

The Imposter Phenomenon: Fake like Feelings

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Abstract: *The Imposter Phenomenon term is defined by psychologists Dr. Pauline Clance and Dr. Suzanne Imes in 1978. It may be defined as fake like feeling, which persists in any individual. Basically, it is feeling that you are not really successful, competent, and smart, that is only posing such. The person who have the feelings of Imposter, attributed their success to luck, by chance and evenly discounting their success. Researcher in this article tried to study the Imposter Phenomenon among male and female by studying the previous literature.*

Key Words: *Imposter Phenomenon, Gender and fear of Failure and Success.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

The imposter phenomenon (IP) is a term used to describe a person's chronic feelings of inadequacy in spite of repeated success (Clance & Imes, 1978). People who experience the imposter phenomenon have a strong desire to be recognized for their intelligence, but also harbour secret and intense feelings of self-doubt. Imposters are typically high-achievers, though their lingering insecurities often frustrate their ability to function optimally and with joy (Clance & O'Toole, 1988). Imposters fear they have achieved beyond their capabilities and intellect, and feel they must continue to function above themselves to avoid detection as the frauds they believe they are.

The impostor phenomenon represents a collection of symptoms that reflect individuals misattribution of success and failure (Clance & O'Toole, 1988). The Imposter phenomenon was first described by clinicians who noted that a large number of their competent and often successful, female patients reported disproportionate levels of anxiety over their performance at work (Clance & Imes, 1978). Most of these women showed an inability to attribute their achievements to their ability. Instead of ability, impostors tended to attribute their achievements to factors such as luck, effort, aspects of their self-presentation (e.g., friendliness, helpfulness, etc.), or their interpersonal skills. Accordingly, impostors expressed a fear of failure. They feared that failure would expose them as incompetent and that others recognize them that, they are frauds. Clance and Imes (1978) identified four behaviors, which they implicated in the maintenance of the Imposter phenomenon. According to the researchers, one or more, but rarely all of these behaviors are characteristic of the phenomenon. First, impostors tend to do an inordinate amount of effort on challenging tasks in order to protect themselves from possible failure. As a result, they perpetuate what Frieze (1978) coined a "low expectancy cycle", where in low initial expectations followed by success create cognitive dissonance. In order to alleviate the dissonance, the individual attributes success to unstable causes (e.g., effort) and, in turn, perpetuates low expectation for the future. When an inordinate amount of effort is expended, success cannot be unequivocally attributed to ability because the individual worked so hard to accomplish the goal. In other words, success did not come easily. The second behavioural pattern observed in impostors is the reliance on "Intellectual inauthenticity", which refers to behaviours that prevent impostors from revealing their true views. Impostors manage to subvert their opinions either by keeping quiet when they think that they will be opposed and subsequently, express what others want to hear. As a result, they do not avail themselves the opportunity to express their thoughts or to test their true intellect in a public arena. Thus, any praise they may receive cannot be internalized, because it is praise for behavior that is phony and for expressions that do not necessarily reflect their true thoughts.

The third behavior that is both characteristic of the phenomenon and at the same time to reinforce it, is the use of interpersonal skills such as charm, wit, and helpfulness to gain favour and approval from others. They engage in these behavior in order to create a context for achievement whereby potential multiple causes can mask the dreaded discovery of self-perceived lack of ability. As a result, when they do succeed, impostors scribe their achievements to their cunning adeptness in the interpersonal arena rather than to their ability. Finally, Clance and Imes (1978) postulated that impostors invoke feelings of fraudulence as a way of coping with what Horner (1972) termed "fear of success". Briefly fear of success refers to the anxiety women face when their sex-role identity is dissonant with their success in a male-dominated domain. Thus, by discounting success that is incongruent with their sex-appropriate identity, the Imposter Phenomenon becomes the antidote to internal conflict.

2. FEAR OF FAILURE OR SUCCESS:

Imposter phenomenon leads to fear of failure and success in the person who have such feeling. A person who has imposter feeling about him always think that he/she can't repeat his success once again in future. For example, if any person who have qualified one of the toughest exam of India such Indian Civil Service exam. He assumes a

presumption that now in future he/she will not repeat his success. It is due to the Imposter Phenomenon that he always fears of such exams, however he/she is more capable and also repeats his success in near future. Thus imposter Phenomenon inculcates in the person a fear of success and failure, which hinders his competency and performance .

3. IMPOSTER PHENOMENON AND GENDER:

Clance and Imes (1978) developed the term imposter phenomenon. They designated Imposter Phenomenon an internal experience of intellectual phoniness and which seemed to be particularly prevalent amongst a sample of high-achieving women (Clance & O'Toole, 1988). For this, Clance and Imes (1978) interviewed 150 highly successful women who earned their degrees and got high scores on standardized tests, or professional recognition from colleagues or organizations. They found in study that, these highly successful women still felt an internal lack of success. Stahal et al. (1980) examined that the imposter phenomenon among high achieving African American high school girls. They found in their study that 55 percent attributed their achievements to reasons others than ability or intellect. Harvey (1981) conducted a study on the imposter Phenomenon: An internal barrier to empowerment and achievement. He found that imposter feeling were shared similarly by both males and females. Yoakem (1988) investigated the Imposter Phenomenon in relation to gender and educational plans following high school graduation. He took the sample of eighteen years old high school students which comprised of 20 males and 20 females. They were selected from Senior English classes in a rural mountain high school. They completed a demographic questionnaire and the Harvey Imposter Phenomenon Scale. The results indicated no significant difference in scores between males and females, or between college-bound and non-college-bound students. A non significant interaction effect was noted. Further the results suggested that male and female high school students experience the Imposter Phenomenon to the same extent regardless of their being college-bound or non-college-bound. Beard (1990) found in his study that both genders doubted their abilities to succeed, and interpersonal styles were quite different. In her finding, female imposters were described as self-protective, cautious, lacking in social initiative and avoiding of interpersonal connections. However male imposters were more accepting of social interactions and did not tend to withdraw from social contact.

