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THE IMPOSTER PHENOMENON

An exploration of the need to please

A thesis

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DEBRA WELLS

University of Waikato

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ABSTRACT

The Imposter Phenomenon is an internal sense of intellectual phoniness that results in those who experience it, discounting their abilities by attributing success to such things as luck or charm.

The topic of this thesis is “The Imposter Phenomenon: An Exploration of the Need to Please” Bussotti (1990) noted in her doctoral thesis that she unexpectedly found a strong association between the need to please and the Imposter Phenomenon and that this warranted further study. This thesis considers the roles Imposters received within their families as children and the impact of the subsequent need to please within the family unit, on the personal development of the Imposter Phenomenon. It however takes the dynamic of the need to please beyond the individual and places it into the wider framework of gender role socialisation.

The theory that I postulate is that the way in which one pleases another is gendered in its understanding and outworking. The seven women who participated in this research were all from homes where traditional male and female roles were modeled. They learnt that to please others meant to behave as a traditionally defined female. Within this definition there was little room for more masculine traits to be integrated within their self-concept. When later in their lives they experienced academic success they attributed this not to their more masculinised behaviours such as assertiveness and competitiveness but rather to the more neutral attributions of luck, or faking it. They said they felt like Imposters waiting to be discovered. I have proposed that this duality be named the Margaret Thatcher/Mother Teresa Identity Enigma.

A brief outline of the thesis chapters is now provided.

Chapter One: Provides a comprehensive literature review of the Imposter Phenomenon research. It covers a definition of the Imposter Phenomenon, why it is considered a problem, characteristics of the Imposter Phenomenon, family dynamics, longevity and maintenance of Imposter dynamics and therapy.

Chapter Two: Imposter Phenomenon – In Other Guises shows how the concept of the Imposter Phenomenon is in fact one of many explanations of the same thing, the fear of failure. It specifically looks at Fear of Failure, Self-Worth Protection Theory, and the Achilles Syndrome.

Chapter Three: Gender Role Development considers three broad theories of gender role development. These are Biological, Social, and Structural theories. It suggests that the social and structural theories are of most use when considering Imposter Dynamics because they recognise that women are shaped to a large extent by the society in which they grow up in.

Chapter Four: Methodology, begins by outlining the paradigm of Interpretivism used in this research. It also covers procedure, recruitment, participants and instruments utilised. It also addresses limitations of this research.

Chapter Five: Findings presents the voices of the participants themselves in sections that weave together to show the impact of ‘needing to please’ others on their lives.

Chapter Six: Towards a Social Theory of the Imposter Phenomenon pulls all of the different threads together and suggests a new theory about the impact of the need to please on the development of the Imposter Phenomenon.

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1 LITERATURE REVIEW

I asked a group of students one day to brainstorm the word ‘imposter’ It conjured up a plethora of images and descriptors for them. These ranged from icons like Darleks, 007, Ben Johnston, Pepsi and the KGB to descriptors such as false, fake, outsider, masked, living a lie and intruder. I was somewhat surprised by their responses, and the negative metaphors that they thought of. On reflection they did actually identify some of the defining characteristics of the Imposter as Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes have framed it.

What then is the “Imposter Phenomenon”?

In this chapter I will provide information about the derivation of the “Imposter Phenomenon”, by outlining its definition, theoretical roots and the present position of the research. This will include an examination of its characteristics, the contexts of family dynamics and society as the source of the Imposter’s genesis. The chapter will also review the recommended strategies about how to overcome it.

The overall purpose of this section is to identify the gaps in the present research and, as a result, to reveal the direction and focus of this thesis.

1.1 The Imposter Phenomenon - its theoretical roots

In the early 1970's Pauline Rose Clance and Suzanne Imes were lecturers at Oberlin College in Ohio. In this position they both started to hear women who had outstanding grades, comment that they lacked academic ability and "felt like phonies". Lecturers considered them to be intelligent but the students did not agree with this assessment of them. Clance and Imes also noted that there was a large disparity between the number of men and women engaged in Honours studies. Males far outweighed females. This was despite the fact that overall the women's academic records were stronger than many of their male counterparts (Clance, Dingman, Reviere & Stober, 1995; Clance & Ojerholm, 1995). As well as being lecturers, Clance and Imes both practiced as psychotherapists. So it was not only in the classrooms and corridors of academia that they became aware of these comments, but also in their respective practices as therapists. As a result of these observations, one year Clance and Imes began to hold small discussion groups for undergraduate women who considered themselves as undeserving of the success and academic recognition they were receiving. The result of these groups was that in the following year the number of women undertaking Honours work dramatically increased (Clance & Ojerholm, 1995).

Then in 1978 Clance and Imes began working with 150 very successful women who came from a wide range of professional fields, in individual psychotherapy, interactional groups and small discussion groups. They heard the same story over and over from these women. They repeated the themes of undeserved success and an overwhelming feeling of phoniness: the same stories they had heard previously from

their undergraduate students. As recognition grew, Clance named the underlying theory the Imposter Phenomenon, (Clance & O'Toole, 1988). Out of these beginnings twenty years ago, research grew and with it a body of published articles.

Much of the literature published on the Imposter Phenomenon is from the discipline of psychology and is targeted back at this audience. The articles teach therapists to both recognise and effectively treat the Imposter Phenomenon in their clients. The majority of the articles are published in journals that reflect this bias, including *Human Relations; Journal of Personality Assessment; Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice; Psychotherapy in Private Practice* and *Women & Therapy*. Almost all of the articles are co-authored by Clance.

The research and resulting theory that form the basis of these articles is clearly influenced by Clance though it has been largely developed by Masters and Doctoral candidates in the U.S.A. It is interesting to note that of the fourteen theses located on the Imposter Phenomenon, ten of them have been carried out at Georgia State University. These are Imes (1979); Lawler, (1984); Flewelling (1985); Grays (1985); Campbell (1986); Holmes (1986); Dingman (1987); Prince (1989); Bussotti (1990) and Langford (1990). This University is where Clance has been the Chairperson of the College of Arts and Sciences for a number of years. She is also the Associate Director of the Psychotherapy and Behavior Therapy Clinic.

Much of the research about to be reviewed has been carried out either in the course of therapeutic relationships with clients or quantitatively with large groups of

university faculty or students. During the course of this thesis I will travel beyond Clance and her colleagues theory in order to bring a different understanding to the topic of the Imposter phenomenon.

What this description of the authorship and site of research illustrates is that Clance, along with her psychotherapeutic cast, have been extremely influential in the scholarship that addresses directly the Imposter Phenomenon. While the ramifications of this are beyond the scope of this thesis, it could be argued that the Imposter Phenomenon has not really been subjected to the scrutiny of the wider academic community except through presentation at academic conferences. Why this should be so is manifestly unclear, as I am sure evidence of this phenomenon can be found worldwide, especially in academic circles. After spending some time immersed in this literature, it became necessary for me to ask, could it be that the term 'Imposter Phenomenon' limits access, and that other researchers have used other names to describe the same problem? The answer to this question will be addressed in Chapter Two. All of the research now reviewed is based on a premise that the Imposter Phenomenon exists, but what exactly is it?

1.2 Definition of the Imposter Phenomenon

Clance and Imes define the Imposter Phenomenon as,

“an internal experience of intellectual phoniness common among high-achieving individuals who persist in believing that they are not bright, capable or creative despite ample evidence to the contrary”, (Imes & Clance, 1984, p.69).

Originally the Imposter Phenomenon was thought to be experienced by high-achieving women only, however later research (Topping, 1983; Dingman, 1987) showed that men are just as likely to experience imposter feelings. Dingman (1987) speculated however that males seemed to be able to overcome its disabling effects more easily because of societal norms and expectations that encouraged them to succeed. In support of this claim, Clance & Ojerholm (1995) argued that women not only have success to cope with, but they also have the conflicting voices of socialization and experience which exacerbate the effects of the phenomenon and thereby create barriers to overcoming it. In other words the Imposter Phenomenon appears to have a greater negative impact on women than on men. This provides the first justification for this thesis and the reason why I will focus solely on women and their experiences of the Imposter Phenomenon.

The 'internal experience of phoniness' means that Imposters experience a discrepancy between how they perceive themselves and how others perceive them. While external measures and standards of their capabilities such as examinations, assignments or performance reviews, reflect high levels of competency, Imposters continue to feel incompetent. They feel that somehow they have tricked the system and its standards, or if they have not fooled it, at the very least they have had very good luck. The students I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter used words such as false, fake, masked and intruder as descriptors of a generic imposter. I believe from all I read in this literature that these descriptors would find a place of recognition in the Imposter's mind. They would find this place, not because the descriptors are true by someone else's external standards, but because that is how Imposters view

themselves; as a fake waiting to be discovered (Clance, 1985). According to this literature Imposters can experience a great deal of frustration because it seems that others do not see them for who they really are; interlopers in an unsuspecting crowd.

As I've already stated, the literature points out that people who experience the Imposter Phenomenon attribute their successes not to innate intelligence, but instead to external factors such as luck, charm, error or sensitivity to the wishes of others (Clance, Dingman, Reviere & Stober, 1995). Using Attribution Theory is one way in which the literature addresses this.

Attribution theory postulates that in everyday life most individuals find causes to explain and understand their environment. This allows them to construct and maintain a predictable world in which to live (Kelley, 1973; Weiner, 1974; Nicholls, 1975; Quattrone, 1982; Trafimow & Schneider, 1994). Frieze (1978) suggested that an individual's perceptions about the causes or factors related to success are very useful in analysing achievement-oriented behaviour. Four factors have been identified by Weiner (1974), and Frieze (1976) to account for the kinds of self-attributions individuals generally use in the evaluation of success. These are (1) ability or skill, (2) motivation or effort, (3) task difficulty, (4) luck or fate. Ability and effort are seen as internal causes for success. These factors are resident within the individual. On the other hand task difficulty and luck are considered external to the individual; they are attributes that reside in a situation outside of the control of the person. The Imposter attributes her success to those external factors which are beyond her control. These include such things as luck and the difficulty of the task. So called 'Imposters' do not

appear to utilise internal attributions at all. As a result of this they do not experience any internalised satisfaction from personal achievements and recognition. Instead these achievements produce a mixture of anxiety, depression, fear and doubt caused by a knowing or a surety that they will not be able to repeat the performance again and then perhaps everyone will know that they are indeed an Imposter (Clance & O'Toole, 1988).

The Imposter Phenomenon then, is defined for the purposes of this thesis as an internal sense of knowing that one is not intelligent even though evidence would seem to refute this. The evidence is negated by attributing any successes to factors beyond one's control.

1.3 So What's the Problem?

One could well ask why the Imposter Phenomenon is presented as a problem, when people who experience it are usually very successful in their chosen fields. While several of the reasons have already been alluded to, these will now be discussed in more depth.

In the literature reviewed, the overriding reason why this phenomenon is cited as a problem, is because people who experience it apparently seldom reach their full potential (Clance, Dingman, Reviere & Stober, 1995). It is thought that this situation occurs for a number of reasons, most of which I have categorized as 'An Unrealistic Sense of Competence' and 'Fear of Being Found Out'

The Imposter has an unrealistic sense of her own competence. She has not fully internalized her strengths. Even if she acknowledges them on some level she simply disbelieves them. Any situation, therefore that demands performance of some kind is met with anxiety, self doubt and fear of failure rather than with a self-assured confidence (Clance & O'Toole, 1988). As the Imposter will settle for nothing less than an elusive sense of perfection, she is doomed to experience dissatisfaction in most evaluative situations (Imes & Clance, 1984). Success when it inevitably comes cannot be celebrated, because it will not be attributed to internal ability but rather to external factors over which the Imposter feels she has little or no control. Success, therefore becomes a 'bitter pill'; a benchmark against which she feels she will be found wanting in the future.

The second group of factors which contribute to the Imposter Phenomenon being viewed as a problem, is centred around the fear of being found out, (Clance, Dingman, Reviere & Stober, 1995). The fear of being found out can induce in Imposters such self-limiting behaviours as social isolation and an avoidance of evaluational situations. They are simply unlikely to take risks, (Langford & Clance, 1993). Risks represent uncharted and therefore unpredictable territory. The Imposter would be unlikely to take opportunities presented, such as applying for a promotion (Clance, 1985). The fear of being found out may mean that she never follows her aspirations nor reaches her full potential.

This fear can also lead to intense feelings of loneliness. The Imposter feels like she is the only one in the world that experiences the haunting fear and the accompanying

stress that plagues her (Clance, 1985). She would rarely disclose her feelings of inadequacy to another, because others do not see what she sees; a failure and a fraud. The sense of isolation is tangible and by its very nature can entrap the Imposter in a giddy cycle from which it is very difficult to break loose.

The reasons therefore that the Imposter Phenomenon is a problem is because firstly it stifles peoples sense of their own personal strengths and hence their ability to reach their full potential. Secondly it results in low risk-taking behaviours because of the deep felt fear of discovery as a fraud.

The isolative nature of the Imposter Phenomenon, due to both an unreal sense of competence and a fear of being found out, are two further reasons why I have chosen to work alongside women who live with this disabling experience. I will contend however, that to focus on the individual who experiences the Imposter Phenomenon is in itself a problem. While it is an individual experience it is also one that is very common. Much of the literature reviewed in this chapter espouses that in fact the Imposter Phenomenon is quite common amongst many high achieving women. I wonder if the labeling of the 'Imposters' as individuals, as having a set of individual problems, in fact detracts from the broader constructs that give rise to this phenomenon. I will argue that to ignore the socialisation of women is to blame the individual for something over which she has little control. This argument about social relations will be addressed in a later chapter.

I have mentioned a few of the characteristic's of the Imposter Phenomenon but these will now be considered in more detail.

1.4 Characteristics of the Imposter Phenomenon

Imposter beliefs are generally categorised as Personal, Familial and Social (Clance, Dingman, Reviere & Stober, 1995) or are discussed as the 'Imposter Phenomenon Cycle' (Clance & O'Toole, 1988).

The focus of this thesis is on the 'need to please' and therefore these categorizations (familial, social and personal) will be laid against the backdrop of the 'need to please' in relationship to others. These three contexts are very difficult to separate because they are inter-twined in a person's relationship with her world. This is reflected in the following discussion.

The Imposter Phenomenon is embedded social contexts, that is, it operates in relationship to others in either the family or society (Clance, Dingman, Reviere & Stober, 1995). However while to separate family from the more general social relations in society is a false dichotomy, there do appear to be certain family dynamics which give rise to the Imposter. These are that the family as a whole tends to experience a degree of internal conflict and in turn is non-supportive towards the child (Langford & Clance, 1993). Alongside this the parents of the IP-potential child provide either false or non-affirming messages to the child about her intelligence and her roles within the family (Clance & O'Toole, 1988). I intend to discuss family

background in greater depth in a separate section further on in this literature review because this, I will suggest, is the soil out of which the 'need to please' grows.

As a result of the early non-affirming family dynamics the IP-potential child apparently takes into her adulthood a strong personal desire to be seen in a positive light by her peers, and in particular the need to be seen as intelligent (Langford & Clance, 1993). The resulting striving to achieve reflects a deep-seated concern about what her performance says to others about her. In other words, the Imposter needs to 'look smart' to others in order to feel good about herself. She sees her 'self' only as reflected by others.

The need to 'look smart' to others is however doomed; the Imposter does not personally believe that she is intelligent (Clance & O'Toole, 1988; Langford & Clance, 1993). Intelligence is seen by her to be embodied in the skills she is *not* good at, and yet those things which come easily and she is good at, and excels in, she discounts (Imes & Clance, 1984). She seems to believe that what comes easily does not constitute 'real' intelligence. Her definition of intelligence is skewed. This conundrum means that the Imposter has great difficulty internalizing success that has been measured by external standards because the imposed measures do not match her own. Thus any success that is achieved comes priced with the tag of guilt (Clance & O'Toole, 1988). The feeling of guilt arises because the Imposter feels that she has had success accredited to her when it is undeserved. She believes that there are others who deserve the recognition above her because her grounds for measuring success (luck and difficulty for instance) have not been the grounds used by others.

The double bind of success and failure ensure that situations which include evaluation are often viewed with dread (Clance, 1985). An evaluation situation spells potential disaster, whether the Imposter performs well or otherwise because in either situation she experiences guilt. Success in evaluation sets a precedent and this precedent then threatens to be her downfall; she wonders if she will ever again be able to perform to such a high standard. Not only does success set a precedent, it can also be feared because of the imagined consequences that may follow. These consequences may include 'unmerited praise' or promotion. Other subsidiary factors can also ballast her fears, for instance her relationships with men. Clance (1985) states that for women particularly,

“there is a concern that a high level of success may interfere in their relationships with men and that they may be seen as threatening or unfeminine”, (p.27).

Not only can Imposters view success as a possible interference in relationships; it can be feared because it may mean that she is asked to take on yet more responsibilities – responsibilities that she may fail at. If she does not perform well, then she fears that she will be seen for whom she really is; an intellectual fraud. The terror of failure ensures that all the Imposter does is done to the best of her ability. In fact a lot of Imposters will avoid those situations where they feel unconfident (Clance, 1985).

