AN INTERPRETIVE APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING THE IMPOSTOR PHENOMENON OVER TIME

by

CHERYL A. KENNEDY

(Under the Direction of Aliki Nicolaides)

ABSTRACT

The term *impostor phenomenon* emerged in the late 1970s during the second wave of the feminist movement in the United States, and interest in the phenomenon has continued over the past four decades, with research examining the causes and effects of individuals' self-doubt and impostor feelings. Within this growing body of literature, however, there was a gap related to understanding the impostor phenomenon over one's lifespan. The purpose of this qualitative interview study was to explore the lived experiences of the impostor phenomenon in women over the age of 60 across their lifespans in order to gain a better understanding of their life transitions and the inner world of the impostor phenomenon. The following research question guided the study: How do women over the age of 60 reflect on a life in relationship to the impostor phenomenon? Using an interpretivist approach, the author explored how women made meaning of their experiences of self-doubt and impostorism over time. A total of 24 women participated in the study. The participants were White, middle-class, American women with different educational and professional histories. All participants completed the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale and a demographic profile; 11 women participated in semi-structured interviews.

Women's developmental theory served as a basis for identifying the factors that influenced participants' self-doubt and impostor feelings. The addition of constructive-developmental theory provided a lens for exploring how these women internalized societal messages and the ways they balanced conflicting societal cues with their desires to "be more." The incorporation of these two theoretical frameworks allowed for an understanding of the impostor phenomenon from the outside in. The findings suggest the existence of a polarity, with the participants managing both self-doubt and determination. Moreover, the ability to manage this polarity suggests a navigation of truces which supports adult development and growth. The findings can inform employers and educators on how to better support women who live with impostor feelings. Understanding how self-doubt and impostor feelings manifest over time also has the potential to offer insights into how women navigate in the modern world.

INDEX WORDS: Adult learning, Constructive-developmental theory, Impostor phenomenon, Interview study, Lifelong learning, Navigation of truces, Orders of consciousness, Polarity, Qualitative research, Women's development

AN INTERPRETIVE APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING THE IMPOSTOR PHENOMENON OVER TIME

by

CHERYL A. KENNEDY

B.A., Piedmont University, 2012

M.Ed., Georgia Southern University, 2015

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2021

AN INTERPRETIVE APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING THE IMPOSTOR PHENOMENON OVER TIME

by

CHERYL A. KENNEDY

Major Professor:	Aliki Nicolaides
Committee:	Kathleen deMarrais
	Juanita Johnson-Bailey

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott
Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
December 2021

DEDICATION

"I sustain myself with the love of family."—Maya Angelou

This dissertation is dedicated to my children.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I come to the end of this doctoral journey, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge those who inspired me, supported me, and cheered me to the finish line. First, I must thank my mother. Mom, your return to college as a nontraditional student left a lasting impression. I count myself lucky that I got to share in that journey with you, attending school newspaper meetings and Halloween parties when our academic paths overlapped. You have always been a role model for me. Thank you for supporting me and cheering me on. I love you.

To Kelly and Evan: There are no words that can express my love for you both. You made me a mom, which is the most important job I will ever have. No matter where this doctorate takes me, I will forever be *Mom* to two terrific people. This journey has been about finding myself and my place in the world. I am so grateful that I get to share this world with you, and my hope is that you never forget how important you are.

Kelly, my dearest Kelly, thank you for listening to me talk about Kegan and Mezirow, and countless other ideas. You should receive an honorary doctorate for helping me figure it out.

Evan, thank you for telling me I would hate teaching elementary school so many years ago. You saw something in me that I hadn't yet realized. Your continued support means more than you know.

To my sisters: Your love and support mean so much to me. I am so proud of you both, and I am thankful for the love that we share, even though we are miles apart.

To my father: Thank you for your continued love and support. I know you are only a phone call away when I need you and I know you are cheering me on from afar.

To my dearest friends, John, Katie, Ajit, and Anil: You have held me up when I was down. You stoked the fire within when it was burning out and I was ready to throw in the towel. Without your encouragement, I wouldn't be here today. I will cherish our friendship always. Much love to you all.

To my major professor, Aliki Nicolaides: Thank you for your support and guidance. Your insight helped me enormously. You challenged me in ways that no one has, and while there were moments of anguish (on my end), you helped make me a better scholar. I cannot thank you enough. You pushed me to be a better me, and I am forever grateful.

I would also like to thank my committee members. Dr. Johnson-Bailey, your kind words and support hold a special place in my heart. When I am doubting myself, I can hear your voice in my head pushing me forward. Thank you for being you! Dr. deMarrais, a special thanks for your thoughtful feedback and guidance in building the argument in my research and helping to guide me in my final revisions. I appreciate the ways you manage to connect ideas and concepts to familiar situations (having a drink at the bar versus sitting down to dinner).

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the women in this research study. Thank you for opening your heart and sharing your experiences with me. I learned so much from each of you, and I consider myself blessed to have met you. I discovered things about myself thanks to you, and I truly hope our paths cross again.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPENDICES

LIST OF TABLES

Page

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The term *impostor phenomenon* described as an internal sense of intellectual phoniness, emerged during the second wave of the feminist movement (Clance & Imes, 1978). Other terms used to describe this feeling are impostorism or impostor syndrome. The second wave of feminism began during the 1960s. Women wanted to be fully liberated, with economic opportunities and sexual freedoms (Tong, 2013). While the women's movement of the 1970s brought new opportunities and access for women, both in the workplace and in higher education, these opportunities translated into added burdens on women. This is not to say that the women's movement caused impostor feelings; rather, with more women taking on careers outside the home and returning to school, the societal expectations for women increased and became more complex during this time. Thus, the women's movement is relevant in the context of women's experience of the impostor phenomenon; given that women have faced changes in and challenges to their rights, both private and public, it is understandable that they would face feelings of impostorism. (It is important to remember that women have had equal access to employment and education for less than 50 years, compared with the hundreds of years of access that men have enjoyed).