Oriel et al. (2004) conducted a study to determine the prevalence of the impostor phenomenon in family medicine residents. According to them, some family medicine residents often doubt their ability to become competent family physicians. Individuals who believe themselves to be less intelligent and less competent than others perceive them to be are described in the psychological literatures having the impostor phenomenon. Researchers conducted a mail survey of all 255 family medicine residents in Wisconsin. This survey included the Clance Imposter Scale and two scales measuring depression and anxiety. A total of 185 surveys were returned, for a 73 percent response rate. They found 41 percent of women and 24 percent of men scored as impostors and Impostor symptoms were highly correlated with depression and anxiety. They found that about one third of family medicine residents believe they were less intelligent and less competent than others perceive them to be. These residents suffer psychological distress. Further they do not believe that they will be ready to practice family medicine after graduation. Kumar and Jagacinski (2005) in their study investigated the relationship between imposter fears and achievement goals. The sample was taken from 135 College students. They completed the Clance Imposter Phenomenon Scale (Clance, 1985) and several measures relevant to achievement goal theory. Both imposter fears and ability avoid achievement goals were positively related to test anxiety and negatively related to confidence in ones intelligence. They found that women expressed greater imposter fears than men and were also higher on ability-avoid goals. Researchers used the hierarchical regression, and examined the pattern of achievement goals that related to imposter fears for men and women. Among men, imposter fears were primarily associated with ability-avoid goals and among women, imposter fears were positively related to ability-approach goals and negatively related to task goals. Further, in women, endorsement of an entity theory of intelligence was associated with imposter fears.

Hutchison et al. (2006) in their study investigated the relationship between gender, self-efficacy, and IP by examining the research self-efficacy beliefs and imposter feelings of students in an eleven-week undergraduate summer research program. The qualitative/quantitative survey was designed to determine students research-efficacy (i.e. their confidence in their abilities to succeed in the research program), their definitions of success in the research program, and their imposter status as measured by the Clance IP scale. Results revealed that Imposter Phenomenon sufferers and non sufferers alike appear to be quite efficacious about overall summer research program success, the same was found to be true for men and women. Imposter Phenomenon sufferers, however, rated their degree to which they were currently achieving success in the program lower than non sufferers. McGregor et al. (2008) found the relation between the imposter Phenomenon and depression among college students. Results of the study showed the Pearson product-moment correlation yielded a positive correlation between the Imposter Phenomenon and Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II) scores. In addition to it, a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) using the Imposter Phenomenon and BDI scores as the dependent variables with sex serving as the independent variable, revealed that men and women differ significantly on the combined dependent variables of Imposter Phenomenon and BDI scores. More specifically, the main effect between sex and Imposter Phenomenon score indicates that women have higher

Imposter Phenomenon scores that men. However, there was not statistically significant relation between sex and BDI. Mattie et al. (2008) reported that the purpose of their study was to investigate the prevalence and correlation of three major psychological constructs in practicing physician assistants (PAs) in the continental United States. Through voluntary participant completion of a comprehensive online survey, the Imposter Phenomenon (IP), depression, and anxiety were analyzed by using the Clance Imposter Phenomenon Scale (CIPS) and the Depression Module and Anxiety Module of the Primary Evaluation of Mental Disorders (PRIME-MD). The demographic information such as age, gender, graduation date, and total number of years in practice, was also gathered. The study investigated four hypothesis and first was, the presence of Imposter Phenomenon would mimic earlier research showing that Imposter Phenomenon exists in approximately one-third of professionals, regardless of profession. Secondly, Imposter Phenomenon scores would decrease as the number of years in practice increased. Third hypothesis stated that, there would not exist any gender difference in the incidence of Imposter Phenomenon among Physician Assistants. Last and fourth hypothesis was that, clinically expressed levels of both depression and anxiety would be statistically correlated with high Imposter Phenomenon scores. Results of the study supported each of the hypotheses. However, anxiety was not shown to be significantly associated with Imposter Phenomenon.

Hoang (2013) in her article explored the literature around Imposter Phenomenon, its impact on men and women, graduate level students, and senior student affairs practitioners in higher education. The researcher offered insights and suggestions on how to navigate Imposter Phenomenon, while working with students or colleagues.

4. CONCLUSION:

This article has presented an overview of research into Imposter Phenomenon with particular focus on male and female. There are some issues regarding the proposed development and consequences of impostor fears that still need to be addressed. Imposter feeling exist in male and female. However, most of the studies showed impostor phenomenon feelings are more significant in women. However, further studies showed that these feeling are equally shared by the male and female. The persons in whom these feelings persist, a sense of fear, insecurity, and evenly sometimes depression occurs. These person are not able to express them and their competency for society not used properly. Thus proper guidelines should be provided such persons to cope with these feeling in country like India, where half of the generation is young.

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