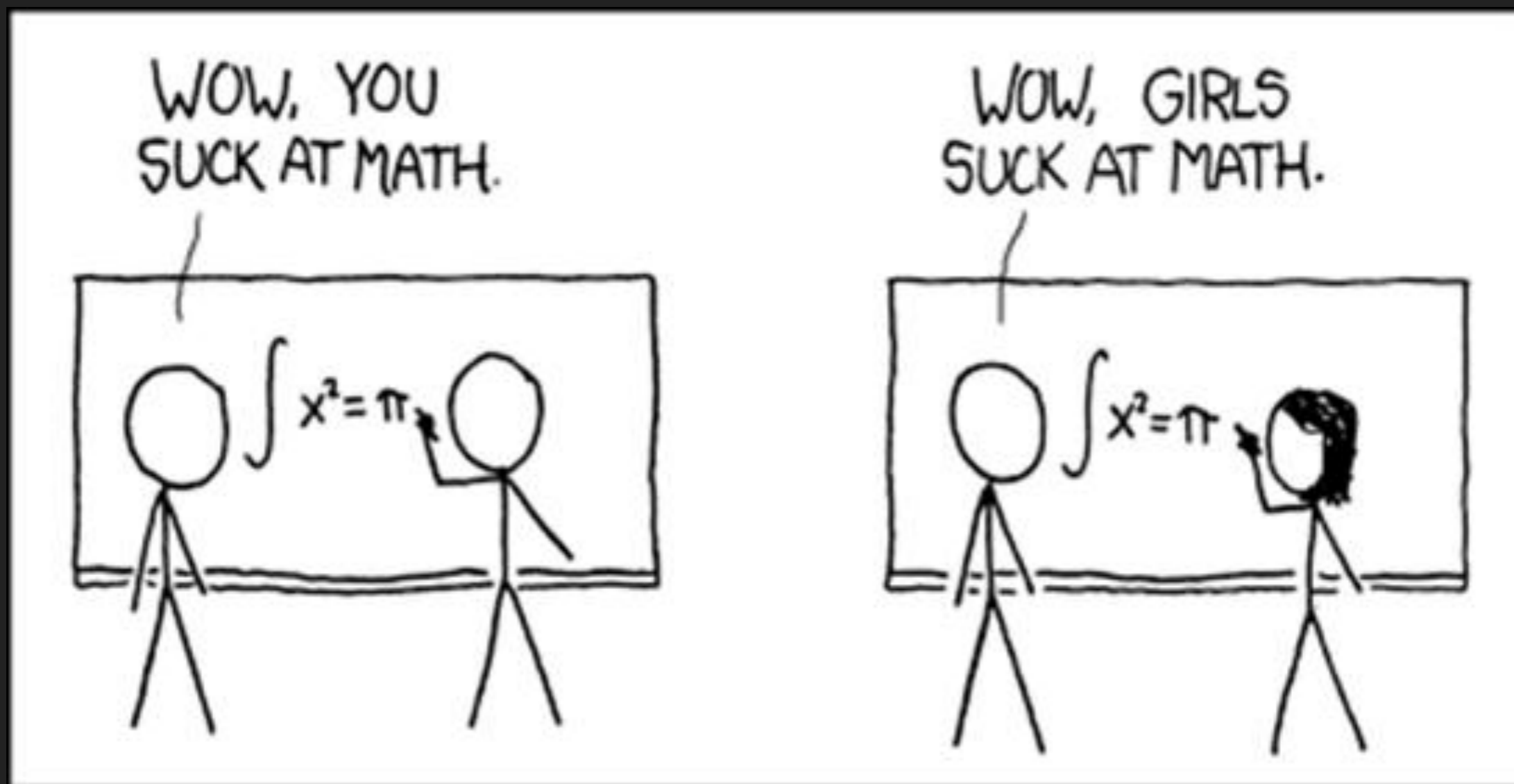
Feelings of belonging foster confidence



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



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



HOW ARE YOU DOING?

I'M DOING JUST FINE!

STOP!

GIVE UP!

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING

IDIOT

YOU SUCK!