The dread of evaluation and the accompanying terror of failure highlight the perfectionist in the Imposter. The standards she sets for herself are extremely high, “doing any project less than exactly right is unacceptable and proof of their lack of worth” (Imes & Clance, 1984, p81). The results of this are that the Imposter puts herself under a tremendous amount of pressure. Langford & Clance’s, (1993)

research has shown that Imposters frequently experience worry, depression and anxiety. These findings confirmed those of Topping (1983) who found that there was a strong positive correlation between the Imposter Phenomenon and anxiety. The worry, depression and anxiety result from the pressure the Imposter puts on herself to live up to an image that is unrealistic, an image however that must be maintained if she is to look intelligent to others. The ability to take risks is severely curtailed, as she always wants to be seen in a positive light. This leads into another aspect of the personal impact of the Imposter Phenomenon, the impact self-esteem.

One would expect from all that is claimed above, that the Imposter had generalized low self-esteem. This does not however appear to be the case. Langford & Clance (1993) state that while Imposters' self esteem is extremely fragile in the area of achievement it can be quite high in other areas of their lives. In the arena of achievement and success, the Imposter tends to be very self-protective. This is exhibited in an elaborate system of defenses that are in some way related to the desire to be recognised as competent (Langford & Clance, 1993). These defenses include few risk-taking behaviours, a lack of impulsivity and a mistrusting of others. Imposters are guarded in their interpersonal relationships because they fear that their weaknesses will be seen, and criticized (Langford & Clance, 1993). The Imposter is in the difficult bind of being seen as achieving yet also protecting herself from criticism. Again this reflects the strong 'need to please'

In the literature available an aspect of most Imposters personality which seems to exacerbate the 'management' of relationships is that they are generally introverts.

Several researchers (Lawler, 1984; Prince, 1989; Holmes, Kertay, Adamson, Holland & Clance, 1993) have shown that there exists a high positive correlation between the Imposter Phenomenon and Introversion as measured by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. Introversion is related to keeping one's personality hidden from the world thus giving rise to the feeling that one is not known for who one truly is (Langford & Clance, 1993). In other words, the sense of being an Imposter is, it seems, more likely to be experienced by people who others identify as introverts.

Throughout this discussion of the characteristics of Imposters lies a background theme of 'needing to please'. Bussotti (1990) too says she unexpectedly found a strong association between the 'need to please' and the Imposter Phenomenon. She concluded that it warranted further study especially in relation to the roles the Imposters had acquired within their families. Herein lies the second justification for the topic of this thesis; "The Imposter Phenomenon; The Need to Please". I will investigate the Imposter Phenomenon by looking at the relationship between the need to please and family-acquired roles.

1.5 Family Dynamics

The Imposter Phenomenon is rooted in interpersonal contexts (Clance, 1985), and the family is the first relational context in which a child is situated. The family therefore has a direct influence on the development of the 'Imposter' within the child through the covert and overt messages imparted to her from quite a young age (Clance & O'Toole, 1988; Langford & Clance, 1993). The family environment is one of unresolved conflict (Bussotti, 1990). The child finds herself in a situation which is

emotionally barren and lacking in support, (Bussotti, 1990; Langford & Clance, 1993). Langford and Clance (1993) further suggest that the child in this barren emotional atmosphere seeks approval and support by working extremely hard at trying to please her parents. Thus the 'need to please' may, in fact, become evident very early in life.

Previous researchers have found two aspects of family dynamics, which impact on the likelihood of Imposter dynamics eventuating. These are family history and family expectation.

- 1) Early family history appears to take two different forms that may lead to a child developing Imposter traits. Clance and Imes (1978) discuss these in the following terms. The first is when either a different sibling or a close relative is thought of as 'the intelligent one' in the family. The IP-potential child is viewed as something other than intelligent, for example as sensitive or socially adept, and she cannot get the adults to change this view. No matter what she does, or in what ways she succeeds her parents remain inflexible in their perceptions despite any evidence to the contrary. This can give rise to Imposter feelings because she receives incongruent messages from her family and school.

The second alternative is the opposite of the first. Here the family conveys to the child that she is unrivalled in every way. She is seen to "learn quickly" and "manoeuvre confidently" in social situations. The child however

experiences difficulty in some situations or at some times, and begins to doubt her parent's perceptions and thence also her own sense of self.

Both of these alternative early family histories involve a mismatch between how the family says they view the child and how she views herself. Rather than being seen as simply 'well-capable' the IP-potential child is either seen as deficient or amazing to her family. Yet neither of these family perceptions reflects what the child experiences in real life outside of the home.

- 2) The second feature of family history is the career path of the parents of the IP-potential child. Hirschfield (1982) conducted a study of 80 successful professional women and found that their parents career paths was a significant predictor of Imposter traits developing in the women studied. When these women pursued a career while her family strongly valued women being homemakers the disparity seemed to make the women studied, more susceptible to Imposter feelings. Furthermore Dingman (1987) also found that when women achieved social mobility through the avenues of education and career advancement, achievements which were not valued by her family, the women often found themselves in uncharted territory. They felt like Imposters both in their birth family and in the outside world.

Summarising the two main aspects of family dynamics then, early family history and parental career paths seem to result in the parents of IP-potential children only selectively validating some of their child's traits; thus resulting in the child's self -

concept becoming skewed (Clance, Dingman, Reviere & Stober, 1995). Langford and Clance (1993) explain this as a true self/false self dichotomy by drawing on the work of theorists such as Horney (1950), Winnicott (1965) and Kohut (1984). When this happens the child may internalise those aspects of herself that are praised and validated by the parents and concentrate at excelling in those areas. The difficulty with this is that the areas that are not parentally validated are not internalised into the child's self-concept. Thus if the child is receiving validation from teachers, for example about her academic prowess, and this is not also applauded in the home, the child may begin to experience an alienation from her 'self' as she begins to present false images to her family in order to fit in and be praised (Langford & Clance, 1993). When asked she may also begin to explain her successes by using those things that her family validates, thereby minimising the role that intelligence has had to play for instance. This dichotomy results in a sense of alienation as a person presents false images of themselves in an attempt to meet the expectations of their social environment. The child, in this case, plays on what is validated and eschews that which is not, no matter how successful she may be in the second arena. Again underlining this behaviour is the need to please, the need to fit in, and be validated and accepted by her family (Clance, Dingman, Reviere & Stober, 1995).

Figure 1: 'Family Dynamics' provides a summary of the preceding discussions.

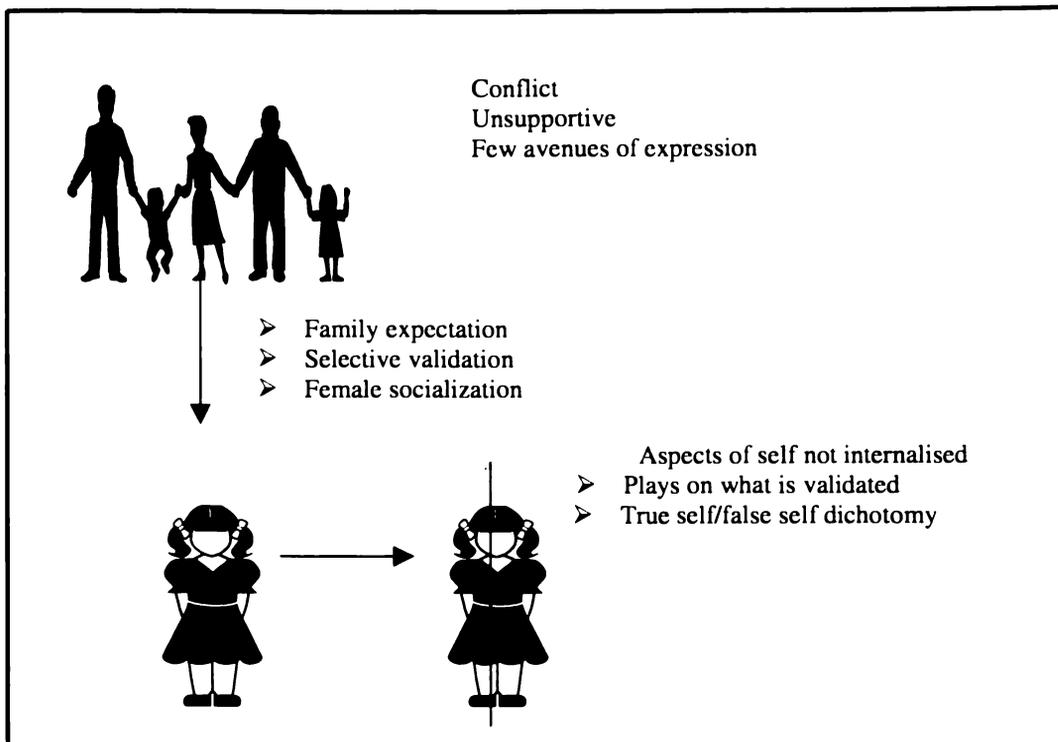


Figure 1: Family Dynamics

While some people may question the claims in Figure 1, it appears that Imposters are likely to come from families that are unsupportive of their children and emotionally distant. Communication within the home will tend to be unclear, with little genuine sharing of thoughts and feelings (Clance, 1985). The combination of parental expectations and the selective validation of the child's abilities seem to result in aspects of the child's true 'self' not being internalised (Clance, Dingman, Reviere & Stober, 1995). The 'self' with which most academics are concerned as they study the Imposter Phenomenon, is the academic self. It is when the parents fail to support or

validate the potential IP-child's academic ability then a true self/false self dichotomy or contradiction emerges (Clance et al, 1995) The child needs approval and validation so will 'perform' in those areas which achieve positive regard from her parents (Bussotti, 1990). She then takes these internalised understandings into her adult life. This transference across time and varying social situations then begs the question of a wider social influence on the development of the Imposter Phenomenon.

More recent research has explored the impact of socialization on Imposter dynamics and found very clear links between the two. For instance, seventeen years after posing a question about the possible influence of socialisation, Clance, Dingman, Reviere and Stober (1995) definitively stated,

“The imposter phenomenon is rooted in interpersonal and social contexts, in that both the family and female gender-role socialization in a predominantly male-normed social system form the backdrop for imposter feelings” (p. 80).

Just as the family can help shape the potentiality of the imposter, so obviously can society at large. However while the IP literature does consider socialization, the emphasis of the articles reviewed is on therapy. It is one of the contentions of this thesis is that therapy alone will not address the wider issues of socialization that impact on women and so I will critique socialization in more depth a separate upcoming chapter. Meanwhile, there are some pertinent questions that need to be asked about the Imposter Phenomenon in the broader social arena. For instance, can repeated successes break the intensity of imposter feelings and how are these feelings maintained in the face of success?

1.6 Longevity and Maintenance of Imposter Dynamics

Clance and Imes (1978) initially believed that repeated successes were not enough to dismantle the feeling of being an 'Imposter'. They commented that they were amazed at the "pervasiveness and longevity" (p.242) of the phenomenon in high achieving women. There have been several studies since which amplify and detail the effect of longevity. Imes (1979), for one, found that the longer a person had been teaching after their final degree, the more likely they were to eventually attribute their success to ability and effort. She surmised however that this change did not occur with females who had who experienced the Imposter Phenomenon to any great degree.

Harvey (1981) compared the IP scores of graduate students to those of undergraduate honours students. She found that the average 'imposter' scores of first year graduates were significantly higher than all other graduates. She suggested that the newness of the role of first year graduates exacerbated feelings of intellectual phoniness. The newer they were, the more fraudulent they felt. She further hypothesised that familiarity with a role and its expectations (such as on-going graduate studies) led to a reduction of imposter feelings. Flewelling's (1985) investigation of professionals in law, social work, medicine and nursing resulted in the same conclusions as Imes (1979) and Harvey (1981). Flewelling tried to explain the apparent discrepancy between the 1978 research (Clance & Imes) which claimed that success did not result in a diminishing level of imposter feelings, and the later research (1979, 1981) that seemed to indicate that in fact they did. Flewelling's explanation was based on methods of research. She claimed that Clance and Imes derived their understanding of longevity from their therapeutic contact with clients, whereas the later research was based largely in questionnaires. Flewelling thought perhaps individuals would be

more likely to engage in self-disclosure during therapy relationships than in replies on impersonal surveys. The issue of longevity then, has yet to be satisfactorily understood.

The short-term maintenance of imposter feelings is better understood. Whenever a new project arises the 'Imposter' appears to progress through a cycle in one of two ways (Clance & Imes, 1978; Clance, Dingman, Reviere & Stober, 1995). She will either over prepare and attribute the need to do so to being a fraud, or she will procrastinate till close to the deadline and because of the rushed job attribute success to luck. Both of these scenarios end in feelings of anxiety when the completed task receives external recognition of a job well done.

These two options are illustrated in Figure 2: The Cycles of Imposter Dynamics.

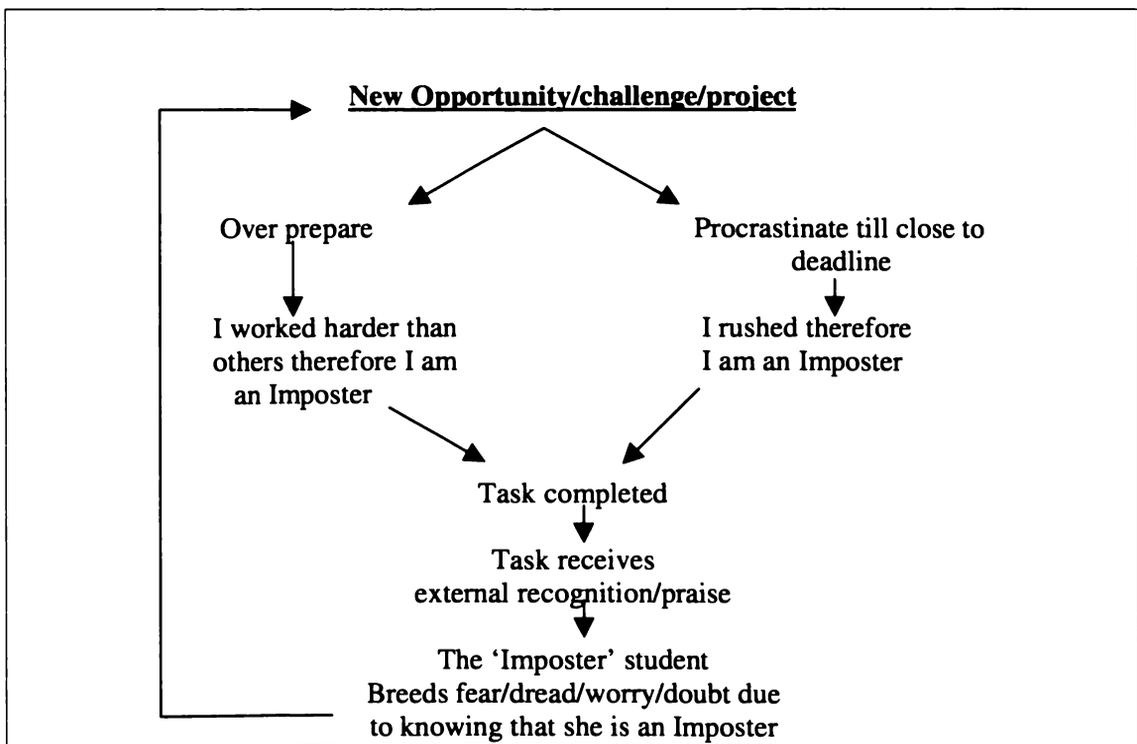


Figure 2: The Cycles of Imposter Dynamics

Figure 2 illustrates the cycle of the imposter dynamics. The maintenance of this cycle is further exacerbated if in fact the success is thought to be partly due to luck, sensitivity or being in the right place at the right time (Clance, Dingman, Reviere & Stober, 1995). However if the 'Imposter' attributes her success to say, being in the right place at the right time, she will use it in a negative way to discount her success rather than making the most of presented circumstances in a positive way.

Clance and Imes (1978) make the interesting point that in fact 'imposters' possibly have a vested interest in maintaining their stance regarding success, because perhaps they feel that if they do acknowledge their success as a result of innate ability, then they may open themselves up to negative reactions from others, especially those who are in some way threatened by successful women. This argument again links into the perceived expectations of others – or the 'need to please' in a society that generally is not comfortable with successful women (Maccoby, 1965). This gendered aspect will be further addressed in Chapter 3: Gender Role Development. In the light of this discussion on longevity and maintenance then, what does the literature recommend as strategies to overcome this disabling experience?

1.7 Therapy is the answer – really?

Therapy, as has been previously mentioned, is overwhelmingly touted in Clance related literature as the means to overcoming the dynamics of Imposter behaviours. This claim is understandable in light of the fact that Clance and Imes are both psychotherapists. However I found the emphasis of 'therapy' a little vexing and

perhaps it concerns Clance also, because in an interview with Clance in 1995 (Clance & Ojerholm, 1995) she stated that,

“it’s very important to us [Clance & Imes] not to have this be another “defect” in women or a pathologising of women, that’s why we called it a phenomenon rather than a disorder” (p. 160).