The second wave of the feminist movement in the 1970s was significantly influenced by post-war changes. World War II had dramatically altered the role of women in American life. At the outset of the war, women, who had previously been cast in domestic roles, took on positions in industry and business left vacant by men required to fight overseas. Between 1941 and 1945,

more than seven million women stepped into jobs vacated by men who had entered the military, working as welders, farmers, and telephone operators (McEuen, 2016). When the men returned from their military service, they reassumed their places in the workforce, forcing women to return to their domestic roles (Solomon, 1985).

Later, over the course of the 1970s, the number of women in the workforce rose by nearly six million (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). This increase was influenced not only by the rapid growth of service-sector jobs (Eisenstein, 2005), but also by the shifting societal perception that employment was now acceptable for women. In some cases, a woman's income was necessary to support the family unit (Kline, 1973).

The percentage of women enrolled in college in 1980 was more than 51% compared to the less than 38% of females enrolled in college in 1960 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2018). This increase can be attributed to rising expectations of future employment (Goldin et al., 2006), related in part to the second wave of feminism and changing legislation that reduced or prohibited discrimination against women (Solomon, 1985).

However, though women since the 1970s have achieved innumerable successes in areas outside the home, continued social expectations on how women should act have resulted in many women struggling to find the ideal work-life balance (Barnard, 2018; Mazerolle & Barrett, 2018; McCutcheon & Morrison, 2018; Toffoletti & Starr, 2016) and experiencing high levels of self-doubt (Cokley et al., 2018; Craddock et al., 2011; Horner, 1972). For the high-achieving woman, this has added another level of inadequacy—the need to be perfect at everything.

Pauline Clance (1985) wrote of the impostor feelings she experienced in college and graduate school, and her discovery that people across the United States lived with a haunting fear that they were not capable of repeating their earlier successes—which prompted her to study the

concept of the impostor phenomenon with Suzanne Imes. Clance and Imes (1978) engaged over 150 women from various life stages (i.e., undergraduate through professional career), and found that, regardless of their accomplishments, these women believed they were not enough.

As has been theorized, the impostor phenomenon occurs when a person, while achieving personal and/or professional success in their daily lives, experiences high levels of self-doubt and inadequacy, and engages in persistent questioning of whether their success is actually earned or deserved. As a woman who experiences this phenomenon, it is important for me to gain insight into impostor feelings experienced throughout the lifespan and to better understand if and how women grow in relation to their impostor feelings. Living with these feelings is often paralyzing for me, sometimes causing me to forego opportunities because I do not believe I am good enough. Exploring other women's experiences of self-doubt and impostor feelings over time will help adult educators and human-resource professionals (among others) become more aware of these feelings and offer insight into the supports necessary for managing them.

In this chapter, I discuss the purpose of my research and offer a brief overview of the theoretical framework for the study. Specifically, the theories guiding the research included constructive-developmental theory and women's developmental theory.

Purpose of the Study

Though women continue to advance in academic and professional realms, many retain a deep sense of inadequacy. While it has been reported that 57% of women are part of the labor force and 43% of women between the ages of 25 and 64 hold a bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Department of Labor, 2018), women still do not feel good enough. Despite that more than one million women earned a bachelor's degree during the 2018–2019 academic year (NCES, 2018), women still do not experience an internal sense of success (Clance & Imes, 1978).

Women continue to struggle to balance work and family, and many feel unable to meet the demands of their daily responsibilities (Brue, 2018; Mazerolle & Barrett, 2018). Women are struggling to believe they deserve their achievements. The purpose of this qualitative interview study was to explore the lived experiences of the impostor phenomenon in women over the age of 60 across their lifespans in order to gain a better understanding of their life transitions and the inner world of the impostor phenomenon. The research question guiding the study was: How do women over the age of 60 reflect on a life in relationship to the impostor phenomenon? The theories guiding the research included constructive-developmental theory and women's developmental theory (Gilligan, 1982/1993). Each of these frameworks provided a pathway for understanding the impostor phenomenon. Women's developmental theory served as the basis for understanding impostor feelings. Understanding how societal and familial expectations impacted feelings of self-doubt provided a foundation for exploring the external tensions associated with the impostor phenomenon. The application of constructive-developmental theory allowed for an appreciation of how the women internalized societal messages and how they made meaning of these messages. That is, constructive-developmental theory helped to better comprehend what women "did" with their impostor feelings. A brief overview of these theories follows.

Adult Development and Growth

Adulthood has only recently (i.e., since World War II) come to be seen as a dynamic period of life in which development and growth can occur if the individual experiences the right conditions related to support, access, and environment (Merriam, 2018). As Daloz (2012) stated, "Development is more than simply change" (p. 23). The external environment—social, familial, and cultural—impacts human development by confirming who individuals are, sometimes contradicting what they know, and providing continuity (Daloz, 2012). Constructive-

developmental theory comprises constructivist notions of how individuals make sense of their experiences, as well as the concept of developmentalism, related to the promise of growth or the capacity to grow internally. The use of constructive-developmental theory as a lens for examining a woman's way of making meaning of the impostor phenomenon is significant because it helps to show how women can grow in their developmental capacities to perceive self-doubt and impostor feelings as parts of their identity, not the whole of it.

Physical, social, and emotional changes occur during adulthood, and each person progresses differently. Kegan (1994) argued that "we need a way of looking at human development that considers not only people's changing agendas but their changing capacities" (p. 6). One's capacity is defined not by their age or education, but by their ability to make meaning of new experiences, and people make meaning in different ways depending on their capacity to open their minds to new ideas and to feel safe to explore these ideas. By understanding these changing capacities, one can better understand the concept of adult development.

The application of constructive-developmental theory as an interpretive lens for understanding the impostor phenomenon provides a way to understand if and how a woman's ability to make meaning of her impostor feelings change over time. By using constructive-developmental theory to explore women's stories about their experiences with the phenomenon, one can better understand if and how women grow and develop their self-concept as their relationship with the world around them changes.

Women's Developmental Theory

Women's developmental experiences with their social environment are different than those of men, and Carol Gilligan (1982, 1993) was one of the first psychologists to identify and explore these differences. From an early age, women learn they are expected to behave in certain

ways. For example, early classroom experiences shape the development of men and women, with schooling representing a large part of the socialization process (Clance et al., 1995). Societal expectations that value women as warm and caring, and men as independent and powerful, lead women to feel inadequate when they do not project the societal image of what it means to be a woman (Clance et al., 1995). These differences arise in a social context where social status and power shape the experiences of males and females (Gilligan, 1982/1993). Within this social environment, how does a woman come to view her relationship to the impostor phenomenon? How do women reflect objectively on their subjective experiences of the impostor phenomenon so that they may revise their self-concept?