YOU'RE A FAKE!

YOU'RE A FAILURE!

END IT

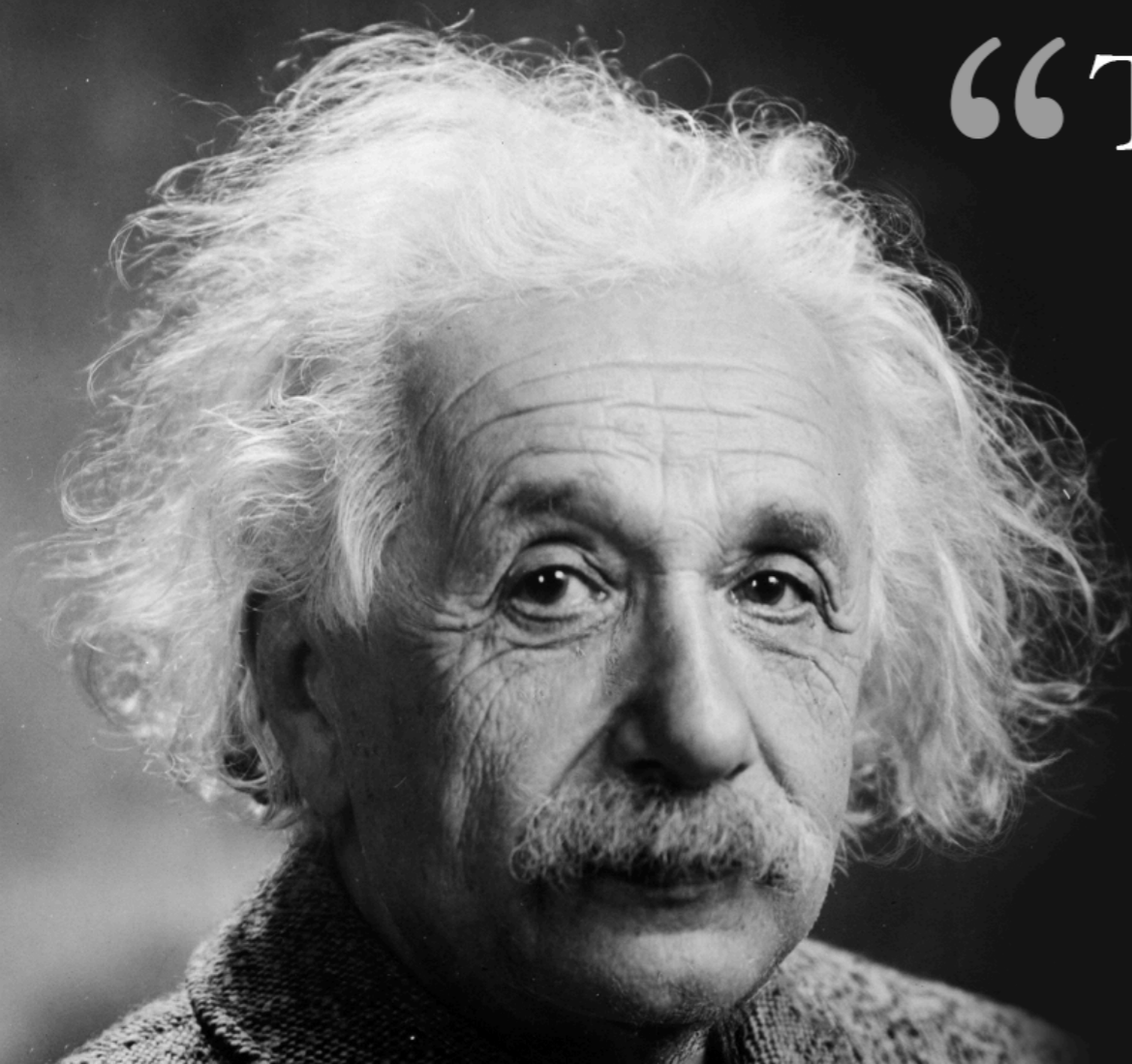
STOP TRYING

NOBODY LIKES YOU!