However, I claim that Clance’s comment is at variance with the way the imposter phenomenon is in fact presented in the literature, where in the use of words like, client, treatment, diagnostic category, clinical symptoms, treatment techniques, therapeutic goals and presenting problems, point directly to pathologising. The author moreover contradicts her claim in the same year when, as first author (Clance, Dingman, Reviere & Stober, 1995) she writes that “one of the most effective treatment modalities for women struggling with the imposter phenomenon is group psychotherapy” (p. 87). This sentiment is also clearly reflected in many of the other articles, where therapeutic strategies are clearly outlined. None of the articles reviewed actually discussed what other effective ‘modalities’ there were, that could be used with people who experienced the Imposter Phenomenon.

My concern centres on the apparent pathologising of behaviours that this psychologising position engenders for women. This concern extends to the fact that while it has been confirmed that men may also experience imposter dynamics, scant attention is was found in the literature that expressly addressed their needs or the ways in which it is played out in their lives. Are men not ill, while women are? I suggest that this position contributes to the Imposter Phenomenon being seen as a ‘women’s problem’ only.

1.8 Conclusion

To conclude then the Imposter Phenomenon is an internal sense of intellectual phoniness initially observed in high-achieving women, but later found to be as equally prevalent in men. Despite considerable success in academic and professional arenas people who experience this difficulty, attribute their successes to external factors such as luck, sensitivity to the needs of others or personal charisma. They discount success as a reflection of their own innate intelligence and as a result do not experience a sense of accomplishment in their achievements. A common denominator is the family backgrounds of these people. Their families experienced a degree of conflict and they were not good at communicating neither with each other nor with validating the real strengths of heir child. As the child grew, they took 'the Imposter' with them in a kind of true self/false self dichotomy which manifested itself, it seems, most when the now adult was confronted with new social situations. However the degree to which the Imposter Phenomenon can be fully understood in adults is unclear because of the discipline and methodological background of previous studies. The Imposter Phenomenon literature is grounded in a psychology framework. This is clearly reflected in the emphasis on therapy interventions to enable people who experience it to overcome the phenomenon's disabling affects.

1.9 Summary

In summary my concerns about the Imposter Phenomenon literature are as follows:

- 1) The potential pathologising of women's behaviours
- 2) The emphasis on therapy as a 'treatment modality'

- 3) The lack of analysis of the socialization of women
- 4) The use of quantitative data in much of the underlining research

This thesis will attempt to go some way towards rectifying these concerns by:

- 1) Considering the role of gender socialization in the manifestation of “need to please” by those who experience the Imposter Phenomenon
- 2) Using qualitative methods i.e. in-depth interviews to obtain data

2 THE IMPOSTER PHENOMENON - IN OTHER GUISES

The purpose of this chapter is to show how the Imposter Phenomenon provides in fact one of many explanations that have been postulated in an attempt to explain much the same phenomenon: the fear of failure borne out of a need to please. This chapter will briefly examine some of these other explanations with a view to comparing them with Clance's Imposter Phenomenon.

The parameters of my choice of these alternative views was cross-referencing; they were either referred to by Clance in her literature or the writers of the other views referred to Imposter Phenomenon literature. While the following discussion possibly does not consider every such piece of work in existence it does critique the major theories found under which these readings are subsumed.

These theories include Fear of Failure, Self Worth Protection Theory, and the Achilles Syndrome. They will each be discussed in turn in order to find the commonalties between them.

2.1 Fear of Failure

The construct of the fear of failure (FOF) will be considered first, as it is the thread that provides the unifying link with all of the other theories being considered. As a construct it has been discussed by researchers such as Beery

(1975) and Covington (1984), under the banner of the psychology of achievement (Mednick & Thomas, 1993).

The fear of failure can be simply defined as a fear of falling short of the mark, whether the mark is actual or imposed (Yuen & Depper, 1988). It does not mean however that the fear necessarily centres on objective failure, it could also be an internal experience of failure despite objective measures to the contrary.

It has been suggested by a number of authors (for example Covington & Beery, 1976; Burka & Yuen, 1983; Covington & Omelich, 1984) that individuals who fear failure, may place a higher priority on protecting their sense of worth, and 'managing' others' perceptions of them, than on achievement. This fear is reflected in scenarios of low risk taking or expectations of low success so that the fragile 'self' is not put at risk. Clance (1985) states a similar idea when she says Imposters are "afraid they would experience shame, self-hatred, and a total loss of self-esteem if they failed" (p.64). She further comments that these are common reactions for people who experience the Imposter Phenomenon.

Yuen & Depper (1988) came to the conclusion, after a review of the FOF literature, that when discussing women, one cannot treat this experience as unidimensional. Fear of failure appears to encompass two separate domains - individual accomplishments and interpersonal relationship. The authors claim that

women can experience fear of failure in either or both of these arenas as they attempt to balance the needs of both work and love. This fear of failure is, I would suggest, rooted in a desire to please others; others with sometimes quite disparate expectations.

Women are not confined, however, within just the personal and work oriented spheres. They also live in a larger society that is increasingly competitive. Being mediocre or average has little place in today's economic or social climate (Yuen & Depper, 1988). The pressure to succeed or be perceived as succeeding in a multi-dimensional world can be viewed then, as ample reason for women to fear failure.

Golden (1988) extends the parameters of this dynamic by placing it within a patriarchal context when she states,

“While success can be defined in a variety of ways, success in a patriarchal culture is, like a generic he, ultimately seen as male. Thus for a woman to fear success is “appropriate” behaviour. In a patriarchal culture, not to achieve success, or to fail, is what is expected for women. Thus, a woman who fears failure is feeling (and potentially acting) against the grain of proscribed feminine behaviour. The woman who fears success is still acting the way she’s supposed to while the woman who fears failure is not” (p.48).

Hall (1990) adds weight to the idea that success is seen as ‘male’ when she discusses success for women as traditionally meaning adapting to the needs and demands of others, particularly men.

These comments of Golden (1988) and Hall (1990) raise very interesting questions, is fear of failure a healthy response to a woman's position within a patriarchal society? Does a woman have to accommodate sometimes contradictory expectations of what she should be? It is a premise of this thesis that in fact are both true.

I believe that fear of failure and its corollary the need to please, is the genesis from which the Imposter Phenomenon arises. Clance (1985) presents IP as a condition in need of treatment, I will however contend that it may be a 'normal' response to societal expectations.

The next section, Self Worth Protection Theory, places the fear of failure within the narrower setting of the academic arena.

2.2 Self Worth Protection Theory

Self Worth Protection Theory is based in the work of Beery (1975), Covington & Beery (1976) and Covington (1984) who explored the self worth theory of achievement motivation. They looked specifically at how some students stand to gain by not trying, but rather deliberately withdrawing effort, in some evaluative situations. These authors claim students appear to withdraw effort to protect themselves against failure and the perception of failure. Their thesis can be

illustrated in the form of the following equations which illustrate different student beliefs :

-where failure = perceived low ability → poor performance

-where poor performance ≠ low ability → good performance.

I believe the need to please is clearly the foundation of this dynamic. If the students did not fear failure in situations that would indicate that they had low ability, to themselves and others, they would not withdraw effort in an attempt to insulate themselves against it.

Thompson (1993; 1994) subsequently took Beery and Covingtons' work on evaluative settings and researched individual difference variables including overall confidence, attributional behaviours and perceived high and low evaluative threat on individual performance. As a consequence Thompson (1996) believes self worth protective students and those who experience the Imposter Phenomenon share common traits. These include fear of failure, low self-concepts of academic ability, externalization of success, and a strong need to please others.

Strategies are used for the protection of the self-esteem (Thompson, Davidson & Barber, 1995) when poor performance is perceived as a reflection of low ability. Students provide themselves with a mitigating circumstance to explain failure, by

either setting unrealistic or easily achieved goals and employing the withdrawal of effort. Thus, like the construct Fear of Failure, protection of self-esteem and management others' perceptions appear to sometimes have priority over the need for achievement.

Self worth protective students however are not necessarily chronic under-achievers. They, like those who experience the Imposter Phenomenon, can be 'overstrivers' That is they may set for themselves extremely high standards and apply immense effort to every task, with the result that they experience success. These students however have a low expectancy of success and when they achieve it, attribute it to external causes, much like "Imposters" (Thompson, 1996).

While Thompson does not appear to tackle in any great depth, the question of how self worth protection arises, he does make the observation that fear of failure in students appears to be becoming more pervasive and suggests that perhaps this is understandable in an age where there "is an increasing ethos of competition through our education system" (1996, p.4). Langford & Clance (1993) also make the observation that society has become far more competitive and achievement orientated: a society where self-worth is often measured by how much a person is perceived to have accomplished.

Thompson's (1996) educational approach, unlike Clance's therapeutic one, reports that techniques such as attribution retraining programmes, particularly in the area of success attribution, helps students to redefine their success strategies. This allows them to set appropriate goals and to perceive ability as a strategy not as a static entity which one either possesses or not. The long-term benefits of this approach, Thompson believes, are that the students begin to take more responsibility for personal agency in their academic endeavors.

Self Worth Protection Theory is yet another example of the impact on performance of the fear of failure in both one's own and others eyes. Those who experience this find themselves in a double bind. If they fail at a task it reinforces their low sense of self-esteem, but if they do well in an evaluative situation they are unable to credit it to their own ability and as a result their self-esteem is not enhanced.

This construct, like Fear of Failure, again reveals that some people insulate themselves, by various beliefs and actions, from personal and social devaluation.

The following section 'The Achilles Syndrome' takes a slightly different tack to the fear of failure in that the fear is understood to have valid grounds for its presence.

2.3 The Achilles Syndrome

“The Achilles Syndrome: Overcoming the secret fear of failure” (1994) is a self-help book written by Clarkson who is a clinical and counseling psychologist, psychotherapist and organisational development consultant in London. She notes in the Forward of the book, that only as it was going to press, did she have brought to her notice the work of Clance and the Imposter Phenomenon.

Clarkson however believes that she is discussing a separate idea to Clance; that of pseudocompetency. She uses the term ‘pseudocompetency’ as a technical term and ‘Achilles Syndrome’ as a “more poetic” way to denote the same experience (pg.11). This latter term is based in the story of Achilles, who although he seemed to be immortal had a secret flaw, his heel, which if discovered by his enemies would ensure his demise. Pseudocompetency involves a mismatch between ability and confidence. People who experience pseudocompetency feel as if their successes are a ‘house built on sand’ that can be undermined at any moment. Confidence therefore is a luxury emotion that is fleeting. The next wave will surely expose the flaws, and the person as a fraud.

Unlike Clance’s Imposter Phenomenon however, pseudocompetency is based in reality; that is it arises out of flaws or gaps in a person’s development in an academic arena. It is the personal recognition of a weak point in a person’s knowledge and/or skill base. The sense of incompetence therefore is based in a

grain of truth and the sense of fraudulence is perhaps valid. Although others may perceive the person as highly competent, the individual knows that there are areas in which they don't know as much as they could do. They do not know it all.

Clarkson does not believe that the person necessarily engages in deliberate lying or deception about their level of success. However as time passes and their competency is increasingly heralded, it becomes far more difficult for the individual to admit to what they don't know. They develop a 'terror of error'. Out of this arises similar traits to that of 'Imposters' They have a fear of failure, they fear discovery of failure by others and they experience a great deal of anxiety in performance arenas. In fact if one did not read the definition of pseudocompetency Clarkson's book reads very similar to the Imposter literature.

Clarkson (1994) believes that the root of pseudocompetency lies in the person's early socialization as well as the current economic and educational domains. She believes that in a culture that values achievement and success it becomes very difficult for individuals to admit that their attainments fall short of perfection.

She also purports that pseudocompetency has its genesis in societies that value "doing" over "being". Such cultures value achievement and success over the honouring of the individual as a unique person despite their abilities. Once again

the need to please; or the need to be seen as competent by others is clearly the foundation stone of this dynamic.

Clarkson (1994) recommends firstly that people who are engaged in the education and training of others must be made aware of this dynamic. Secondly, like Thompson, she recommends utilizing teaching and evaluation strategies which create a learning climate that values the students as people rather than solely focusing on what they may or may not be able to achieve.

The aspect of the Achilles Syndrome that is most useful to this thesis is Clarkson's assertion that society places a far higher value on what a person can do i.e. performance, than on who a person is. This inevitably leads to situations where failure of whatever type, is seen as a blight on the very personhood of individuals and once again reflects a need to please. Fear of failure thrives in this incubator of ever increasing demands of excellence.

2.4 Conclusion

The intention of this chapter was to present several different guises of the same phenomenon; fear of failure borne out of a need to please others. The Imposter Phenomenon is just one of many similar attempts to identify, name and understand the same experience. While Fear of Failure, Self Worth Protection Theory and The Achilles Syndrome are all experienced on the individual level,

this chapter has shown that in fact these experiences are positioned within a wider orbit; society. It has been further suggested that these 'phenomena' may in fact be a 'normal' response for women to the contradictory expectations of our society, and that they all originate in early socialisation of children. Therefore to solely relegate any of these theories to the individual level minimizes the impact that both socialization and economics have on their development.

2.5 Summary

For the purposes of this study, the points that this chapter has suggested that are important to this thesis are:

- 1) The Imposter Phenomenon is but one of a number of explanations of the fear of failure rooted in a strong felt need to please others.
- 2) The Imposter Phenomenon has less to do with the experience of individuals than it does with the social, educational and economic pressures brought to bear on people to succeed.
- 3) Women, by definition, can only ever be 'imposters' in a male-normed world.

The following chapter will specifically discuss gender role development, that is socialisation, and how this contributes to the development of the Imposter Phenomenon in women.

3

GENDER ROLE DEVELOPMENT

“The female is a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities; we should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness” (Aristotle, cited in Mills, J 1989, p. 79).

“When a woman inclines to learning, there is usually something wrong with her sex apparatus” (Nietzsche, cited in Mills, J. 1989, p. 30)

“anatomy is destiny” (Freud, 1925/1964, p.256)

The consideration of gender role development is central to this thesis because as briefly alluded to in the previous chapter it would seem that the beginnings of the Imposter Phenomenon and a ‘need to please’ lie in the early socialisation of children.

The above three quotes by men, who have been influential in the development of modern thought, all portray women by the sum total of their genitalia. However since the time of Freud much effort has been expended in an attempt to understand the development of gender roles in society.

Freud (1925/1964) equated sex, that is anatomy, with the development of gendered behaviour. He took a purely biological approach in his work. Others, for example Piaget (1928) and Kohlberg (1981), went beyond sex by also incorporating social factors in their theories on personality development. They did not however consider why societies were structured the way they were; they took

them at face value. Still others, in particular feminists such as Chodorow (1978), Gilligan (1982) and Fine (1985), have looked at and beyond 'society' to the 'whys' of its structures. Thus it can be seen that the investigation of gender role socialization and its relation to social structures of a society has a very recent history.

This chapter will firstly briefly outline each of these foci; biological, social and structural theories. It will then frame Imposter dynamics within these discourses.

3.1 Biological theories

The first construct to be briefly examined is where the understanding of gender roles is based in a biological framework. This means that being born male or female automatically typecasts one's roles for the rest of one's life. Who one is, is genetically preordained and therefore immutable. While it is impossible to deny that biology does have an effect on behaviour, the pressing issue is where does the influence of biology end and environment begin. This is often referred to as the nature verses nurture debate.

Freud, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was the best known advocate of the biological approach to personality and behaviour. He postulated that physical differences in genitalia and hormones were the principle factor in understanding differences between males and females (Katz, Boggiano & Silvern,

1993). His work has been found wanting in the light of current knowledge by a researchers including Horney, (1967); Shafer, (1974) and Chodorow, (1978). Chodorow for example took Freud's theory of the Oedipal explanation of gender differences and reframed it by suggesting that perhaps girls did experience penis envy, but that this envy had more to do with their growing understanding about the disadvantages of being a female in a male-normed society than with wanting to be male. For Chodorow (1978) therefore the penis became a symbol of the advantage of being male and disadvantage of being a female. Current ideas about biology as the foundation of gender differences in behaviour continue to broaden but not definitively. Gorman (1992) summed this up when she stated "So far, none of the gender scientists have figured out whether nature or nurture is more important" (p. 40). Ehrenreich (1992) pointed out that the very debate about innate sexual difference is in itself shaped by cultural factors such as politics and economics but these factors are not often made explicit or even recognised by theorists and researchers.

In the context of this thesis the biological approach, while not totally dismissed, is not considered to be useful to this discussion. Over the years biology has been used to debase women, people of color and people with disabilities, (Katz, Boggiano & Silvern, 1993). It has been used to justify witch-hunts, wars, persecution and discrimination. A biological approach to understanding gender

role development is therefore unsuitable because it locks people in to the sum total of their genetic make-up.

3.2 Social Theories

Social theories of gender role development acknowledge that yes, there are obviously differences in the anatomical composition of males and females but they argue that anatomy alone does not proscribe behavior. The social environment from birth through to adulthood socializes a person into what is expected from his or her kind. The institutions of socialization are numerous but the most commonly accepted ones are family, media, religion, formal education and law, (Katz, Boggiano & Silvern, 1993). The result of the socialization process is that a child and adult are culturally shaped so that they display the attributes and behaviours expected of their own gender. These attributes and behaviours have been imbibed through ongoing interaction within the social environment.