Women's developmental theory provides a foundation for understanding how women experience the world around them and the ways societal expectations impact their self-concept. This study drew heavily on Gilligan's (1982/1993) research about women's development, which offered a means of understanding women's life experiences and how they influence growth and development.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because women are struggling with persistent impostor feelings and self-doubt, and they continue to be underrepresented at all levels of leadership, facing obstacles early in their career (Huang et al., 2019). The lack of opportunities to see other women succeed supports impostor feelings and, in some way, conveys the message that women are not enough. While women are making strides in top executive roles, less than 25% of corporate-level leadership roles are held by women (Huang et al., 2019). Moreover, women continue to receive less compensation than men for the same work. On average, women are paid 82 cents for every dollar a man is paid (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). The American Association of

University Women (AAUW; Miller et al., 2018) reported that, based on the rate of change in pay since 1960, “women are expected to reach pay equity with men in 2059” (p. 5).

This pay inequity is attributable to women being steered into jobs that offer lower compensation, such as education and office support, while occupational fields traditionally associated with men, such as construction and transportation, tend to offer higher compensation, leading to what the AAUW (Miller et al., 2018) described as “segregation by occupation” (p. 14). While the impostor phenomenon is not only about career and compensation, these issues reinforce the societal message that women are not as important as men, further perpetuating impostor feelings.

Additionally, the expectation that a woman will be the primary family caretaker makes it difficult for women to fully participate in the workforce. Women who stay home to raise their children lose years of salary earnings and work experience, putting them at a disadvantage (Miller et al., 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic illuminated the struggles that working mothers face, as schools were closed and children were expected to learn virtually; not only were women working remotely, but they were balancing their children’s academic tasks and care (Thomas et al., 2020). Though women today have achieved much in their personal, professional, and academic lives, it is not difficult to understand why they often feel that these accomplishments are unmerited.

This study allows for an enhanced understanding of whether or how women’s self-doubt and impostor feelings change over time. The findings from the research contribute to the literature around the impostor phenomenon, adult development and growth, and women’s development. The results provide practical and theoretical insights to help those who work with

high-achieving women to more effectively support these women in managing their impostor feelings and self-doubt.

Chapter Summary

This chapter offered a brief overview of the impostor phenomenon and its impacts, and discussed briefly women's involvement in the academy and the workplace since the 1970s as a way of understanding impostor feelings within the sociocultural and political climate of the 70s and 80s. I described the purpose of this study and its significance to the literature on the impostor phenomenon and women's development. Additionally, I included an overview of adult development theory, specifically constructive-developmental theory and women's developmental theory, which comprise an interpretive lens for understanding the impostor phenomenon. Chapter 2 provides a review of the relevant literature and an elaboration of the theoretical framework undergirding this study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Previous studies of the impostor phenomenon have focused primarily on quantitative measures, determining the frequency with which one experiences impostor feelings or the correlations between the impostor phenomenon and other factors (e.g., race, gender, self-esteem). This chapter presents a review of the literature pertaining to the topic of the impostor phenomenon as it relates to professional women. The purpose of this qualitative interview study was to explore the lived experiences of the impostor phenomenon in women over the age of 60 across their lifespans in order to gain a better understanding of their life transitions and the inner world of the impostor phenomenon. The central question guiding this research was: How do women over the age of 60 reflect on a life in relationship to the impostor phenomenon?

Changes during the 1970s, such as those brought on by the women's movement, allowed women to expand their role beyond the home into the workplace and academic institutions. The adaptive challenges that women experienced, however, caused a disorientation in their ways of making meaning, thus leading to impostor feelings. This study sought to understand how women make meaning of such feelings by examining the impostor phenomenon through the lens of adult development theory, specifically constructive-developmental theory. This chapter is organized into three main sections: (1) a definition and description of the impostor phenomenon, and a review of previous research about the phenomenon; (2) a discussion of the theories informing this study, namely women's developmental theory and constructive-developmental theory; and (3) a discussion of the gap in the literature.

Impostor Phenomenon

The term *impostor phenomenon* describes a feeling of intellectual phoniness experienced among high-achieving women (Clance & Imes, 1978). The term was coined in 1978 by Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes, who, in their study of over 150 highly successful women, found that none of the participants possessed an internal sense of success (Clance & Imes, 1978). Women who live with these feelings have accomplished valid and tangible successes yet fear that they cannot repeat those successes, or they do not believe they are as capable as they appear (Clance, 1985). Though the term *impostor syndrome* has also been used to describe this phenomenon, for the purposes of this study, the term impostor phenomenon will be used since this was the term defined in the initial study.

The most significant study pertaining to the impostor phenomenon was completed by Clance and Imes in 1978. Clance and Imes (1978) focused on women in various life stages (undergraduate through professional career) to show that, regardless of their accomplishments, they suffered from feelings of inadequacy. The sample included 95 undergraduate women and 10 faculty women (all holding doctorates) at a small, private, co-educational, and academically acclaimed college in the Midwest; 15 undergraduates, 20 graduate students, and 10 faculty members at a large urban university in the South; and 22 professional women in such fields as law, anthropology, nursing, counseling, religious education, social work, occupational therapy, and teaching. The sample was predominantly White middle- to upper-class women between the ages of 20 and 45. Significantly, the demographics of the sample showed that this phenomenon was experienced by women in multiple realms of life, from college onward. Yet, Clance and Imes's initial research was limited by its exclusion of women from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, suggesting that the impostor phenomenon was only experienced by White women.

Arguably, considering that some of the participants came from a Southern urban university, a more diverse sample could likely have been included in this study, providing a better representation of the phenomenon among all women.