JUST STOP!

KILL YOURSELF

THEY KNOW!



“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

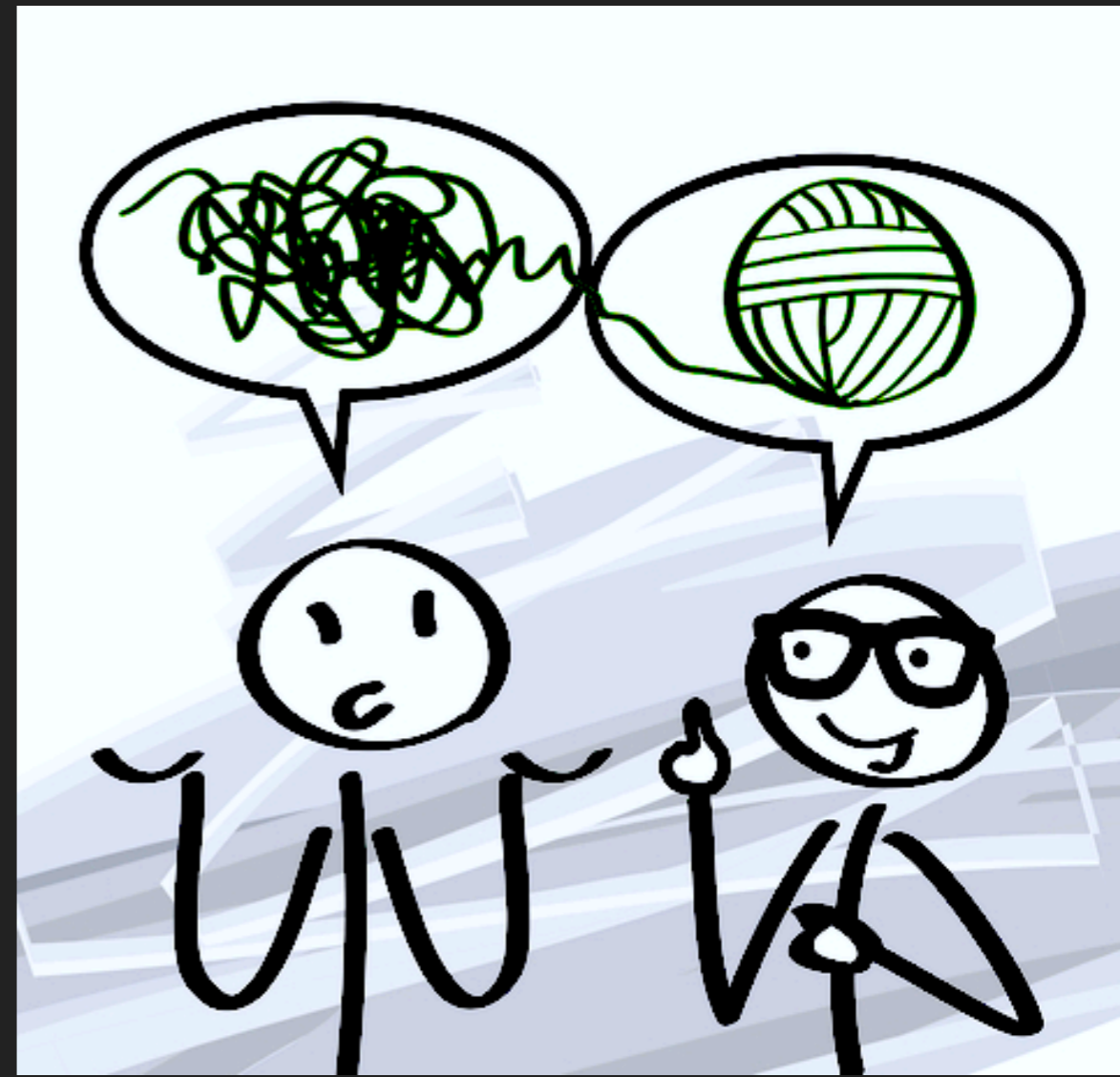


MANAGE YOUR ENVIRONMENT

- ▶ 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!