In recent years it has become increasingly recognised that social models have also been written from a male perspective and have reflected gender biases. Gilligan (1982) for example noticed that much of the work on identity development whether it be intellectual or moral was actually based on the study of males only. Erik Erickson's (1963) work on identity was based on an all male sample; Jean Piaget (1928) used boys only in his research and Lawrence Kohlberg (1981) also based his theory of moral development on an all-male group (Kitzinger, 1994).

Kitzinger (1994) purported that Kohlberg's theory on moral development was biased against women not only because of his male sampling but also because (as will be shown) he devalued the female level of moral development. She draws her evidence from Gilligan (1982). Gilligan (1982) maintains that in human experience and judgement two distinctive 'voices' are utilized. One of these voices is concerned with such issues as rights, justice, rules, principles, reciprocity, and autonomy. This voice is commonly identified with the male world. The second of the two voices is concerned with issues such as caring and concern for others, sensitivity and relationship. This second voice is found to be more dominant in women than men. The overriding theme of this voice is that relationship is more important than rules and principles. While Kohlberg recognised these two voices he believed that the 'male' voice of 'justice' was in fact a higher stage of moral reasoning than was the 'female' voice of relationship (Kohlberg, 1981). Gilligan's stance was that relationship or relatedness was not a less developed stage it was in fact just different and required a different theoretical explanation. She believed that Kohlberg's analysis was yet another reflection of the devaluing of female personality by developmental theorists (Gilligan, 1982; Kitzinger, 1994). While Gilligan's work has been criticized (for example, Faludi, 1992; Tavris, 1994; Contratto, 1994) it has also rattled the cage of developmental theorists in that she showed that there was more than one way to interpret data particularly as it related to women. In fact Katz, Boggiano & Silvern (1993) noted there has been an increasing emphasis on research which

looks at the whole notion of 'relatedness' in a manner that does not devalue women.

Eagly (1987), another developmental theorist, focused more on adult behaviour than on child/youth socialization. She developed a theory called 'social-role' theory, which stated that the difference in males' and females' social behaviour is largely determined by compliance to gender-role expectations within family life and occupational settings. This would seem to be a 'chicken or egg' argument but again the determinism's of social life rather than individual choice are the key factor in Eagly's theory. Family, especially, was a primary centre of gender role socialisation.

Other developmental theorists place a huge emphasis on early childhood socialization practices and experiences (for example Katz, 1979; Fagot, 1984; Ruble, 1988). From this perspective the primary 'socializers' are parents/caregivers, teachers and peers. Ruble (1988) has concluded that these interactions place pressure on children to behave in sex-appropriate ways from a very early age.

The socialization theories that have been outlined in this section all have a common denominator; that over the life-span pressure is felt by both males and females to behave in ways which are considered congruent with their sex.

Furthermore, there is reason to believe that the learning of gendered roles may take place within the family and from the child's earliest years. Thus the study of gender role development within the family is feasible within this thesis. However these theories, while useful to the study of the Imposter Phenomenon because they begin to look at the impact of society on gender role development, are considered to fall short because they generally take society as 'given' but do not really consider why society is the way it is. The third focus, structural theories, does however do this.

3.3 Structural Theories

Increasingly feminist researchers are bringing a different perspective to the arena of female social development. They are both dismantling and reconstructing previous theories and by so doing revealing the sexism which has formed the basis of much of the analysis that has gone before, (Fine, 1985). As well as considering biology and the 'static' society, as previously discussed, they are also focusing on the structures of society such as economics, politics and institutional systems, with a view to understanding why society is the way it is. In other words those who come from a structural approach study the positions held in society by different groups, for example women, people of colour and the aged, and examine how these positions are maintained by the institutions of society at large, (Deaux & Kite, 1993).

Women, Schaeff (1981) has argued, share many of the characteristics of marginalised groups. These characteristics include greater sensitivity to social cues, higher degrees of deference, less expressed aggression and a greater knowledge of the group in power, than the dominant group has of itself. If this latter point is true then the study of the meanings of the Imposter Phenomenon would be most meaningful if the women themselves discussed their own socialisation within societal structures. After all some feminist theorists believe that gender role development is “most explainable in terms of deep structural organizations of a society that has systematically condoned and practiced sexism” (Katz, Boggiano & Silvern, 1993, p. 269).

Structural explanations of gender role development are important for studying the Imposter Phenomenon because they, unlike biological or social theories, actually attempt to provide an explanation of how people are ‘institutionalised’ at a structural or social level. In other words, this thesis takes as a premise for investigation, that people are in a sense ‘institutionalised’ rather than ‘socialised’ into their roles in life, including the role of Imposter.

To summarize then, the biological approach was too narrow and deterministic and the social theories left ‘society’ as an unexamined concept. The structural theories however, centre the understanding of social phenomena (like Imposter Phenomenon) upon the relations between the personal and the public and in this

case, between the Imposter and the family. Furthermore, the structural explanations may be said to incorporate the other two positions.

These three approaches to the understanding of gender role socialisation are summarized in the following diagram (Figure3

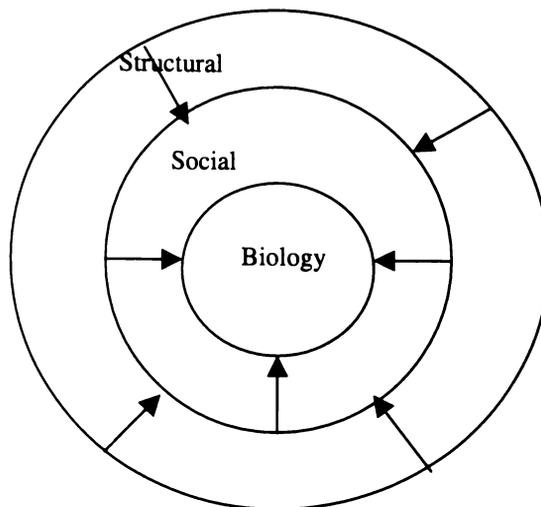


Figure 3: Ways of Understanding Gender Role Socialisation

3.4 Relating gender-socialisation theories to the Imposter Phenomenon

How then do these three theories contribute to an understanding of Imposter dynamics? In Chapter One it was found that the Imposter Phenomenon was rooted in both interpersonal and social contexts. In particular the site of the family had a direct influence on the development of the “Imposter’ This chapter has discussed the broader theme of gender role socialization and shown a preference for

structural explanations because of the relational quality, that is the effects people have on one another. The imposter literature, in the main, utilises the societal explanation of gender-role development. This thesis will adopt the structural or institutional explanation by siting the family in the broader context of society at large.

Such a thesis could be said to directly arise from previous Imposter Phenomenon work. In one of Clance and Imes' (1978) early articles they stated "it has been suggested to us that the real root of the problem [i.e. the Imposter Phenomenon] lies in social expectation" (p. 243). They also suggested that the societal stereotype of women as being the nurturer and less intellectually able than men was developed from a very early age within the family context. Their conclusion however was that this was not well understood and there needed to be further investigation to ascertain exactly what impact social expectation had on the development of the Imposter Phenomenon.

Details on the gender role socialisation of Imposters is more recently evident. By 1995 a much stronger stance on the impact of gender socialization is visible in Imposter literature. Clance, Dingman, Reviere & Stober (1995) suggested that a feminist framework was possibly the most effective and appropriate stance from which to address Imposter dynamics. The Imposter Phenomenon was thought to actually be a reflection of a "learned social role" (p.92), which women had

assimilated throughout their lives. Characteristics of this role include women as less intellectually able than men, (Clance & Imes, 1978), feelings of passivity and inferiority (Sturdivant, 1980), perceived lack of ability to control their own lives, (Smith & Siegal, 1985). They also include training to nurture others, (Clance & O'Toole, 1988), a lack of support and encouragement for women to succeed, (Clance, Dingman, Reviere & Stober, 1995), and warmth and expressiveness (Clance et al 1995). The difficulties for women who have learnt their role 'well' is that there is little place for the so-called masculine traits of achievement, assertiveness, self confidence and autonomy within the societal definition of who she is and what she should be. For women who are successful, Clance et al (1995) suggest there arises an incongruity. On the one hand, the woman has internalized how she should 'be', but on the other she has employed 'masculine' traits to succeed. Jean Miller (1991) suggested that in fact when women claim power they experience "fears of selfishness, destructiveness and abandonment of others" (p. 202). When these traits are held beside Gilligan's (1982) theory of relatedness, an integral component of how women function, the fears outlined by Miller (1991) are understandable. In this light, the experience of being an Imposter is in fact a reality. A successful woman is by societal definition an imposter in the male-referenced world. The feeling of being an Imposter may actually personally serve women to assuage their guilt for being this way, in that it allows them to attribute success to more feminine qualities such as awareness of others feelings, helpfulness, sociability and the ability to communicate easily, (Ayers-Nachamkin,

1992; Clance, Dingman, Reveire & Stober, 1995). This is not to say that this view is a positive stance, but rather it is understandable when being both a woman and successful are inconsistent in the present societal structures.

A concern that was voiced in Chapter One was that there was a strong emphasis in the Imposter literature on the need for treatment vis-à-vis therapy for ‘Imposters’. A question that this chapter raises is, will therapy alone contribute to a dismantling of the influence of patriarchy within our society? The answer to this question must surely be no. The primary rationale for this stance is that the emphasis on therapy, while not totally dismissed, exacerbates the marginalization of women when it is not held in concert with a broader thrust to dismantle structures and systems which “keep women in their place”. An integral component of the destabilization of these structures is, I would suggest, an analysis of women as distinct but not inferior to men. Included within this analysis there needs to be an increased understanding that a lot of what is pathologised in women’s behaviour is in fact a normal response to living in a male-normed society.

Until this happens the ideas of the Aristotle, Nietzsche and Freud quoted at the beginning of this chapter will still impact on what a woman is and is not, in today’s society. She will continue to be seen as “afflicted with a natural defectiveness”

3.5 Conclusion

In conclusion then, there are three major theories that address gender role development. The first of these, the biological view, is considered as deterministic, the second, social theories are not problemised, so the third, structural theories, the focus of which is on social relatedness, is used in this investigation. Gilligan (1982) for example showed that women's meanings might be significantly different to that of men. Eagly (1987) draws attention to gender role expectations in the family and Katz (1979), Fagot (1984) and Ruble (1988) draw attention to early childhood socialisation in the family. All of these different views lend credence to the study of a single gender, in this case woman, because gendered roles are expected to be found.

By investigating the Imposter Phenomenon through the third lens (structural theories) it becomes apparent that Imposter dynamics have more to do with the gender role socialisation within the family and the institutions of the wider society than they do with the individual.

3.6 Summary

For the purposes of this study, the points that this chapter raised that are important to this thesis are:

- 1) The structural theories about gender role socialization are the most helpful when examining the Imposter Phenomenon.
- 2) Women can be said to be ‘institutionalized’ into their life roles rather than socialised.
- 3) The ‘institutionalization’ of women’s roles results in her being seen as “afflicted with a natural defectiveness”
- 4) Being successful and a woman can be viewed as a contradiction in terms in a society where success and its corollary attributes are defined as ‘male’

4 METHODOLOGY

This thesis presents an exploration of the need to please as evidenced in women who are identified as experiencing the Imposter Phenomenon. In particular the relationship of the need to please and gender role socialisation is examined.

In order to examine this relationship the overarching paradigm of this thesis is Interpretivism. This paradigm recognises that knowledge is a construction of subjects and the societies in which they live. This is a premise this thesis takes when focusing on the relational aspects of the social development of Imposters. Knowledge can only ever be subjectively conveyed, as it is contextual, relative and often quite personal. In other words knowledge is constructed in a social milieu where people intersubjectively come to create and share meanings. In short, interpretivism is a paradigm that says that it is important to understand people's common sense beliefs and actions the way that they do (Berger & Luckmann, 1973). Most of the research in the area of the Imposter Phenomenon was based in the paradigm of a positivistic stance and largely utilised quantitative measures. In order to try and see past or get beyond the difficulties made evident in Clance and colleagues psychology- based work this research is based in the qualitative methods of Interpretivism.

Within this paradigm Polkinghorne (1995) outlines two types of investigation. These are firstly, there is research that seeks to parallel the gathered data with previous literature on the subject in an attempt to discover if they align. This is deductive research. The second type of investigation involves coming to the data with an open mind in order to discover consistent themes and concepts in the data that has been collected. That is to say the data is approached from an inductive stance. This thesis will lean more heavily towards the deductive kind of study. However I also look for consistency in the concepts or themes that did not align with the literature reviews undertaken. In this regard, some aspects of this Interpretive study will be inductive.

4.1 Purpose of the Investigation

The purpose of this thesis therefore is to consider to what extent and how is gender role development and family socialisation responsible for, or evidence of, a growing need to please amongst University students who identify as Imposters (itself a phenomena identified by Clance (1985)).

4.2 Sample Selection

The participants initially volunteered themselves after hearing a 5-minute presentation of the thesis topic during two lectures, a 300 level philosophy course and a similar level course in counselling. Both courses are run out of the same department of the School of Education. A pamphlet (Appendix A) was made

available to anyone one who wanted to contact me further. These were left at the classroom entrance. When people contact me by telephone a meeting will be arranged with the objectives of giving each volunteer a fuller description of the topic, covering ethical considerations and finally, if the volunteers are still interested, they will be asked to complete Clance's Imposter Phenomenon Scale (I.P Scale) (Appendix B). If they gained a score of 62 or higher they will be invited to participate further. It should be noted that, in fact, everyone who came forward to volunteer themselves, scored above the IP Scale threshold required. In other words, no volunteers were turned away.

4.3 Participants

The participants chosen consisted of seven students from the University of Waikato. All are female. Five of the women are undergraduates in their 2nd to 5th year of study. One woman is engaged in both undergraduate and graduate study, another is doing her Masterate and one is doing her Doctorate.

They range in age from 20 to 49 years, with a mean of 34 years of age. All of the participants identify themselves as either European or New Zealander and this is one limitation to the generalization of the findings. Their pseudonyms, IP Scores and level of study are summarised in Figure 4.

Pseudonym	I.P. Scale Score	Level of Study
Abby	81	Graduate
Robyn	65	Under-graduate
Jelly	93	Post-graduate
Charlotte	84	Under-graduate
Mabel	83	Under-graduate
Lyn	93	Under-graduate & Graduate
Mary-Anne	78	Under-graduate

Figure 4: The Participants

4.4 Procedure

Participants were recruited through briefly introducing the topic ‘Imposter Phenomenon’ during two different 300 level lectures. Interested persons then rang me up, and an initial appointment was made to meet in an office within the School of Education. This venue was chosen for the convenience of the students. During the initial discussion with each person an outline of the project was given and any questions were answered. During this interview they were also asked to fill in the personal data questionnaire (Appendix C), as described under Instruments, and to complete the Clance IP Scale. While they were still present I tallied their score on the scale and if it exceeded 62 they were informed that I would be interested in working further with them because they were according to Clance’s (1985)

criteria, now confirmed as 'Imposters' This interview took around 45 minutes. The participants were then asked to read and sign a consent form (Appendix D) which stated that they could withdraw from the project at any time before all data had been collected. [N.B. I did not initially intend to audiotape these interviews but by the time of the third discussion it became obvious that by not doing so I was missing out on some valuable information. This meant that five of the seven initial interviews were taped and transcribed.

Each participant was then contacted a month later and a further personal interview was scheduled. This meeting was a semi-structured interview that was guided by the Interview Schedule (Appendix E) as described under 'Instruments' These sessions lasted 90 minutes. All second interviews were audiotaped and transcribed.

Letters of appreciation for participation were sent to all participants immediately following the second interview.

The rationale for using in-depth semi-structured interviews was based in two things. The first of these is that Bussotti (1990), who undertook a similar investigation, based her method on the use of quantitative measures. However in her 'Directions for Future Study' she suggested that a more appropriate method of investigating 'the need to please' might be to use interviews because surveys did

not allow the participants unedited voice to be heard. The second justification is that the give and take of talk during interviews permits a greater depth of investigation and opportunity for clarification than do structured surveys.

4.5 A Methodological Diversion

Before starting this project I intended to do both individual interviews and then follow these up with focus group work to provide a space for discussion in a context where all eight participants could share their experiences. The focus group was also going to be used as a place of joint exploration of why we all had experienced imposter dynamics and what we could do about these experiences. After the second interviews however I felt that the group work was going to take me in a different epistemological direction because the personal interviews became not only information gathering but also a point of catharsis. Many tears were shed. It was the first time for most of the participants that someone listened to their fears and understood them. As a result the thesis topic was in danger of becoming too broad and unfocussed and as a consequence it was decided to not do the group work. However a compromise was suggested; that I still hold a group meeting nearer the end of my study. The purpose of this was to allow the participants to meet each other and to ask any questions that they may still have. I was also to present my findings to them and ask for feedback about their experience as a part of the project. Each participant was rung in this regard and all agreed that this altered format would be very valuable to them. None of them

expressed regret about the canceling of the group work as had been initially proposed.

4.6 Instruments

A total of four instruments were used in the gathering of data. The Personal Data Questionnaire and the Clance IP Scale were used during the first interview and the Interview Two Schedule and the Scenario Narratives were utilised during the second.