Over the course of a 5-year period, Clance and Imes (1978) worked with the study participants in clinical settings, such as individual psychotherapy sessions, as well as college classes and growth-centered interactional groups. Through observations and interviews with the participants, Clance and Imes gained a better understanding of why and how these women experienced feelings of fraud or inadequacy. Their findings suggested that early family history plays a part in the origin of the impostor phenomenon in one of two ways (Clance & Imes, 1978): when a sibling or close relative is the "smart one" in the family (p. 242) or when "the family conveys to the girl that she is superior in every way" (p. 243). Each of these situations results in the girl feeling that she must work harder to impress her family (i.e., to prove she is smart) or to remain perfect (in her family's eyes). Regardless of her accomplishments, she believes she is less than perfect and begins to develop self-doubt. When she begins to have difficulty with certain tasks or activities and cannot live up to these expectations, she starts to feel like an impostor.

Clance and Imes (1978) found that women may not experience an internal feeling of success due to societal expectations. A woman's success may run counter to societal expectations, leading some women to look for other reasons for their achievements (Clance & Imes, 1978). This is not surprising, given that the 1970s was a time of change for women, preceded by the passage of the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, with its Title VII provision prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex as well as race, color, religion, or national origin,. Women were trying to figure out how they fit within the ever-changing social

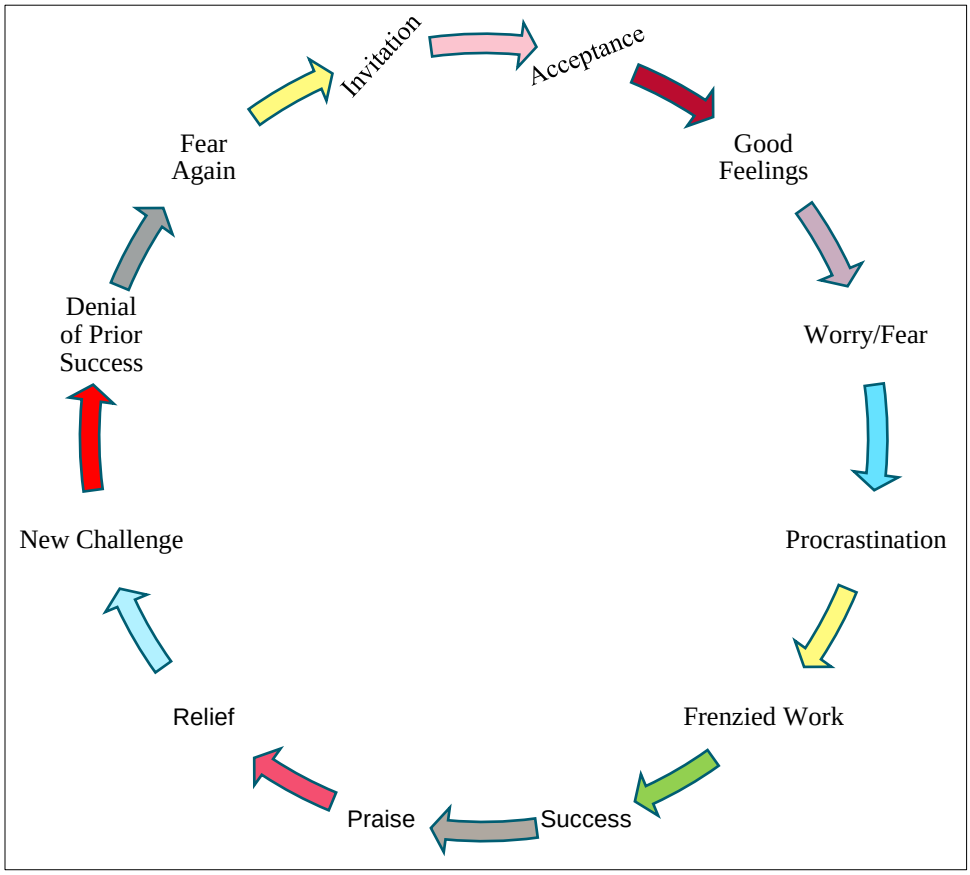
and political climate. For some women, that meant taking on a career. For others, it meant pursuing education. Though this was a time to enjoy change, women still struggled to enjoy and internalize their success: Regardless of their achievements, they experienced considerable self-doubt and worried excessively (Clance, 1985).

Women who live with impostor feelings experience what Clance (1985) referred to as the *impostor cycle*. Difficult times stand out more than successes, and women who live with the impostor phenomenon tend to dwell on unknowns (Clance, 1985). Those experiencing the impostor phenomenon may procrastinate when faced with a task or over-prepare, losing time that could be spent on other tasks. The next time a similar situation arises, the cycle repeats itself, and the person who lives with the impostor phenomenon experiences the same feelings and doubts again. There are different reasons why women experiencing the impostor phenomenon stay in this cycle, such as the need to be the best, "superwoman" feelings, fear of failure, the inclination to deny one's competence and discount praise, and a fear of and guilt about success (Clance, 1985).

As illustrated in Figure 1, when a woman who lives with impostor feelings is given a new task or opportunity, she may experience excitement or dread at having to maintain success (Clance et al., 1995). She may experience fear that she will not be able to complete the task successfully, and will likely approach the task in one of two ways: by procrastinating or over-preparing. Either way, she will not believe that the successful completion of the task was due to her ability; rather, she will attribute it to last-minute luck or use it as "proof" that she must work harder than everyone else to succeed (Clance, 1985; Clance et al., 1995). The impostor cycle can be found in Figure 1, below.

Figure 1

Impostor Cycle



Clance (1985) explained that for women who live with the impostor phenomenon, the need to be the best carries over from childhood, when they were the top performer. Entering a more competitive environment, such as college or the workplace, they realize they are one of many top performers, an awareness that is difficult to process. Given this new dynamic, they may dismiss their talents, and if they cannot be the best, perceive themselves as unintelligent. The superwoman response to this phenomenon is similar to the need to be the best, with the impostor attempting to do everything perfectly. Yet, as Clance (1985) shared, “Being human, of

course, makes this goal difficult or impossible to obtain, and these people generally feel overwhelmed and that they have failed" (p. 26).

The fear of failure becomes intensified for individuals living with the impostor phenomenon. They may take drastic measures to not appear foolish in front of others for fear of humiliation, and they often work very hard to avoid failure. Those who live with impostor feelings find it difficult to accept praise or positive feedback, and develop ways to diminish their accomplishments (Clance, 1985). In addition, many women with impostor feelings are concerned that their success may interfere with their relationships with others, especially men, whom they believe will see them "as threatening or unfeminine" (Clance, 1985, p. 27).

