

Why Do We Sometimes Feel Like A Fraud?

Do you ever get that feeling that everyone else knows what they are doing and you are just flying by the seat of your pants? Do you ever think that if people really knew how little you know they would be appalled? In other words, do you ever feel like a fraud?

Well, good news! You are not alone! Most of us have had that feeling at some time and some of us have it most of the time. Maybe it came on that first day at infant school when all the other kids seemed to know what was going on and you just stood there looking around you, not having a clue. The decision made by children when they start relating to people outside their families about how to cope with the anxiety of not feeling confident about what to do is a key one in the development of personality. The best decision a child can make is to engage: to decide what they want, seek support from other children, and get the information they need. You may have been one of those children who made a different decision: to withdraw, to bully, or to be led by another child. If so, maybe you need to think now about revising that decision and start doing things differently.

The fraudulent feeling seems to be more common in women than men. Anne Oakley, a feminist writer, argues that in a sense, women are right to feel like a fraud in male hierarchies because hierarchies embody the belief that one person is superior to another. Anne Oakley thinks that it isn't the people who think they are frauds that are the problem, it's the one's who believe they are right to feel superior to others that are! Oakley thinks that putting people into hierarchies makes them fraudulent. She believes we should work towards more egalitarian social systems.

Feeling like a fraud isn't a good feeling to have, so how can you shift it? Well, it's not going to go away all at once, but you can begin to lessen its power from today. You have been giving your feeling primacy over the evidence. Reality is not determined by how you feel: it's determined by how it is, so maybe you need to start noticing the evidence. When you have told people that you believe you are a fraud, did they agree with you? Measure what you do against what others achieve, not against some notional perfect standard. Your concern about being a fraud has probably made you work harder and to a higher standard than other people. Stop thinking that what is real is your feeling about yourself and realise that what is real is your behaviour. If you act competently, even if you feel incompetent, then you are competent. If you bring your perceptions into line with reality instead of distorting it by emphasising your mistakes and playing down your successes, then you will start to feel more confident.

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Responses to this article are warmly welcomed.