4.6.1 *Personal Data Questionnaire*

The Personal Data Questionnaire is a single page containing questions which the volunteer filled out. It was designed to obtain demographic information, including name, pseudonym, address, age, ethnicity and present course of university study. It also asked for information regarding final year results at secondary school, awards received and results of University papers to date. Information about family history was also solicited. In particular the aspects of family history included parents/caregivers occupations, birth order, age and occupation of all siblings. The scholastic information requested was chosen to provide a picture of academic achievements. This was required in order to ascertain the degree of academic success experienced as the Imposter literature indicated that this would be above average. The family history data was used as a platform for the second interview, which focused on family dynamics. While other information such as interpersonal

relationships and personal philosophies may have proved to be interesting, I did not think that it would add to the particular focus being explored. It took participants about five minutes to complete the personal data questionnaire.

If I were to repeat the study I would add a question that asked participants what they knew about the Imposter Phenomenon. The reason for this would be to ascertain any potential bias that the participants may have had. I would also delete the question about final secondary school examination results for two reasons. Firstly, most participants found this very difficult to recall and secondly I did not feel that it provided any information that their University results didn't already show. The question about birth order could also be deleted. While the information it provided was very interesting (four of the seven women were the eldest child) I did not use this information in any way in this thesis.

4.6.2 *Clance Imposter IP Scale*

This instrument (Clance, 1985) was used as a screening device to ascertain the level of imposter feelings experienced by the volunteers.

The Clance IP Scale was developed in 1985 as a means to identifying Imposters. It is a 20 item, Likert scale to which participants respond by indicating how true each statement is for them. Possible responses range from 1 (not true at all) to 5 (very true). The items cover various aspects of the Imposter Phenomenon that

were observed by Clance and Imes (1978) and Clance (1985). These include fear of failure, attribution of success to luck, error or charm and dread of evaluation. Holmes' 1986 study of the instrument provided support for its reliability and convergent validity. Her study found a measure of internal consistency of .96. In addition Clance's I.P Scale was found to successfully differentiate imposters from non-imposters in both clinical and non-clinical populations. Holmes recommended a cutoff score of 62 on Clance's Scale as this provided the clearest division between imposters and non-imposters. In this study I adopted the same cutoff point as this provided the surest measure of the Imposter Phenomenon available.

Now that this study is over I think that the use of the IP Scale was the most effective and quickest method of selecting participants I could have used.

4.6.3 *Interview Two Schedule*

The Interview Two Schedule was designed to guide the second interview. The participants did not actually see this schedule. It consisted of a list of focus questions that I used to keep the interview on track. It focused on the arenas of family dynamics, schooling and success. The questions themselves were generated from both the literature review and the focus of this study. Thus this schedule included both deductive and inductive items of my own. Some of the questions were modified versions of ones used by Bussotti (1990) in her Family

Role Questionnaire. I pre-tested the questionnaire on some New Zealand friends, to ensure that the questions were worded in an informal, and focused way that encouraged the participant to share their experiences at length. The purpose of the questions was to elicit information about self-perceptions of roles within the family, self-perceptions about the interface between home and school and to clarify how the participants measured success in their own lives. What I was trying to discover was whether the participants fitted the typical family dynamic characteristics outlined in the Imposter literature and what their understandings of and explanations for the roles they had experienced within their family were. I also wished to know if and/or when success had become problematic for them and how they explained this to themselves. The purposes of these foci were to discover how much the 'need to please' was actually a factor in their explanations for their experience. In other words, was the need to please something they recognised or was it subconscious, if applicable at all.

If I were to do this study again I would not delete any of the questions because the questionnaire worked well. I would however add the questions "How do you think the Imposter Phenomenon affects you?", and "How do you deal with these effects?"

4.6.4 Scenario Narratives

A scenario narrative is a short descriptive piece that highlights a particular way of understanding a scenario. The scenarios had been modified from three case studies that Bussotti (1990) had used in her thesis. The purpose of presenting these scenario narratives was to illicit further information about the role that the participant felt that was ascribed to her within her family. If any information was highlighted that had not already been discussed in the interview, the participant was questioned further in an attempt to provide a more comprehensive picture of the participant's experiences as an 'Imposter'

The scenario narratives (Appendix F) were given to the participants towards the end of the second interview. These were presented on a sheet of paper. The four scenarios presented each described different family patterns and messages that participants may have experienced when they were growing up. The participants were asked to read each of the scenarios and then mark with a highlighter, the messages that they perceived as being true of their experience. They could highlight any parts of the each narratives that they felt was relevant, the whole narrative did not have to be chosen.

The use of scenario narratives as a research instrument was, in retrospect, something I would use again because they elicited information that had not become apparent during the actual interview.

4.7 Data Analysis

The method of data analysis was congruent with an Interpretivistic approach. It consisted of three different 'readings' of the data. These readings were seeking deductive and inductive understandings of details and theorising beyond them. Firstly, all of the interviews were read and coded with coloured highlighters for the common themes that had been prescribed in the Imposter literature. These included 'the need to please', relationships with parents, family role assignments and success. These themes had been the central focus of the interviews. Second, during this analysis process it was evident that consistent but unexpected themes had also emerged from the data. For instance, I found a recurring theme of "craziness" The participants felt that their experiences and fears were indicative of them being in some way 'crazy' These were also colour coded and recorded. The third approach to the data was to conceptualize and theorize the findings. I was attempting to go beyond the obvious themes by reading between the lines and seeking out the relations that underpinned the first two groups of findings. Polkinghorne (1995) refers to this as second level analysis.

Using the interpretivist paradigm and searching inductively, I was particularly interested in locating implied evidence of gender socialisation as a context for understanding the development of the Imposter Phenomenon in these women's lives. I was searching between the lines of their experiences for common conceptual understandings that would embrace their different experiences. When

these conceptual understandings were found they were placed beneath the umbrella focus of 'the need to please' that arose out of their gender socialisation in order to provide a theorized backbone for this thesis.

4.8 Limitations

The limitations of this study can be grouped under three headings: participants; bias; and methodology.

4.8.1 *Participants*

Race: All of the women who volunteered to be a participant in this project identified as European or New Zealander. No women of colour came forward. This could be viewed as a limitation because the socialisation of non-European women would probably include dynamics that white women would not necessarily experience. However as this study is based in an interpretivist paradigm, and therefore not viewed as a definitive or final statement on the topic in question, this limitation is not considered to be a problem.

Gender A): Another limitation involving the participants is that they are all women despite the fact that the Imposter Phenomenon appears to be just as prevalent in men. This was a deliberate choice on my part. I believe that women are a marginalised sector in our society and thus by the very nature of their

biology are the 'other'. It was therefore important to me as a woman to work alongside those who were a part of this dynamic of 'other'

Gender B): Another factor in the selection of women only, is that I initially intended to follow the individual interviews with group work and felt that a single sex group may facilitate a greater level of ease amongst the participants. A similar study with men would be a possibility for future research.

4.8.2 Bias

The potential for bias in this study arises from two camps: myself and the participants themselves.

Personal Experience: This thesis arose out of my own experience of feeling like an imposter, a fraud. I wanted to understand this dynamic and come to some resolution about it and as a result set about doing this. My own personal experience of this has shaped the way in which I have approached this subject. I did not want to be labelled with yet another 'tag'. I wanted to find a way, a voice that allowed me to celebrate who I was, not be one that yet again pathologised what I experienced. This stance has probably biased both my approach to and analysis of the data in that I personally understood a lot of what the women said and at times found myself predicting the participants responses. The data analysis could also be biased by my own desire to understand my own personal

experiences through the participants. As I have become aware of this possibility of bias I have attempted to minimize it's effects by firstly acknowledging it and secondly by discussing any ideas or theories with my supervisor to test whether they stood up to her scrutiny. I have also provided a fairly extensive coverage of the participants' voices in the Findings chapter so as to enable the reader to confirm or contradict my resulting theory.

Consistency of Response: The second site of bias lies within the participants themselves. It arises on two different levels. The first of these is that the data was collected from the women and was not checked or confirmed against the meanings that their respective families held of the same events. The data therefore reflects the women's memories as they alone understood them to be and in this sense is unsubstantiated. The way in which I have attempted to address this is to compare each woman's answers across a variety of questions so as to check for constancy of response. While this obviously does not deal with the direct issue of confirming each woman's story it does quite clearly show that there were very strong common themes both within and across their stories. In this respect it could be argued that their general experiences were substantiated by the similarity of them with other respondents' stories.

Saying What I Want To Hear: I became aware during the course of the second interviews in particular, that some of the participants seemed to want to 'please

me' This was reflected in them bringing me little gifts such as some notes they had found on the Imposter Phenomenon and Crunchie bars. As the need to please was a focus point of this study, it proved interesting that I too became yet another person that some of the participants felt they needed to please. I chose not to reflect this thought back to the participants concerned, as I did not want to stem or censor their expression of this dynamic in their lives. In fact, I remain unsure about what I should or could have done about this.

4.8.3 Methodological Limitations

Focus Group: It was initially intended that the methodology would include an educational focus group so that as a group the women could explore some of the issues together and attempt to come to some level of shared understanding about why they were the way they were. This portion of the methodology was dropped from the research. I see that as is a limitation of this study because it does not address the wider issues of socialization and methods that might be used to overcome Imposter dynamics for the participants. In a sense I feel as if it has left them in a state of limbo. I have attempted to address this limitation by firstly, providing all of the women with the Clance, Dingman, Reviere & Stober (1995) article "Imposter Phenomenon in an Interpersonal/ Social Context: Origins and Treatment. I chose this article because it is one of the more recent published, it is not too academic in its formatting and it does, to a degree, consider socialization

issues. By reading this article I hope that the participants will come to recognise the generality of the experience and so be less afraid to discuss or address it.

The second way in which I have tried to address this issue was to have the women meet together near the completion of this thesis. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss my findings, answer any questions that they may have had and to brainstorm some ideas about how they as women, who experience this phenomena, may turn it into a plus in their lives.

From this point on, this thesis will directly consider the voices of the participants and what they reveal to us about how gender role development and family socialisation impact on a growing need to please in the participants' lives.

5 FINDINGS

This section of the thesis will look at some of the categories and themes that emerged about the details of the Imposter's experiences of gender socialisation and the subsequent need to please those around them. This chapter is divided into two sections, the first deductive and the second inductive. That is, the first section reflects the categories that were specifically focused on during the interviews. These categories, as gleaned from the Imposter Phenomenon literature, include the need to please, family dynamics, education and perceptions of intelligence. The second section outlines five themes that were unexpected or surprising to me. These categories include the respondents' reactions to the Imposter Phenomenon Scale, feelings of 'craziness', the impact of the Imposter Phenomenon on the participants lives, feeling different from other people and fear of failure. In this chapter the emphasis is upon releasing the details of each classification accompanied only by a minimum of description and interpretation. The theorising of these classifications (second level analysis) occurs in Chapter 6.

SECTION ONE

In exploring the role of gender socialization in the manifestation of the 'need to please' the early family life of the 'Imposter' was recognised as the first fertile soil in which the seeds of Imposter dynamics took root. This section reflects this

‘soil’ It is divided into four subsections, a Need to Please (5.1), Family Dynamics (5.2), Education (5.3) and Intelligence (5.4). Then within each subsection, the findings are classified according to a generic question or conceptualization of the commonly voiced experiences of the participants.

5.1 The Need to Please

The need to please was expressed in a number of different ways by the participants. Most of them identified themselves as ‘good girls’ (5.1.1), in fact it appeared important to them to be viewed as such. The need to please also manifested itself clearly in the notions of ‘keeping the peace’ (5.1.3) and ‘redemption’ (5.1.4) which some of the respondents identified.

5.1.1 *Were you a good girl?*

When each of the participants were asked if they considered themselves to be ‘good girls’ when they were growing up, all of them felt that they had been, especially as children. Even Lyn who said ‘no’ actually named mainly positive (pleasing) behaviours in her explanation of why she wasn’t. Her only negative was that she wasn’t a tidy person and this was the measure she identified as ‘being good’ in her home.

“as a child yes, I wanted to be good – it was easy to be good. I wanted to be good because I suppose I associated it with being loved. I think I thought you have to be good or you won’t be loved –I felt loved but feared losing it I think” – Jelly.

“yes, for me being academic was everything. That’s weird because what else could have made me good?” – Mabel.

“no, but I actually think it mattered a lot more underneath than people knew. People saw me as the one who was sociable and helped shy [sister]. [My sister] was seen as the more popular one...I was always more myself in some ways. If I thought something I’d say it, I wouldn’t try to hurt peoples feelings though...I was someone who wasn’t very tidy at home” – Lyn.

“yeah, I was. I just wanted to – I must of enjoyed it I think. I never really wanted to do naughty things” – Robyn.

“yeah- pretty much, which is why when I got pregnant at 16 it was a hell of a shock to everybody” – Abby.

“I’ve always been a good girl, never been rebellious” – Charlotte.

“I just quietly got on with things...I was quite compliant really” – Mary-Anne.

As earlier discussed, Bussotti (1990) felt that the need to please was perhaps related to the roles Imposters had received in their families as children. It is clear from the women’s perceptions of themselves as children that a very early role to develop for each of them was being a ‘good girl’

5.1.2 What did it mean to be a good girl in your family?

Most of the respondents illustrate that being good meant abiding by the rules, or in other words doing the ‘right thing’ The rules were made by their parents rather than themselves and were negatively framed as in ‘don’t this and don’t that’

Being good was dictated by 'doing' There was almost no emphasis reflected that related to 'being', that is, the recognition of innate goodness.

"abiding by the rules – there wasn't a stated set of rules but you knew how you were expected to behave – so helping mum [were the rules] for me" – Jelly.

"as a child doing what you're told and not doing anything bad like stealing chocolate out of the fridge, that was considered bad. Doing well at school. As a teenager, doing well at school, that always came all the way through" – Mabel.

"to always have your room tidy, being tidy yourself, very organised in every way" –Lyn.

"stay out of trouble, don't get dirty, play nicely and quietly, don't hassle anybody. Trouble meant don't go down town shop lifting and chasing cats down the street and harassing little kids or anything. Just be good, don't misbehave, don't write on the walls, don't make a mess" – Robyn.

"to do everything you were told as soon as you were told, so as to stay out of trouble" – Abby.

"it was never their priority for me to do well at school, not smoke, not drink. I sort of chose them and happily, and that's what good girls do" – Charlotte.

"it meant that I didn't make mum angry...and it meant you got on with whoever you were dealing with" – Mary-Anne

Being a good girl meant abiding by the rules, rules that were in the main, externally imposed. The picture that this is beginning to paint is of children learning what is expected of them in terms of behaviour through socialization within the family unit.

5.1.3 *Keeping the Peace*

An important component of being a ‘good girl’ appeared to be ‘keeping the peace’ within the family unit. This appeared to become more prevalent as the respondents got older, that is from their mid to late teenage years onwards.

“I actually wanted to change schools in my 7th Form year – my parents said ‘you know its just a whole lot of hassle, a new uniform, what’s wrong with the last four years, stay for an extra year – so I just left school even though I would have liked to have gone on – to keep the peace really- but it wasn’t peaceful for me” – Robyn.

‘Jelly’ married a man that her parents did not approve of. They did not attend her wedding because they felt so strongly against it. After a few years her parents decided to move to the other side of the world so they...

“invited us up to dinner and behaved as if nothing had ever happened. There was no mentioning it – so we all went along with that because it was the easiest thing to do” - Jelly.

“I think I’m not like my sister, I just quietly get on with things and didn’t cause any ripples...I really felt like I have had to please mum...I mean it’s more since my father died I suppose...I got into this habit so almost always I’ll go and visit mum on a Sunday, but it’s become that she expects it and sometimes it drives me nuts...its very powerful...I feel like I spend a lot of my time keeping my mum happy...I don’t like it, I resent it...I still do things to keep things running smoothly” – Mary – Anne.

“I don’t make waves, never have, because I’m so eager to please” – Charlotte.

Keeping the peace then can be viewed as a way of navigating in family relationships so that waves were not created, but the solution they chose was perhaps at the price of the respondents’ own sense of peace. It appears that they had learnt, through socialization I would suggest, that relatedness (Gilligan, 1982)

or in other words sensitivity to the needs of others, was more important than issues such as personal rights and autonomy.

5.1.4 Redemption

The term 'redemption' has been used to describe the ongoing need to appease for 'wrongdoings' This, like the previous sub-section, that showed a need to maintain peace, shows respondent's endeavouring to re-create the 'good girl' image. Several of the participants discussed their redemption through their achievement. Two examples of this are as follows:

"I always wanted to please my parents especially Dad and make him really proud of me because I went through a really rough patch in the 4th Form being rebellious and getting into trouble. The only thing that was redeeming me was my grades so that's what kept me in good faith with Mum and Dad" – Mabel.

"It is still important for me to please my parents because I went through my teens and disappointed them time after time and then I got married and that disappointed them and I didn't go to University and that disappointed them and I became a nurse and that disappointed them, one thing after another – everything I did was wrong – what I'm doing now, they take pride in – so given that huge history of disappointing them, I'm really pleased that they're proud of me now" – Jelly.