Clance and Imes (1978) found that there are different behaviors that allow a woman to maintain the impostor phenomenon, namely diligence and hard work, a sense of phoniness, and intellectual flattery. Through diligence and hard work, the woman over-prepares and works and studies very hard, yet regardless of the outcomes of this work (which are generally positive), she still feels like a phony. Women who fail to share their ideas or opinions, or engage in intellectual flattery to avoid being considered unintelligent never know if their ideas are respected since they remain silent, fearing they will be discovered to be someone they are not. Some women use charm to win approval because they aim to be recognized as intellectually special.

Clance and Imes's (1978) study drew upon Horner's (1972) work, which dealt with achievement-related conflicts in women. Horner described such conflict as a motive to avoid success: "It is identified as an internal psychological representative of the dominant social stereotype which views competence, independence, competition, and intellectual achievement as qualities basically inconsistent with femininity even though positively related to masculinity and

mental health" (p. 157). The theme lining these two preceding studies is that of the impact of societal influences and expectations on a woman's sense of her place in the world.

Horner (1972) completed multiple studies measuring achievement motive among more than 200 college freshmen and sophomores, and found that 65% of the female participants held a negative view of success. Horner argued that most women avoid success due to the possibility of negative consequences such as social rejection. She noted that young women "would be least likely to develop their interests and explore their intellectual potential when competing against others, especially against men" (p. 165). Horner found that when achievement-oriented women were faced with conflict between their feminine image and the development of their abilities, they opted to disguise their abilities and defer to internalized sex-role stereotypes.

A variation of Horner's (1972) research was replicated in 1999 by Tomkiewicz and Bass to examine whether women's fear of success and of appearing incompetent had changed over two and a half decades. Using the Fear of Success Scale and the Fear of Appearing Incompetent Scale, the researchers surveyed 113 graduating seniors at a school of business in the eastern United States. Of this number, 61 were men, and 52 women. Tomkiewicz and Bass (1999) included an Attitude Toward Women Scale, which is used to determine whether the respondent possesses a traditional or pro-feminist attitude toward women. They found that men's and women's scores for fear of success and fear of appearing incompetent were both significantly correlated. Perhaps most notable were the differences in scores between the groups of women on the Fear of Success and Fear of Appearing Incompetent Scales. Those women in the progressive group (pro-feminist) had lower mean scores on both scales. Though the researchers noted that their findings were in no way generalizable, they did suggest that there may be changes over

time for women who experience a fear of success, and there may be differences among different subcategories of women.

Replications of Clance and Imes's (1978) research have included studies examining impostor experiences in social environments, such as colleges and various workplace settings. Table 1 lists the common themes around the impostor phenomenon which were identified in these studies during the literature review. Table 2 summarizes the impostor phenomenon literature and is followed by a more in-depth discussion of the extant research.

Table 1

Themes From Previous Imposter Phenomenon Research

Theme	Study
Impostor Feelings and Identity (Gender, Professional, Racial)	• Badawy et al., 2018 (gender) • Cohen & McConnell, 2019 (gender) • Cokley et al., 2015 (gender) • Hutchins & Rainbolt, 2017 (professional) • Lane, 2015 (professional) • McClain et al., 2016 (racial) • Rackley, 2018 (gender) • Stone et al., 2018 (low racial representation; feelings of otherness; need to prove stereotypes wrong)
Competing Commitments & Perfectionism	• Cokley et al., 2018 (perfectionism) • Craddock et al., 2011(competing commitments) • Cusack et al., 2013 (perfectionism) • McEnery, 2014 (perfectionism) • Studdard, 2002 (competing commitments)
Internal and External Impacts of the Impostor Phenomenon	• Hutchins, 2015 (emotional exhaustion) • Hutchins et al., 2018 (emotional exhaustion) • McLean, 2017 (persistence) • Neureiter & Traut-Mattausch, 2016 (low motivation) • Sanford et al., 2015 (career advancement) • Tao & Gloria, 2019 (persistence)

Table 2

Impostor Phenomenon Research

Author & Title	Sample (N)	Study Purpose	Data Collection Methods	Findings
Badawy et al. (2018) "Are all impostors created equal? Exploring gender differences in the impostor phenomenon-performance link"	Upper-level undergraduate students: Business and Communication (N = 268)	Examined the relationship between the impostor phenomenon (IP), performance, and gender	Surveys CIPS Marteau & Bekker's Anxiety Scale	Females reported stronger imposter feelings; significant mean difference between positive and negative feedback conditions
Cohen & McConnell (2019) "Fear of fraudulence: Graduate school program environments and the impostor phenomenon"	Graduate students (N = 1,476)	Examined the relationship between the perceived characteristics of graduate school program environments and students' impostor feelings	Surveys Graduate student stress and coping survey Self-developed survey— IP Self-developed survey—perceived graduate program environment	Students studying arts/humanities reported greatest average impostor scores; students who perceived greater funding competition reported significantly higher impostor scores; increased perceived isolation from students and faculty corresponded to significantly higher impostor scores; students in doctoral research programs had significantly higher impostor scores than students in master's programs; students with increased social support had lower impostor scores; older student had lower impostor scores; women had significantly higher impostor scores
Cokley et al. (2015). "The roles of gender stigma consciousness, impostor phenomenon and academic self-concept in the	Undergraduate students (N = 491)	Examined (1) academic self-concept predicting impostor feelings, (2) impostor feelings predicting gender stigma consciousness, and (3) GPA	Surveys Social Identity Attitudes Scale CIPS Academic Self-Concept Scale Disengagement Subscale	Gender stigma consciousness was a positive predictor of IP for women and men, but stronger among women; significant relationship between IP and GPA among women

