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# Discussion Paper No.15

**When Will They Blow My Cover?  
The Impostor Phenomenon Among  
Austrian Doctoral Students**

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Barbara Schober und Christiane Spiel (2012)**



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## Abstract

*“This study contributes to explaining psychological barriers in female university careers by examining the relation between the impostor phenomenon and research self-efficacy in the university context. The impostor phenomenon refers to people who are objectively competent but feel the opposite and therefore fear being unmasked. So far, there have been no data from German-speaking countries concerning the impostor phenomenon at universities; thus, the impostor phenomenon was examined in a sample of 631 (389 female) Austrian doctoral students. One-third of the sample reported moderate to strong impostor feelings. Female doctoral students both suffer more from impostor feelings and show lower research self-efficacy than male doctoral students do. Furthermore, the impostor phenomenon and research self-efficacy are associated with faculty membership. The most important finding is that the impostor phenomenon is negatively related to research self-efficacy. Research self-efficacy is an important indicator for successful university careers; hence, the impostor phenomenon was shown to be a psychological barrier for female university careers. Implications for support programs for female doctoral students are discussed.*

**Keywords:** *impostor phenomenon, self-efficacy, human sex differences, university career, faculty membership”*

(Jöstl et al. 2012)

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