What this subsection (5.1) 'The Need to Please' illustrates, is that all but one of the respondents identified themselves as good girls. Being good meant obeying the rules. This ensured that as little conflict as possible was created between themselves and their parents when they were children, and resulted in them feeling accepted or loved. This dynamic is expressed in the Imposter literature when Langford & Clance (1993) suggest that children will seek the approval and support of their parents by working extremely hard at trying to please them. Even

as adults, the need to keep things running smoothly was apparent and some used academic success to redeem themselves from earlier episodes where they felt that they had disappointed their parents.

5.2 Family Dynamics

This section on Family Dynamics considers some of the actual day to day realities of the respondents' lives as they were growing up. These realities are reflected in the following sections: parental roles (5.2.1), parental expectations (5.2.2), parentification (5.2.3), sibling roles (5.2.4), praise (5.2.5), and conflict in the home (5.2.6).

5.2.1 Parental Roles

The roles taken by the parents of the respondents tended towards the traditional end of the spectrum.

“Mum was pretty conservative, dad was the boss...mum said the house was my job and going out earning the money was your fathers” – Abby.

“Our family was very traditional. Mum didn't go to work until I was 10 or 11 so she'd had a long time out of the paid workforce. Dad was the primary earner and mum looked after the home. For years she didn't know what he earned – he'd give her housekeeping money each week and she paid the bills and bought the food out of that and anything that was left over was his and not for her to know about” – Jelly.

“Mum did everything as well as working on the farm. Usually after milking she would come in first, she never stopped, she always used to do everything, the housework, cook the tea” – Mabel.

“Mum is very traditional...very passive, you can walk all over her, she was just a housewife, I don’t think I ever saw her as anything other than that...she didn’t seem that important...Dad wouldn’t divorce mum even though they aren’t happy...he said ‘I’ve got responsibilities, I’ve got to think of you kids’” – Robyn.

In the light of the previous section (The Need To Please 5.1) it would seem that these four quotes illustrate that the parental roles modeled to the respondents provided a perfect ‘soil’ for the initial development of a gendered understanding of what it means to be ‘female’

5.2.2 Parental expectation

The following quotes from Robyn, Abby and Mabel illustrate that the plans that their parents had for them all reflected a very traditional view of the role of women in society. In a nutshell they were expected to grow up, get married and make a home for their husbands and children. This is not surprising in the light of the previous section. If they must work then it was to be in a ‘traditional’ employment role for women.

“My mother lives in the dark ages and she’s amazed that I’m at University because she thinks I should be married and have a couple of kids and be a housewife...mum’s ambition in life was to be a nice man’s wife – and that’s what she expects of me as well – when I was 18 she said – “when I was your age I was married.” “Come on” – Robyn.

“I think they’d [parents] like to see me married and settled down and to have someone...I think that my parents hold up [sister] as being successful. She’s married, she has two children, they have six acres and good jobs” – Abby.

“When I was about 4 years old and I said I wanted to be a dentist when I grow up and [mum] said no – you’ll be a dental assistant – and I didn’t know what the difference was then but it came up years later – you’ll be a dental assistant or a dental nurse – only boys are dentists” – Mabel.

What this illustrates is that the respondent's parents, particularly their mothers, wanted them to grow up and be like them; women who understood their role in society as wives and homemakers.

5.2.3 Parentification

Parentification refers to the experience of having the responsibilities of adulthood foisted on to a child. For both Abby and Mabel, the eldest child in their respective families, they found themselves assuming parental roles as children.

"I was 11 when my mother started work for the first time so when I came home from school, I was the parent until my parents came home and I could get back to being a kid...I felt put upon, woken up at 6.30 by mum and told the first load of washing was in the basket ready to be hung out...I would come home from school, get the kids organised, make sure they did their jobs cos mum and dad would be home soon. If the jobs weren't done I got flack from them...instead of being a kid I fluctuated between having to be a kid when they were home and having to be an adult when they weren't" – Abby.

"I had quite a responsible role from an early age, when [my sister] was born I would have been 8, I did a lot of baby sitting especially when [my brother] came along... mum and dad both milked cows twice a day so I baby sat every afternoon. I was like the mother in some ways cos I did the housework as well" – Mabel.

Parentification not only placed demands on Abby and Mabel that were 'grown-up', they were also taught at a young age, the home-making roles of traditional females. They were expected to fill the role of parent and as is illustrated in "Praise" (5.2.5) they did not receive any recognition for doing this work. I wonder

if the eldest in the family had been a boy, whether he would have been expected to do the same thing?

5.2.4 Sibling Roles

All of the quotes in this sub-section show the disparity in the treatment of the female and male children in the family. As with the other areas considered under the heading 'Family Dynamics' these also illustrate the socialization of the respondents as 'traditional' females.

*"I've always felt like the baby of the family particularly because I was a girl and I wasn't the big male all important son...I think he was like a status symbol to them [parents] because he was very intelligent and they could say – look we have this wonderful son who produces good grades"
– Robyn.*

"With my brother, I can remember the first time I got drunk and mum came and picked me up and I had the bucket in the car. I was in so much trouble...but when it happened to [my brother] it was all so funny and just a joke and I thought maybe it was a girl- guy thing...I remember thinking where's the fairness in that, he gets it laughed off and I get into so much trouble"- Mabel.

"I had to help around the house – as far as I can remember my brother didn't have to do anything- I'm not sure what he had to do to be good – he couldn't cry- my dad used to smack him when he was a kid then if he cried he'd get shouted at for doing that" – Jelly.

"My brother was maybe more favoured – I don't have a hang up about that, but I think having a boy was very important to my parents...he has managed to not be pulled into the visiting thing, he just lives down the road from mum but if he says he hasn't got time... she doesn't expect him to visit but if he goes and visits her its halleluia" – Mary-Anne.

“My brother was a real mummies boy...Mum has protected [my brother] because she has always seen me as bossy...so she’s always been very protective and giving towards him” – Charlotte.

Altogether, these women were socialised in such a way that differences of gender were exemplified. Boys did not do ‘girl’ things, and girls did not do ‘boy’ things.

5.2.5 Praise

Acknowledgement for being good was a rare commodity in the respondents’ early lives. Perhaps their parents felt that it was unwarranted because they were in the main ‘good girls’

“Never. The only time I heard mum say she was proud of me was when I got my diploma in management studies and it just cracked me up – I had no idea...I thought here I am 40 something and how come I’ve never heard you say this before” – Lyn.

“I don’t actually remember a lot of praise – I don’t remember heaps of encouragement either. We were both pretty good kids so it wasn’t necessary I suppose” – Robyn.

“Praise!! You’re joking, I don’t remember a lot of praise in the house – I remember being growled at...I remember a focus on the negative” – Abby.

“...with Dad, I would always get the feeling that with him it was always token...his praise was a put down as well” – Mabel.

“No, not really. I have a couple of memories in my head of smacks” – Mary-Anne.

It could be argued that the lack of praise resulted in the respondents growing up with a distorted image of themselves, in that nothing they did could earn them positive feedback. Did they grow up with an image of themselves that did not

accommodate externally recognised success and therefore when it occurred there was nothing in their personal schema that allowed them to accept it as true?

5.2.6 Conflict in the Home

It has just been shown that positive feedback was a rarity in the respondents' lives. For some of them the home environment itself was not always perceived as positive. The following words of Robyn, Mabel, Abby and Jelly all reflect home lives which were marked with underlying tensions.

"I felt let down by my family – I think of my family as some what dysfunctional as it wasn't what I always wanted...there was a family next door which were my role models – they were like a TV family – and that's what I always wanted, a mum and dad who got along and the kids were wonderful...my family was never like that" – Robyn.

"It wasn't good for years and years in my family. I only just found out though and it was kind of a shock because they always looks quite happy and I always felt quite special when I grew up because of a stable family...then suddenly when it all falls apart" – Mabel.

"The conflict was kept underground. I remember a couple of incidents where dad went to hit mum and she said – go on, you bloody do and I'll leave – but he didn't" - Abby.

"I said to [mother], "My brother and I have never been able to talk to either of you." She was really upset and started crying – it surprised me cos they'd always cut us off" – Jelly.

I would suggest that the tension created by a conflictual home would exacerbate the need that the participants felt to not create any ripples themselves; that is the need to please others by being 'good girls'

The second category, 'Family Dynamics', has shown us that these women grew up in homes where the parents took on the traditional roles of being male and female and further modeled them in their dealings with their children. Praise for being good was a rare commodity in the fabric of the respondent's family life, so the children apparently continued to seek it, perhaps by habituating the effort to be 'good girls'

5.3 Education

The third category, Education, shows how the respondents' academic life, from quite an early age created tensions for them. The tensions were either facilitated through comparison with others or an internal sense of striving. This section is divided into the following; comparisons within the family (5.3.1), comparisons at school (5.3.2), fulfilling other people's expectations (5.3.3), dumbing down (5.3.4), and the respondents' own reactions to university study (5.3.5) and finally other's reactions to university study (5.3.6).

5.3.1 *Comparisons within the Family*

Comparisons within the family could go one of two ways, the respondents were either compared with their siblings or their siblings were compared to them. Whichever way it went the respondents experienced a degree of discomfort.

“I think a part of the reason I was unhappy at school was because I felt the pressure of being known as [my brother’s] little sister, therefore I would get straight A’s no matter what” – Robyn.

[My brother] was telling mum and I a few years back that it was awful when he was growing up because he used to get stuff like “[Jelly] knew her 5 times table when she was whenever and you can’t do it yet” – Jelly.

“I think [my sister] definitely had a problem. She was in my shadow a bit, especially now she’s gone to training college...and I think if anyone said you are ‘Mabel’s’ sister it would drive a chord with her, but she’s alright now because I’m academic and she’s not” – Mabel.

My parents thought that [my sister] was more intelligent and I think they got a real surprise when I got through to Intermediate and in the PAT scores I came out the highest in the region...but my teachers used to say, “not all like [your sister], always not at all like [your sister], you aren’t like your sister, you don’t listen like your sister, the only good thing was you can play netball like your sister, you run well like your sister” – Lyn.

While these excerpts illustrate that these women obviously were doing well at school, it also shows that it was not necessarily a positive experience for them in that it contributed to tensions with their siblings. I would suggest that when one has taken the role of ‘good girl’ and then finds that doing well at school creates personal and/or sibling tension a dilemma is created; how does one reconcile these tensions with wanting to please others in your life?

5.3.2 Comparisons at school

The comparisons at school were a result of streaming or ranking and resulted in pressure to succeed or maintain one’s class position. For Robyn in particular, this resulted in her putting less and less effort into her work because she was

surrounded by others just as bright as her; she was not longer the best. Being the top student was all that mattered to her and if she couldn't maintain this position why bother working at all.

“All through Primary School that's when I was in my prime – that's when I was always brilliant and everything. But when I got to Intermediate it was a whole different school, different people, the teachers didn't know that I was [Robyn] and I was brilliant. I could get away with anything at Primary School just because of who I was...but I didn't have that at Intermediate. ...In Form Two I was in the top class and I think suddenly [at High School] I wasn't the elite anymore – I was surrounded by people who were just as good as me if not better – I stopped trying I think because I wasn't the best anymore” – Robyn.

“In that Form [Top stream at High School] we were expected to have an aptitude for everything so if you weren't getting good marks you weren't working” – Jelly.

“At school I'd get reports that said we wish the class was full of [Charlottes] and things like that and I wanted to please and I liked it...in the 5th form when the ranking was getting serious I hated it, hated it because I know that I'm not good at everything...like you get labeled those one's are clever, those one's aren't and if you get put in the clever bracket early on you've got to try and hold on to that...when I found some kids were cleverer than me I hated it because it's a reflection on my own inadequacies” – Charlotte.

At secondary school when I started to get compared with the other kids I remember realising that coming from a little Catholic School I was a big frog in a little pond and then a little frog in a big pond at high school, so it felt more like this must be more real...I was quite competitive” – Mary-Anne.

The interesting theme in each of these quotes is that academic success is very narrowly defined. If one wasn't the top or very near to it, then one wasn't working hard enough or wasn't intelligent enough. They all effectively have discounted

their abilities as inadequate. The question this raises is how if they do not acknowledge their own abilities, how then can they internalise recognition of their abilities from others?

5.3.3 Fulfilling other people's expectations

Performing well at school was important because it resulted in a feeling of being loved or accepted despite the fact, that as we saw earlier, in fact very little praise at home resulted from the success.

“I think my parents perceived me as being intelligent cos I liked learning stuff – I got rewards for it – I mean it made me feel good. I think that’s what I did to make myself be accepted – by doing well at school” – Robyn.

“I started reading at a very young age and went to kindy when I was quite young and I’ve always wanted to please other people, teachers, parents, friends...I’ve been praised from a very young age being told I was clever and good so I suppose I just wanted more of that...it’s a need to prove what all these people think about me...for attention – to be loved” – Charlotte.

“I always wanted to have my successes recognised. I came first in English and they forgot to call me up at prize giving and I had all these merits and firsts and I knew they were coming to me and I was sitting there waiting for my name to be called out and it wasn’t and I was really upset about it. There’s mum and everyone sitting there and my name wasn’t called out. I was so upset and crying” – Mabel.

It is clearly evident in these three excerpts that pleasing others through academic achievement was rated highly by these three women despite as we have

previously seen success was a mixed bag in that it contained both acceptance and conflict.

5.3.4 ‘Dumbing Down’

Dumbing down was a phrase used by one of the respondents to describe how she consciously manipulated her test scores at school so as not to cause her sister too much grief with her success. Neither Lyn or Jelly wanted to be seen as different and especially not better than others.

“I felt embarrassed because I was only one year behind my sister and my parents never said this but I felt a real threat to [my sister] – I always dumbered down- at Secondary School I was doing French and History – I loved them both – I dumbered down in Latin for the exams and tests but not so far as my reading for myself ...And Maths I dropped down in Maths too. I thought I could drop maths – it was the wrong one to do, so then I improved in Maths and dropped Science to go nursing because you could go nursing without any sciences” – Lyn.

At Secondary school you didn’t want to be a SWOT so you didn’t actually want to get 90% on a test – a SWOT was the thing not to be...there was girl in our class- top of everything – she was a SWOT – she never went anywhere – nobody wanted to be her friend” – Jelly.

Dumbing down enabled Lyn and Jelly to navigate in the world of relationships.

They did not want to be unpopular or to create discord, in other words their need to fit in was stronger than their need to do the best that they could.

5.3.5 *Own reaction to University*

While all of the respondents are doing very well at University they sometimes attributed this to ‘learning the game’ or ‘jumping through the right hoops’

“I think that I’m intelligent but I don’t really think I get a chance to express it – part of the reason I’m not entirely happy at University is I don’t seem to have enough time to put into it. You have those pathetic little 12 week course – what can you do in 12 weeks – to really learn about something...I just do what I have to do to pass...I think its going to be when I’m working that I’ll get a lot of real learning done” – Robyn.

“As I get more and more apt at using this academic goobildigook nobody understands what I’m talking about. I mean I did that deliberately with my D. Phil proposal, I just filled it with philosophical terms in the full knowledge that they probably wouldn’t understand what I was talking about...in a way I know how to play the game now so it just makes it more difficult for them to find me out” – Jelly.

“I always thought that I’d go to University, no one ever said that’s what you’ll do but I had the expectation that that’s what people who are somewhat bright do, they go to university...In the Varsity system you have to prove yourself in a certain way...I think you’re just judging me on one type of intelligence and I could do more – jumping through hoops really” – Charlotte.

Even though these women have a history of doing well in academic settings (school or university) they do not attribute their success to ability, they in effect discount this and explain their success in terms of ‘playing the system’

5.3.6 *Others reactions to University Study*

Other people’s reactions to the respondents being at University were a mixture of admiration and disapproval. The following three excerpts illustrate this.

“Other people said I shouldn’t be undertaking varsity because I’d be making myself better than I should be or could be and therefore I’d be also posing a challenge to my husband” – Lyn.

“To me leaving school and going to University was a big thing, but to my parents it wasn’t a big thing. Dad’s like – get out there and work” – Robyn.

“My parents are really proud. My dad was blown away at my graduation. I know mum was delighted too because she always wanted us, she always hoped that we would go onto higher education but I don’t think she knew how to go about it because it wasn’t in her history” – Abby.

Each of these three women expresses aspects of gender socialization. They express the notion that higher education for women is not ‘normal’. Even Abby’s comment reflects this in that her familial history provided her with no female academic role models.

5.4 Intelligence

If one were to measure the intelligence of the respondents by their grades at university they would all be thought of as well above average. All of the seven participants were A level students. This however is not necessarily how they viewed themselves (5.4.1). They attribute their successes at university to working hard (5.4.2), faking, being lucky or discounting the achievements altogether (5.4.3).

5.4.1 *Are you intelligent?*

These responses are a direct result of the respondents being asked the question,

“Are you intelligent?”

“Yeah, I do think I’m intelligent compared to the general population, I don’t know about in here [University]. Like a big fish in a smallish pond out there, but a much smaller fish in here” – Jelly.

“I suppose I must be... in academic terms I guess that I’m taking papers at varsity but I don’t feel intelligent –to me intelligence would mean being able to get the cryptic crossword out in the hour I give myself” – Lyn.