Author & Title	Sample (N)	Study Purpose	Data Collection Methods	Findings
academic outcomes of women and men"		predicting academic self-concept		
Cokley et al. (2018) "Self-esteem as a mediator of the link between perfectionism and the impostor phenomenon"	Undergraduate students—Psychology (N = 468)	Investigated the degree to which self-esteem is a mediator of the relationship between perfectionism and impostorism.	Surveys CIPS Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale Almost Perfect Scale	Perfectionist standards positively correlated with self-esteem and had a non-significant negative correlation with IP; self-esteem was negatively correlated with IP; women reported significantly higher impostor feelings than men; women reported significantly higher standards than men
Craddock et al. (2011) "Doctoral students and the impostor phenomenon: Am I smart enough to be here?"	Doctoral students (N = 6)	Explored feelings associated with IP as experienced by six doctoral students in a higher education program	Semi-structured interview Focus group	First-semester coursework, participants' racial identity, and family expectations shaped impostor feelings.
Cusack et al. (2013) "Connecting gender and mental health" to imposter phenomenon feelings	Undergraduate students (N = 506)	Expanded on prior research on whether gender, mental health, perfectionism, test anxiety, and low self-esteem were significantly related to impostor feelings	Surveys CIPS General health questionnaire Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale 14-item Child And Adolescent Perfectionism Scale Test Anxiety Inventory-5	Women were significantly more likely to report impostor beliefs than men; mental health, perfectionism, and test anxiety were significantly related to impostor beliefs; low self-esteem was not related to IP
Hutchins (2015). "Outing the imposter phenomenon among higher education faculty"	Academic faculty (N = 61)	Examined the prevalence of faculty experiences of IP, how it affected their perceived emotional exhaustion, and their reported coping skills	Surveys CIPS BRIEF Cope Scale	Faculty did experience moderate levels of IP, with highest reported by untenured faculty; emotional exhaustion was positively related to IP
Hutchins & Rainbolt (2017)	Academic faculty (N = 16)	Examined the predicating events	Narratives	Incidents that provoked impostor

Author & Title	Sample (N)	Study Purpose	Data Collection Methods	Findings
"What triggers imposter phenomenon among academic faculty? A critical incident study exploring antecedents, coping, and development opportunities"		that trigger imposter tendencies among academic faculty, their applied coping skills at mitigating such experiences, and types of institutional resources that could support faculty struggling with IP		thoughts included questioning of expertise, comparison to colleagues, scholarly performance, handling successes; faculty viewed their imposter experiences as emotionally unsettling, disruptive, and creating adverse psychological (stress, anxiety) and work (avoiding opportunities, working harder, procrastination) outcomes
Hutchins et al. (2018) "What impostors risk at work: Exploring impostor phenomenon, stress coping, and job outcomes"	Academic faculty (N = 310)	Examined how IP contributes to emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction among university faculty	Surveys CIPS Brief COPE Scale Maslach Burnout Inventory Cammann et al.'s (1979) 3-item job satisfaction subscale from the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire	IP was positively related to emotional exhaustion; negatively related to job satisfaction
Lane (2015) "The imposter phenomenon among emerging adults transitioning into professional life: Developing a grounded theory"	18- to 25-year-olds who either were not enrolled in an educational program or were within 1 year of graduating from their respective programs (N = 29)	Explored IP among emerging adults who were transitioning into professional life	Qualitative surveys Follow-up interviews	79% indicated they experienced impostor feelings; perceived phoniness; minimization of achievement or praise; self-doubt; comparing self to others; high motivation and perfectionism; inability to self-validate; need for external praise
McClain et al. (2016) "An examination of the impact of racial and ethnic identity, impostor feelings, and	Undergraduate students (N = 218)	Examined ethnic identity, racial centrality, minority status stress, and impostor feelings	Surveys Multi-group ethnic identity measure Racial Centrality Subscale Minority Stress Scale	Ethnic identity was a significant positive predictor of mental health, whereas minority status stress and impostor feelings

Author & Title	Sample (N)	Study Purpose	Data Collection Methods	Findings
minority status stress on the mental health of Black college students"		as predictors of mental health	Mental Health Inventory CIPS	were significant negative predictors
McEnery (2014) "Female doctoral students' experiences of the impostor phenomenon: An exploration of narratives"	Doctoral students (N = 4)	Explored female doctoral students' experience of IP	Narrative	Striving for perfection; tendency to avoid asking for assistance; concerns about how others—particularly authority figures—may perceive them; generally discounting compliments and praise; experienced an overall sense of feeling different than peers; strived for internal self to be consistent with external self; family influences
McLean (2017) "The impostor syndrome: An obstacle to women's pursuit of power"	Undergraduate students (N = 437)	Examined whether impostorism heightened sensitivity to negative feedback, resulting in less persistence (i.e., higher rates of attrition) and lower graduate school aspirations when striving for higher education, and whether that was particularly true for women.	Surveys CIPS Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale Mindset Scale	Impostorism was negatively related to self-esteem and to graduate school aspirations and positively related to beliefs that intelligence is fixed; women reported stronger impostorism than men; those with stronger impostorism reported weaker graduate school aspirations
Neureiter & Traut-Mattausch (2016) "An inner barrier to career development: Preconditions of the impostor phenomenon and consequences for career development"	Sales and security employees at an international airport (N = 110)	Investigated how impostor feelings are related to the fear of failure, fear of success, self-esteem, and career-development aspects, career planning, career striving, and the motivation to lead	Surveys German CIPS Hamburg Motivation to Lead Inventory Single-Item Self-Esteem Scale	Fear of success was the strongest predictor of impostor feelings

Author & Title	Sample (N)	Study Purpose	Data Collection Methods	Findings
Rackley (2018) "Examining the role of impostor phenomenon in the college experience"	Undergraduate students (N = 521)	Tested the fit of the hypothesized conceptual model that explained the relationships of student-faculty interactions, gender stigma consciousness, and attributional style predicting IP, and impostorism in turn predicting students' well-being, sense of belonging, and GPA	Surveys Student-Professor Interaction Scale Social Identity Attitudes Scale Causal Dimension Scale CIPS Well-Being Subscale of the Mental Health Inventory Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale	Perceived approachability of professors and the controllability of causes for academic success contributed to IP; social interactions with academic gatekeepers fueled women's impostor fears
Sanford et al. (2015) "Finding courage and confirmation: Resisting impostor feelings through relationships with mentors, romantic partners, and other women in leadership"	Women mentors made up of educators, law enforcement officers, lawyers, and executives (N = 29)	Explored how successful women discuss the presence of IP in their lives and how women in leadership resist feelings of fraudulence	Survey and semi-structured interviews Survey was a 96-question Likert-scale survey based upon the book *Lean In* CIPS	Impostor feelings originated from a lack of experience or youth and not giving oneself credit for personal success; impostor feelings had hurt the careers of the women interviewed in career advancement, self-worth, and honest communication with co-workers; IP feelings were resisted by turning to mentors, other women in leadership, or romantic partners
Stone et al. (2018) "Learning while Black: A culturally informed model of the impostor phenomenon for Black graduate students"	Black graduate students (N = 12)	Explored the academic experiences of Black graduate students attending predominantly White universities and to what extent these experiences aligned with Clance & Imes's (1978) construct of IP	Focus groups	Inductive thematic analysis revealed five themes: awareness of low racial representation, questioning intelligence, expectations, psychosocial costs, and explaining success externally
Studdard (2002)	Doctoral students	Explored how impostorism	Qualitative interviews	Participants experienced