“I am intelligent because I wouldn’t be at varsity if I wasn’t, but I also think I’m not as intelligent as lots of people. I feel being at university you’re always given a label of being intelligent, but I don’t think I’m really that intelligent” – Mabel.

“I don’t think I’m stupid any more” – Robyn.

“I’d say no, but if someone questioned my intelligence I would probably back myself and say yeah... I could never say to myself, yes you’re clever...I’m not super bright and I’m not dah. I wouldn’t be here if I was real thick, I’d rather put myself down the dumb end of the scale” – Charlotte.

It is interesting to note that while each of these women are consistently A grade students they seem to have difficulty accepting that they must have a modicum of intelligent. I wonder if this is a reflection of socialization in that women are not supposed to ‘boast’ of their achievements. I would suggest further that the beliefs they portray could be ballast against the failure that each of them feels is inevitable.

5.4.2 “Working hard”

Some of the respondents attributed their excellent grades to working hard. There was no sense of acknowledging that if one doesn't have the intelligence, then no amount of hard work will give one excellent grades.

“I work hard – a lot of hard work . I just try really hard and I feel good when I see my grades ...but I've got these two past years of good grades staring at me, but then I think well what about this year, what if I muck it up” – Charlotte.

“I work long and hard, and have greater expectations. For instance I'm doing an assignment and I hear people saying they'll do it in five minutes...until I've read every book in the library on it just about – it would be a rarity for me to do an assignment without reading 20-30 books – to get a picture of what it's about... I often don't work hard enough, I know that if I applied myself I could do a great deal better” – Lyn.

The above comments highlight one way in which these women explain their successes. The following sub-section explores other such deflections that actually make intelligence a moot point.

5.4.3 *Fake, Luck and Discount*

These three terms relate to the discussion in Chapter One about the attribution of success to factors outside of the one's control. The following responses indicate that the respondents were well acquainted with these ideas, even though they did not always articulate them in these terms.

“They're going to find out that I'm thick one day” [Fake] – Charlotte.

“I think it is that – pushing myself harder to make sure nobody cottons on that I’m not all that smart” [Fake] – Lyn

“[A lecturer] has nurtured me through, but [the lecturer] might have actually made a mistake and I was just in the right place at the right time so when a job came up that’s how I’m in this position...I just keep going until they find me out and they just haven’t yet. But I’m beginning to suspect that they’re just not clever enough to work it out because they just don’t seem to be getting it” [Discount, Fake] – Jelly.

“I’m lucky I fell into these courses because they interested me and I wasn’t caught out as being a fake, whereas other course I may have taken I may not have been so lucky and I may have been found to be a fake...When I get my Masters I won’t be successful, I just won’t be found out. Found out that I’m a fraud” [Luck, Fake] – Abby.

The reaction of ‘Jelly’ to her getting First Class Honours was as follows:

“I got on really well with all the lecturers...and they were kindly disposed to me when it came to grading...It seemed to be marked on some personal perception of me, so I don’t go around telling people I have 1st Class Honours because there is a question in my mind about that. It’s only a piece of paper anyway” [Discount] – Jelly.

“I got A++ on Art and I thought it doesn’t really reflect what I thought I should get because the lecturer marked me easy because I’m good at it. I didn’t have to do much work and I thought I should have had to work a lot harder to get that” [Discount] – Mabel.

“If the assignment is just a piddly little thing and it doesn’t really matter, I discount the mark, but if it is something more substantial that’s worth more I feel like a fake” [Discount, Fake] – Robyn.

“I tend to discount my grades cos I know I could of done better if I had put in more work” [Discount] – Mary-Anne.

The women were unable to accept personal agency for their successes. This may mean that they are reliant solely on recognition from others and therefore the concept of an academic self is fleeting.

Section One, a deductive analysis of the participants' interviews, has exposed a unfolding picture of seven women who grew up in homes where traditional male, female roles were clearly modeled. They, as females, learnt what it meant to be a 'good girl' and that a part of this role was to please others in order to feel accepted and loved. Being good had far more to do with action (doing) than it did with an internalised understanding of their worth as people. They appear to have taken this notion with them into adulthood and still seek to please others by behaving in traditional 'female' ways. The down side of this is that they seem unable to acknowledge or embrace their more 'masculine' traits (for example; assertiveness and autonomy), which have to some extent enabled them to achieve in the academic arena.

Section Two will explore themes that were inductively located in the interview transcripts.

SECTION TWO

The themes outlined in this section were unexpected and surprising to me. They include; Reaction to the IP Scale (5.5), So I must be Crazy (5.6), Impact on Life (5.7), Being Special or Different (5.8), and finally Fear of Failure (5.9) which should, in some respects, have been anticipated.

5.5 Reaction to the Imposter Phenomenon Scale

During Interview One the respondents were asked to complete the Imposter Phenomenon Scale (Clance, 1985). I then asked them how they felt about the Scale. What follows are their responses. For some of them it was a relief to see that they were not on their own and that what they experienced had a name.

“Thought provoking... some made me think why – why am I like this” – Robyn.

*“Writing a book of my life here with some of these questions” – Charlotte.
“Judging by what you said I thought that sounds like me – there’s a name for it – which I was quite surprised at” – Abby.*

“It’s a relief to see me in this questionnaire. I thought I was the only one who felt like this” – Lyn.

Well I know all that about myself and I know that there’s something wrong with that...its terrible really. Well in a way it’s good to see that other people obviously feel this way if you’re been able to formulate those sort of statements” – Jelly.

The reactions of these women to the IP Scale were fascinating. Most of them thought that I had specifically written it for them. After I explained that it was in fact a widely used instrument they expressed amazement that this must mean that they were not the only one’s who felt as they did.

5.6 So I must be Crazy

A further response to the scale was expressed by Charlotte and Jelly, who both thought that passing the threshold of 62 on the Scale meant that they were crazy.

“Everyone knows what a nut I am” – Charlotte.

“I’m a basket case...officially barking mad” – Jelly.

Even though all of the women were told that in fact the Imposter Phenomenon was widely experienced, these two saw it more as an indictment of their mental health. One could say that they felt ‘mentally ill’ in an institution of the mind (university).

5.7 Impact of the Imposter Phenomenon on life

The following responses illustrate the fact that the Imposter Phenomenon can result in a lot of stress and self-doubt for those who experience it.

“Lack of confidence inside, severe self-doubt and I feel inferior” – Abby.

“I think it means I try harder, work longer and have greater expectations for myself” – Lyn.

“I had last weekend off the first full weekend where I didn’t do any work in 3 years so that was a bit scary because the world didn’t fall down and I’m still doing the work now so it’s still being done but I hate it [having time off]. If I can measure it and control it then its OK, if I know I’ve done a bit then I feel better about it. I don’t like having all this time off, I feel guilty” – Charlotte.

“We did [a university paper] that was so hard. I totally convinced myself I’d fail. Going into the test I just relied on memorizing because I didn’t feel like I had the understanding of the content. In the end I passed and actually got an A, I did quite well” – Mabel.

The drivenness of these women is clearly evident. The impact of the Imposter Phenomenon on their lives results in little time to relax and just ‘be’

5.8 Being special or different

Several of the respondents spoke about feeling different in some way from their family or peers. For both Charlotte and Jelly their ‘difference’ has provided them with an identity which they both enjoyed.

“I was the black sheep ...all the others except my sister got married and I didn’t, I did different things like not going to church anymore...yeah I was different...I didn’t like it when I was younger” – Mary-Anne.

“I don’t know anyone else who has this fear and worry and desire to succeed as much as I do and that’s what makes me, me and if I say it’s OK to be like this and this is how it is for me, then I don’t lose a part of me that distinguishes me from other people. I treasure its uniqueness...actually I’m still quite devastated that I’m not an all round wonder that knows everything” – Charlotte.

“Me and dad argue like mad, and actually he will swear in front of me – he won’t swear in front of women so I must be an honorary man...what women should and shouldn’t do doesn’t quite apply to me as far as he’s concerned, that’s the only way I can explain it – I’m an honorary man [Jelly laughs]” – Jelly.

“I was the black sheep”, “I treasure its uniqueness”, “I’m an honorary man”, all speak of these women in some way reframing an on-going experience in their lives which as we have previously seen has actually created a lot of discomfort for them. The final comment of Jelly is very revealing; her father no longer relates to her as a woman because of her university accomplishments, she too has named herself an honorary man. Is this the only way that she can find that allows her to integrate the more masculine traits that she has employed to get to where she is?

5.9 Fear of Failure

The fear of failure is a common factor in people who experience the Imposter Phenomenon. The literature drew attention to this factor (Chapters 1-3) but I had not expected it to be expressed with the depth of emotion that Mabel, Charlotte and Abby showed.

“it wouldn’t be acceptable if I failed something...it wouldn’t be acceptable to mum or me” – Mabel.

“When I get a grade like A+ on an assignment I have a fleeting moment of pleasure and then, shit I have to keep going, how am I going to beat that...To me it’s like a quota keep pushing out, someone’s got to get the A’s and let it be me for a while. I’m waiting for the time when they say no, we’ve given enough of those out, now you get what you really deserve” – Charlotte.

“I went to New Start and thought I can give [university study] a go and if I fail it won’t matter – not a big deal- and funnily enough I passed a couple of courses and thought oh well I’ll come back and do a couple more 100’s and a 200 and it won’t matter if I fail the 200 because I’m not supposed to be here. I told myself that all the way through and I’m still telling myself that now – it won’t matter if I fail my Masters – I should really just take my Honours [1st Class] now and be very thankful that I’ve not been found out” – Abby.

Section Two reflects the impact of the Imposter Phenomenon on seven individuals. While I have previously stated that to regard this phenomena as an individual ‘affliction’ is counter productive, it is also important to see that this social phenomena has consequences on the lives of individuals.

5.10 Conclusion

These brief vignettes provide a peck into the lives and minds of seven women who fitted the criteria of Imposters. Section One plainly revealed that gender socialisation had a direct impact of the development of the need to please in these women's lives. They grew up in traditionally structured families and absorbed what they were and were not supposed to be as women. The main message was that they would receive love and acceptance through certain behaviours; behaviours that are encapsulated in traditional female gender roles. This resulted in them being unable to recognise and embrace their more masculine traits as university students, for perhaps to do so would result in them ceasing to be 'good girls'

Section Two narrowed the focus from gender role development to individual impact of the Imposter Phenomenon and showed that this experience carries with it a high personal toll in terms of energy and self-esteem.

The next chapter will focus on pulling together the threads of the previous discussions with a view to establishing a social theory of the Imposter Phenomenon.

6

TOWARDS A SOCIAL THEORY OF THE IMPOSTER PHENOMENON

The broad purpose of this thesis has been to investigate aspects of the Imposter Phenomenon, which Clance and Imes (1978) defined as,

“an internal experience of intellectual phoniness common among high-achieving individuals who persist in believing that they are not bright, capable or creative despite ample evidence to the contrary” (p.69).

The key words in this definition which have particular relevance to this thesis are *persist* and *not*. The reason for their pivotal nature is that persistence is an active position, in that it requires energy and focus to maintain this stance. It must therefore be asked why the women in this study vigorously maintained this position in the face of negative or contradictory evidence. Herein lies the focal question of this thesis. The crux or linchpin if you like is, “how does the ‘need to please’ impact on the development of the Imposter Phenomenon?” Bussotti (1990), as earlier noted, discovered an unexpectedly strong association between the ‘need to please’ and the Imposter Phenomenon and concluded that it warranted further study especially in the realm of the roles adult ‘Imposters’ were assigned within their families of origin. So in this thesis the concept of ‘the need to please’ has been placed within the broader framework of gender socialisation (see Figure 5: The Need To Please in Context), because I believe that it is only within this latter construction that the dynamics of ‘needing to please others’ can

be understood. It is to this matter that this thesis has been directed. If the need to please *is* central to understanding the Imposter Phenomenon, then to what extent has it developed out of the process of gender socialization?

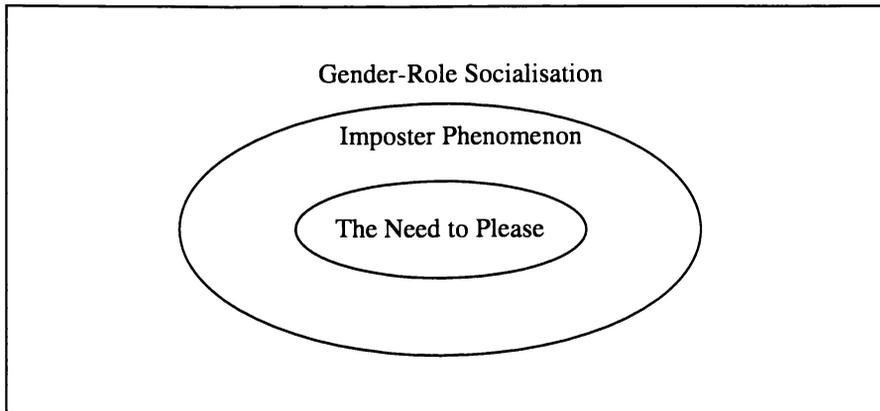


Figure 5: The Need to Please in Context

6.1 Theorising of Findings

There can be little doubt that the seven participants in this research, Abby, Robyn, Jelly, Charlotte, Mabel, Lyn and Mary-Anne, all displayed characteristics of the Imposter Phenomenon. This is not only made obvious by their IP scores but also by their various comments and understandings as outlined in the previous chapter.

I would further suggest that it was equally clear that they were raised from quite an early age in such a manner that they imbibed a very gendered understanding of their roles as females. That is, their 'job descriptions' as children were gendered. For example they were expected to "help mum", "to always have your room

tidy”, to “play nicely and quietly” and for Abby and Mabel it meant also taking on the role of mum herself while she was at work. Where there were brothers in the family these gendered understandings of female behaviour became even more starkly illustrated (e.g. as was exemplified by the section ‘Sibling roles’).

Gender role socialisation, as previously discussed, shapes people to behave in a manner considered congruent with their gender within their culture. The first ‘culture’ in which women are immersed is that of their families. Within this arena they learn about behaviours which are or are not acceptable – behaviours which for these women were blatantly shaped by traditional gendered understandings. These largely unconscious understandings accompany children as they grow into adulthood. The resulting conditioning is taken into educational pursuits, employment and relationships and continues to impact on the day to day interactions experienced. This notion of a social behaviour being largely determined by compliance to gender-role expectation will be recognised as Eagly’s (1987) social role theory. The participants in this study not only displayed gendered understandings about what it meant to be a ‘good’ female as children they also exhibited similar behaviours as adults. They demonstrated that they still placed other people’s desires and demands before their own, that they still felt that it was important to both nurture others and to work at maintaining good relationships with their families and peers. In short they showed caring and concern for others, and sensitivity to others feelings. These characteristics may be

recollected as mirroring Carole Gilligan's female 'voice'. I, like Gilligan (1982), do not wish to insinuate that these desires and resulting behaviours are lesser than those of their male counterparts, merely to point out that they existed and were clearly evident in the participants' lives.

The particular socialisation focus that occurred in the participants' homes was understandable. Their parents, by and large, lived their lives as traditionally defined mothers and fathers, women and men. I do not necessarily view this as a problem. I believe that the problem arises when the children's gendered roles become set in concrete. The women in this study developed both a gendered understanding or schema of what it meant to be females and as a result what behaviours were required 'to please others'. I think such tightly ascribed roles become a problem for women when later in their lives they need to utilise other behaviours; especially behaviours that are viewed as atypical to their gender. In this particular thesis these traits are manifested in the arenas of intelligence and resulting educational achievement.

These women began with a firmly set understanding of their role behaviour limits and yet these were challenged by their need to use other, more masculine, role behaviours. These behaviours would for instance include the more 'masculine' traits of assertiveness, competitiveness, autonomy, and independence.

It is from this empirical evidence that my thesis arises. I would suggest gender role socialisation directly impacted on the development of the Imposter Phenomenon in the participants lives because they had what seemed to be contradictory and restrictive understandings of womanhood.

Earlier on, I stated that I believed the key words in the definition of the Imposter Phenomenon were 'persisted' and 'not' Why do these women persistently belittle their intelligence and ability in their academic work? I would suggest that the reason for this is that like other outposts of their lives, they take into the academic arena, a perhaps unconscious but nevertheless gendered understanding of what it means to be a 'good girl' This was at odds with some of the behaviours and traits that are necessary to succeed in university work. Success in university study, I believe, requires one to be autonomous, assertive, competitive and independent among other things. This is fine if one is a male because that is expected behaviour from them, but if one is a female this can create problems. These are not generally expected characteristics of the 'good girl'. If the concept of 'pleasing others' is gendered, as I suggest it is, and the traditional female roles such as sensitivity, nurturance and warmth have been internalized as the reason for positive self-regard and approval from others, then accepting that such traits as autonomy, assertiveness and competitiveness have any role to play in one's success becomes very difficult to believe. Herein lies the dilemma for successful women. The solution to this dilemma that was chosen by the participants was to

attribute their success to something recognisably feminine (e.g. luck) because the masculine traits are foreign to their gendered schema. As a result these traits (e.g. being competitive or assertive) are expunged by denial. That is, out of this dynamic of denial arises their need to attribute success to external 'femininely-acceptable' factors such as luck, charm or fate.