Author & Title	Sample (N)	Study Purpose	Data Collection Methods	Findings
"Behind the mask of success and excellence: Impostorism and women doctoral students"	(N = 11)	shaped the graduate experience for women doctoral students		impostorism that was manifested as: feelings of fraudulence, fear of discovery, and feelings of inadequacy; new endeavors, the classroom setting, and evaluative situations intensified instances of impostorism
Tao & Gloria (2019) "Should I stay or should I go? The role of impostorism in STEM persistence"	Female STEM-related doctoral students (N = 224)	Examined the association between impostorism and graduate student self-efficacy, perceptions of the research-training environment, and attitudes toward academic persistence	Surveys CIPS Persistence/Voluntary Dropout Decision Scale Graduate Student Self-Efficacy Scale Research Training Environment Scale	Found a significant negative association between impostorism and perceptions of graduate student self-efficacy, the research training environment, and persistence attitudes

Impostor Feelings and Identity

One of the main themes from previous research on the impostor phenomenon centers on identity, including racial, gender, and professional identity (Badawy et al., 2018; Cohen & McConnell, 2019; Cokley et al., 2015; Hutchins & Rainbolt, 2017; Lane, 2015; McClain et al., 2016; Rackley, 2018; Stone et al., 2018). These studies explored the presence of impostor feelings at different times in an individual's life, with a focus on undergraduate and graduate students, and professionals.

Badawy et al. (2018) examined the effect of gender and the impostor phenomenon on anxiety, effort, and performance. Their first study was conducted with 268 undergraduate students at a public university in the northeastern United States. The participants were tasked with completing five Graduate Record Examination (GRE)-style questions. They were randomly

assigned to receive positive or negative feedback, and then completed another set of five questions. Following the completion of these questions, they received actual feedback on their performance. The second study involved 250 participants who were informed they would be answering sample GRE questions; however, in this study, they were told who would be viewing their performance. The participants were randomly assigned to a high-accountability group, with their performance being shared with a professor of the management class in which they were enrolled, or a low-accountability group whose performance would be shared with a random stranger. The impostor phenomenon was measured using the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale.

Badawy et al. (2018) found that females reported stronger impostor feelings in both studies. They found that males experienced higher anxiety, while females demonstrated higher effort and performed better when faced with negative feedback. Much of this study focused on how males who identify with gender norms may be more vulnerable to negative feedback and require more support in academic and workplace environments by explaining away a woman's ability to try harder and risk failure due to gendered expectations of poor performance on competence-based tests (Badawy et al., 2018). While this research may enhance understanding of men's impostor experiences, it is a very good example of how and why the impostor phenomenon persists in women. Even though the women in the study excelled in the face of negative feedback and performed better, the focus remained on the men who did not, furthering the notion that men need more support around in their academic and career aspirations than women. The authors did, however, note that organizations should work to suppress impostor tendencies in both male and female employees.

Cokley et al. (2018) examined the roles of gender stigma consciousness, the impostor phenomenon, and academic self-concept among undergraduate students in a psychology class in the southwestern United States. Pinel (1999) defined *gender stigma consciousness* as the extent to which one is aware of their gendered stereotypes. Using the Social Identity Attitudes Scale, the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale, the Academic Self-Concept Scale, and the Disengagement Subscale, Cokley et al. (2018) found that gender stigma consciousness was positively related to the impostor phenomenon and that the relationship was stronger among women than men. These findings highlight the societal impacts on a woman's sense of self. Similarly, Cokley et al. (2015) found a significant relationship between the impostor phenomenon and GPA. Women who had high impostor phenomenon (IP) scores were likely to work harder and be more engaged in school, leading to positive outcomes such as higher grades, Cokley et al. (2015) noted that their findings have possible implications for women's career choices. They also align with Clance and Imes's (1978) study, which discussed how women experiencing the impostor phenomenon will work hard to cover up their incompetence. That is, their hard work pays off in the form of good grades and allows them to cover up their perceived stupidity (p. 244).

Cohen and McConnell (2019) examined the relationship between the perceived characteristics of graduate school program environments and students' impostor feelings. The authors argued that the impostor phenomenon should be interpreted as a social process based on prior research (e.g., Clance & Imes, 1978) suggesting that women are socialized to believe they are incapable of professional success. Using results from the Graduate Student Stress and Coping (GSSC) Survey, which includes questions about impostor feelings, mental health, healthcare services use, and academic and social experiences in graduate school, Cohen and McConnell

(2019) found that students studying arts and humanities reported the greatest average impostor scores, whereas students in public health reported the lowest scores. They found that students who perceived greater competition for funding reported higher impostor scores and that increased perceived isolation from students and faculty corresponded to higher impostor scores. Cohen and McConnell's study did not provide the demographics of the participant pool, so the percentage of women to men surveyed is unknown, though they did indicate that the study institution had a majority White student population. It would have been valuable to know whether participants' feelings were experienced equally among male and female students, considering that prior research has shown that women have different social experiences than men in academia (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). Sadker and Sadker (1994) noted that "women who have spent years learning the lessons of silence in elementary, secondary, and college classrooms have trouble regaining their voices" (p. 10). It is easy to understand how this silence becomes internalized and allows a woman to experience impostor feelings.