In summary, these women appeared to develop a gendered understanding of what it took to 'please others' from early childhood. This resulted in a gendered schema, which disallowed room for any behaviours or traits that were 'masculine'. At any time these masculine traits were utilised, they could not be acknowledged as a factor in success so they were explained away through the use of more feminized traits thus allowing the women to maintain an image of the 'good girl'

Within my theory, a conundrum can be recognised. When the externalized causes for success are held alongside the fear of failure, (an integral component of the Imposter Phenomenon), one needs to ask; "What does 'failure' mean to the woman 'Imposter' when the results of failure are experiences of shame, fear and anxiety?" Golden (1988) suggests the woman who "fears failure is feeling and potentially acting against the grain of proscribed feminine behaviour" (p.48). If this is true then the question arises, is the dreaded failure that causes so much angst related to a perceived sense of comprising her feminine self? I would

suggest that to embrace the knowledge that one has masculine traits and that these have contributed to one's success can present a difficult conundrum for women. Success, according to Golden is "ultimately seen as male" (p.48). Therefore to succeed as a female, does the 'Imposter' feel the need to redefine her success by using attributions that are in the main feminine or asexual. In this way she does not deny her femaleness yet nor does she lay claim to utilising 'male' qualities. In this way she can retain her 'good girl' image. This notion of reattributing casual factors to explain success could also be renamed as 'deference to the feminine schema'. After all, it is regarded as 'unladylike' to boast about or recognise one's achievements.

The dynamic of reattribution or deference is further exacerbated by the observation that the Imposter has a strong need to please others, a need that is gendered in its prescriptions. To attribute success to asexual or female gender traits is to be able to still fit in, consciously or unconsciously, with what one knows is expected of one in terms of behaviour. In this light then, what they individually see is that 'the need to please is met', 'the need to fit in' is met and the need to explain one's successes' is met. But is this enough?

If one takes this discussion from the individual, to the social, it becomes obvious that my theory of the participants' behaviour is an uncomfortable and problematic one especially when it comes to identity integration. Why must they attribute their

academic successes to asexual or assumed female-trait qualities and thereby deny their more masculine ones? The answer to this question is as uncomfortable as the question itself. If, as Hall (1990) postulates success for women is traditionally viewed as adapting to the needs and demands of others, and in particular men, then the avenue taken by these women allows them to please others at the expense of their own identity integration. I could also add, “can a woman aspire to any other higher calling?” She can as a result walk in both worlds without upsetting the ‘male consciousness’ too much.

It is difficult to deny that the patriarchal underpinnings of the social, political and educational domains of our society infiltrate most of what men and women experience. Role models of women who are powerful and successful are often tainted with acerbic comments about how she obtained her position. Some people would be familiar with the cliché that if a woman is seen as successful she is characterised as a bitch or whore, while men who obtain recognition as successful are thought of as assertive and go-getters.

In this sense the Imposter Phenomenon could conceivably be renamed the Margaret Thatcher - Mother Teresa Identity Enigma. Thatcher the ‘iron lady’ (in medieval times, an instrument of torture that castrated males) or Teresa the servant and a ‘good girl’ appear to be the only two recognised options for females in today’s society. This dichotomizing of the female gender roles is reinforced

time and again in the ongoing gender socialisation process that we are all subject to via the media, law, religion and education. The entire contradiction that this engenders for successful women is at root because women are seen as lesser than men, instead of 'different from but equal to' them. Women must therefore "*persist* in believing that they are *not* bright, capable or creative" (Clance & Imes, 1978, p.69) for to do otherwise than maintain this stance is to come head to head with societal structures and beliefs that have been written into the fabric of their beings from birth. This idea does make sense in light of a comment made earlier by Clance and Imes (1978) that in fact this stance may serve the very real purpose of protecting the women from others' negative reactions especially those who are threatened by successful women.

I would also suggest that in fact the behavior and beliefs of these Imposter Phenomenon women is understandable in the light of gender role socialisation. Furthermore, my concern voiced earlier regarding Clance and her colleagues seeming pathologising of IP behaviour, is I would suggest, in the long term more destructive than helpful in addressing Imposter dynamics. Their stance places the 'problem' of feeling like an imposter squarely on the individuals shoulders, when in fact the dynamics are rooted in traditional social circumstances which are beyond the individuals control. These women are socially determined into IP roles. Women are by definition "imposters" when they dare to tread on the hallowed ground of masculine defined success.

We can look back at the evidence for the proving of my theory. In a society where value is very much defined by what one has accomplished, and the criteria of accomplishment are gendered, it is no wonder that the *only* thing that Abby identified as a success in her life was “my son, I’ve done a bloody good job. I could cry, yes I have done a good job” and Jelly could only explain her father’s acceptance of her achievements by stating that she “must be an honorary man” What both they and the other participants felt, I suggest, is a feeling of fraudulence. They are imposters in the female world for they are successful by standards recognised as male, and they are imposters in the male world by nature of their gender.

6.2 Conclusion: The Margaret Thatcher/Mother Teresa Identity Enigma.

How does the ‘need to please’ impact on the development of the Imposter Phenomenon?

Theorising these findings leads me to conclude that these seven IP women displayed behaviours and beliefs that are consistent with traditional forms of female gender role socialisation. They were experiencing the Margaret Thatcher/Mother Teresa Identity Enigma. From a very early age the participants were apprenticed into the expected roles and behaviours of females. As a result of this they developed a gendered understanding of two things; firstly that the role of females was to please others, and secondly that what was required to please others

was 'female' They were being expected to grow into 'Mother Teresa's' The dilemma of expected role behaviours for successful women is that the more generally accepted masculine traits which they have undoubtedly used to be successful, the Margaret Thatcher traits, are not considered to be a part of the repertoire that is available to them because they are women. To compensate for this, the successful woman uses asexual or female attributions such as luck, fate and charm to explain their apparent achievements. In this way she does not tread on the assumed sensibilities of the wider society. She elects the Mother Teresa image of a 'good girl' over the Margaret Thatcher image of an 'iron lady'

I would suggest that the 'need to please' is related to the 'Imposter Phenomenon' by becoming gendered through the socialisation process. Success therefore must be persistently reframed in terms that do not break away from what she has learned well – the traditional role and place of women in society.

This cannot be viewed as an individual problem, it is generated by a society that is at times inflexible in its attitudes and beliefs about who and what women should be. It is also not a problem that is easily resolved for these beliefs are deeply woven into the warp and weft of our systemic culture. I believe that change is possible however and that as further research highlights matters such as these, we will see generations of women who are fully comfortable in their own skin.

6.3 Directions for Future Research

The findings and resulting theory presented have provided a glimpse into the lives of seven academically successful women. The resulting discussion about the 'need to please' and its impact on the development of the Imposter Phenomenon has opened up questions and ideas that I have not found specifically addressed in any of the literature reviewed, nor can I explain them from within my findings.

Some areas that could be further investigated in this regard will now be outlined.

- 1) The methodological effectiveness of the use of an educational focus group for assisting women to come to a greater understanding about why they feel the way they do. It would be interesting to do pre and post IP scores to see what impact this type of group would have on their attributional strategies for dealing with success.
- 2) While it was beyond the intended scope of this thesis to discuss men who experienced the Imposter Phenomenon, I would suggest that this 'Identity Enigma' could also apply to them. Men who have more feminine traits in their personality may find it very difficult to find a place in their explanations of their success if for example they are not competitive or 'ladder scramblers'
- 3) How women actually define themselves in terms of traits and characteristics and whether women who have an acceptance of their

masculine traits would experience the Imposter Phenomenon to the same degree as those who struggle with it. If my hypothesis is correct I would predict that women who had integrated their masculine traits would experience fewer difficulties with Imposter fears.

- 4) Whether women who are raised in less patriarchal societies would experience the Imposter Phenomenon to the same degree. Again this would either support or negate my ascertain that Imposter dynamics have more do with socialisation and less to do with the women themselves. That is, that the Imposter Phenomenon is socially rather than individually determined.

I would conclude this thesis by saying that while this study has gone some way towards answering my question about the impact of socialisation on the 'need to please' it is just a beginning. I believe that this is a starting point for constructing a social theory to explain the Imposter Phenomenon.

The Imposter Phenomenon



My name is Debra Wells and I am doing research for my Master's of Education degree.

I am investigating a thesis this year on Clance's idea of the Imposter Phenomenon.

Most people respond by asking 'the Imposter what?', but some of us know, deep inside, what it's really like.

Do these comments sound familiar to you?

- **I only get A's because the lecturers like me.
One day soon people will realise that I'm not as intelligent as they think I am.**
- **I don't understand why I consistently get good grades – my work is not that good.
If people really knew me they would know I'm a fraud.**

I am looking for 2nd or final year female students who would like to explore the Imposter Phenomenon because it has personal significance for them.

I would like to talk with these people individually, as well as in a group situation. While this process will form the research component of my thesis, I have a strong commitment to feminist principles and therefore envisage that the research will primarily be about working together to create a deeper understanding of who we are as a group of women 'imposters'.

If you are at all interested or wish to find out more please give me a ring. All inquiries will be treated confidentially.



**Debra Wells
07 843 3296
Supervisor
-Dr. Teresa Baer-Doyle
07 838 4500**

Please refer to the back of this pamphlet to have some of your questions answered.



What will it involve for Me?

You will be asked to be involved in three interviews (between 1-1½ hours) each. You will also be asked to be part of a group of other women who have also identified as Imposters. It is envisaged at this stage that the group will be run for 5 sessions at 2 hours per session. These will be run over 5 weeks. Both the interviews and the group work will be audio-taped and transcribed.



What will I get out of the research?

It is my hope that you will gain an understanding of your Imposter feelings as resulting from your familial and social context I believe that an outcome of this for you will be that you will enjoy your successes more than at present, and that you will be more likely to fulfill your potential in whatever you choose to pursue in life.



What will happen to the information I give to you?

**All gathered information will be treated as confidential to you as the participant and myself.
You will be asked to choose a pseudonym and this will be used to identify you when any reference is made to information you provide. All information will be kept in a lockable filing cabinet in my home.
The only other person that will have access to the information you provide in its raw form will be a typist who will transcribe the audio-tapes.**



What do I expect from you?

There are two things that I expect from you as a participant. These are:

- 1. That you are fully committed to the**
- 2. That if for some unforeseen circumstance you have to withdraw you advise me of this as soon as possible.**

**An
Inquiry
Does NOT
Commit you.

So
PLEASE
Inquire.**

Research: The Imposter Phenomenon Scale**THE IMPOSTER PHENOMENON**

It is best to give the first response that enters your mind rather than dwelling on each statement and thinking about it over and over.

1. I have often succeeded on a test or task even though I was afraid that I would not do well before I undertook the task.

1	2	3	4	5
not true at all	rarely	sometimes	often	very true
2. I can give the impression that I'm more competent than I really am

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
3. I avoid evaluations if possible and have a dread of others evaluating me

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
4. When people praise me for something I've accomplished, I'm afraid I won't be able to live up to their expectations of me in the future.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
5. I sometimes think I obtained my present position or gained my present success because I happened to be in the right place at the right time.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
6. I'm afraid people important to me may find out that I'm not as capable as they think I am.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
7. I tend to remember the incidents in which I have not done my best more than those times I have done my best.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
8. I rarely do a project or task as well as I'd like to do it.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
9. Sometimes I feel or believe that my success in my life or in my job has been the result of some kind of error.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
10. It's hard for me to accept compliments or praise about my intelligence or accomplishments.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

11. At times, I feel my success was due to some kind of luck.
 1 2 3 4 5
 not at rarely sometimes often very true
 all true
12. I'm disappointed at times in my personal accomplishments and think I should have accomplished more.
 1 2 3 4 5
13. Sometimes I'm afraid others will discover how much knowledge or ability I really lack
 1 2 3 4 5
14. I'm often afraid that I may fail at a new assignment or undertaking even though I generally do well at what I attempt.
 1 2 3 4 5
15. When I've succeeded at something and received recognition for my accomplishments, I have doubts that I can keep repeating that success.
 1 2 3 4 5
16. If I receive a great deal of praise and recognition for something I've accomplished, I tend to discount the importance of what I've done.
 1 2 3 4 5
17. I often compare my ability to those around me and think they may be more intelligent than I am.
 1 2 3 4 5
18. I often worry about not succeeding with a project or on an examination, even though others around me have considerable confidence that I will do well.
 1 2 3 4 5
19. If I'm going to receive a promotion or gain recognition of some kind, I hesitate to tell others until it is an accomplished fact.
 1 2 3 4 5
20. I feel bad and discouraged if I'm not "the best" or at least "very special" in situations that involve achievement.
 1 2 3 4 5.

[Clance, P. R. & O'Toole, M. A. (1987). The Imposter Phenomenon: An Internal Barrier to Empowerment and Achievement. *Women & Therapy* 6 (3). 51-64]
 Permission has been received from Dr. Pauline Clance for the use of this questionnaire

Research: Interview One, Personal Data Questionnaire

Interview One

Name

Proposed pseudonym

Address

Age.....

Ethnicity

Present Course of StudyYear.....

Please list all of your final year secondary school examination results.

Please state your marks for University papers completed to date.

Please list any awards that you have received.

Family History

Parents/Caregivers occupations - Mother

Father

Birth Order (Circle) 1st 2nd 3rd 4th Other

Siblings:

Gender

Age

Thank you for completing this. Please be assured that it will be treated in confidence.

Research Consent Form for Participants

**UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION STUDIES**

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

Title of Project: *The Imposter Phenomenon*

Research: *Thesis – Masterate Investigation*

Researcher: *Debra Wells*

Supervisor: *Teresa Baer-Doyle*

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information I have provided from this project (before data collection is completed), without having to give reasons and without penalty of any sort.

I give my permission for any information collected from me to be used in the writing of the thesis “The Imposter Phenomenon”. I understand that it may also be used in other arenas such as seminars and other papers, but that my anonymity will be preserved under all circumstances.

I understand that both the interviews and group work will be taped and transcribed
I agree to take part in this research.

Signed:

Name of participant:

(please print clearly)

Date:

In my opinion consent was given freely and with understanding.

Signed:

Name of the researcher:

Date:

(Adapted from Victoria University ‘Consent to Participation in Research’ Form.)

Research: Interview Two Schedule**Interview Two.**

1. Tidy up any unanswered questions from Interview One.
2. Draw a picture of your family/siblings – choose 5-6 words that describe each of them.
3. Choose one word/pseudonym for each of siblings.
4. What do you think your major role was within your family...put on you/assumed?
5. Who was the favourite child in your family?
6. Who was the most intelligent one in your family?
7. Who was considered the most sensitive?
8. How did your family decide who was the brightest?
9. Who has the most education?
10. You have characterised yourself as.....are you aware now of what motivated your behaviour as a child?
11. What words would you use to describe yourself now?
12. If a change from childhood to adulthood words –have you carried these characteristics over into adulthood –why have you modified them?
13. As a child what did it mean “to be good”?
14. Did it come naturally/or cause inner conflict?
15. As a child/adolescent who did you feel you had to please-list everyone-rank order?
16. What was your family's attitude towards bright people?

Schooling

1. What do they think about you being at University?
2. What were your parents expectations about your behaviour at school?
3. Do you think that you were successful at school –why/why not?
4. Overall how do you think your teachers viewed you at school—how did you view yourself as a student?
5. Common remarks on report cards-parental reaction to report cards?
6. How did the teachers opinions compare with your family’s opinions?

Success

1. How would you define success?
2. Are you successful by your own criteria?
3. What would you have to do to consider yourself successful?
4. Do your family consider you successful?
5. If yes, how do your family overtly/covertly acknowledge this?

Research: Scenario Narratives**Scenario Narratives**

Listed below are four case studies that describe different family patterns and messages. For each example, please use the highlighter and mark out any statements that you feel are applicable to you. You may mark as much or as little in each scenario as you wish.

1. Jane grew up in a family where her oldest sister was always considered the intelligent one, while she was always told that she was sociable and likeable although not especially gifted intellectually. Even when she did very well in school, it was always explained by her parents as being due to her teachers “liking her” rather than her abilities. Although Jane often had to study hard to do well in school, she received good grades. Yet, she never felt as competent as her teachers and peers believed that she was.
2. In her family, Diane was always expected to do extremely well in everything she attempted. From her parents, she received the message that they expected and wanted her to achieve, to be special, to rank among the best. When she did bring home excellent grades, they barely seemed to notice because, of course, she was doing what was expected. Diane developed the idea that she should never make mistakes, believing that she should do well at everything and that it should come easily to her. She is reluctant to try anything that would be different, where she would not be the “best”
3. Jo’s father was a very successful professional who was extremely critical of Jo’s accomplishments. If Jo brought home a report card with mostly A’s and one B, she was reprimanded about the B..the A’s were not acknowledged. She grew up being extremely self-critical with perfectionistic standards. No matter how well she did a task, she always felt she could do it better. It is very difficult for her to accept praise, and she wonders “what is wrong” with the people who praise her.
4. Kate grew up in a home where all her parents expected of her and her siblings was that they did their best at school. Each report card was read by her parents with one question uppermost in their minds, “Did they try their best”, and if they thought that the answer to this was “Yes”, then the results did not seem to matter to them.

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