Rackley (2018) examined the impostor phenomenon among undergraduates and its impact on their college experience. By investigating social and individual factors that influence impostor feelings, Rackley sought to explore if student-faculty interactions, gender stigma consciousness, and attributional style predicted college students' experiences of the impostor phenomenon; whether the impostor phenomenon predicted students' college experiences; and whether any of these relationships differed by student gender. The sample included 521 undergraduate students, predominantly female (66.6%), from a large public university in the southwestern United States. Rackley found that perceived professor approachability contributed to the impostor phenomenon, especially for the women in the sample. Higher impostor feelings led to a lower sense of belonging and a lower feeling of well-being. As Rackley reported,

"Women who perceived their professors as more approachable experienced lower impostorism, and in turn reported a greater sense of belonging" (p. 102).

The impostor phenomenon literature has also explored racial and ethnic identity. McClain et al. (2016) examined whether ethnic identity, racial centrality, minority status stress, and impostor feelings predicted mental health. Minority status stress relates to stressors that minority students experience as a result of racism, discrimination, insensitive comments, and questions of belonging on campus (McClain et al., 2016, p. 102). The authors noted that these stressors caused an increase in mood and anxiety disorders among Black college students. The participants in this study were recruited in 2010 from a university conference at a large southwestern university; 12 universities were represented at the conference and were located in the western, southwestern, and midwestern United States. The researchers found a positive correlation between minority status stress and the impostor phenomenon, which were negatively related to mental health. McClain et al. (2016) reported that "individuals with higher impostor feelings scored lower in mental health" (p. 109). The findings suggested strongly that minority stress status and impostor feelings can be a significant psychological burden on college students. The authors noted that their study was completed at a university conference on the topic of Black student government, which might have skewed their results. Yet, one could argue that as members of student government, the participants were leaders on campus and still experiencing the effects of minority stress status and impostor feelings.

Stone et al. (2018) facilitated a focus group of 12 graduate students who were recruited from primarily White institutions in the southwestern United States. These students identified as Black and/or African American, and consisted of eight females and four males. Five themes emerged from the data: low racial representation; a questioning of intelligence by oneself,

university peers, and faculty; family and self-imposed expectations; psychosocial costs of racial isolation within the program; a need to disprove stereotypes; and a need to explain their success externally through faith, social support, or rechanneled oppression. Stone et al.'s finding of low racial representation was not noted in Clance and Imes (1978), and provides another way of understanding impostor feelings. Being one of a few Black students in a learning environment can lead to feelings of non-belonging (Stone et al., 2018) and can increase impostor feelings.

The transition from college to professional life is another area of interest in the impostor phenomenon literature. Hutchins and Rainbolt (2017) applied Kegan's and Erikson's identity theories to explore faculty experiences in the development of their professional self, focusing on the impostor phenomenon in the context of identity development. Hutchins and Rainbolt found that scholarly productivity, such as is expected early in a tenure-track role, triggered feelings of impostorism. In addition, many faculty reported that these feelings persisted due to the continual pressure to demonstrate their expertise. Comparing oneself to colleagues and internalizing successes, such as promotions, led to impostor feelings among academic faculty.

Hutchins and Rainbolt (2017) looked at coping approaches used by the faculty in their study to work through their impostorism. They found that women relied more on social support to understand their experiences, positive self-talk, regular exercise, and the recognition of success in other areas of their life (pp. 205–206). This use of social support by women was not surprising, since it reinforced the commonly accepted notion that women's development differs from that of men (Gilligan, 1982; Belenky et al., 1986) and that women focus more on relationship and responsibility.

Similarly, Lane (2015) focused on professional identity, exploring the impostor phenomenon among 29 emerging adults who were transitioning into professional life. This study

incorporated into a survey a passage from a fictional narrative about an individual experiencing the impostor phenomenon in a professional setting. Several of the survey questions pertained to the narrative, with the remainder asking about the participant's professional or academic identity, primary profession, and whether they could relate to the experience of the fictional narrative. Follow-up interviews were conducted to probe participants' individual impostor experiences. A central theme emerged from the data related to impostor feelings stimulated by comparison; this included witnessing peers succeed, interacting with others on group projects, and speculating about others (Lane, 2015). Some of the participants in the study felt that their impostor feelings would lessen over time as they gained professional experience.

In all of the preceding studies, participants felt as though they were something other than the norm. Whether these feelings related to racial identity (McClain et al., 2016; Stone et al., 2018), gender identity (Badawy et al., 2018; Cohen & McConnell, 2019; Cokley et al., 2015; Rackley, 2018), or professional identity (Hutchins & Rainbolt, 2017; Lane, 2015), the study participants experienced self-doubt and impostor feelings because they felt that they were inferior or substandard (Miller, 1986).

Competing Commitments and Perfectionist Tendencies

Another common theme in the impostor phenomenon literature centers on competing commitments and perfectionist tendencies (Cokley et al., 2018; Craddock et al., 2011; Cusack et al., 2013; McEnery, 2014; Studdard, 2002). I grouped these findings under one theme because there appears to be a connection to what Clance and Imes (1978) referred to as "superwoman tendencies," as discussed previously.

Cokley et al. (2018) explored perfectionism and impostorism among undergraduate students in a psychology class at a university in the southwestern United States. Using surveys,

they gathered data about the demographics of the participants, their self-esteem, and their impostor phenomenon scale score. The study findings showed that those who had impostor feelings doubted their abilities due to the high standards they set for themselves. Those with perfectionist tendencies may have had increased feelings of impostorism. The results indicated a strong correlation between discrepancy and maladaptive perfectionism. As Cokley et al. (2018) described, "Maladaptive perfectionism involves a discrepancy, or mismatch between having high standards and the degree to which those standards are reached" (p. 295). The authors noted, however, that their findings were based on self-reporting and may be subject to skewed interpretations on the part of the participants.

A study involving 506 college students found that women exhibited greater impostor beliefs than men, and that there were connections between the impostor phenomenon and mental health, perfectionism, and test anxiety (Cusack et al., 2013). In this study, Cusack et al. (2013) hypothesized that gender, mental health, perfectionism, test anxiety, and self-esteem would predict impostor scores. They found that all but self-esteem were significant predictors of the impostor phenomenon. These results reflect Clance's (1985) discussion of the concept of the superwoman, driven to be perfect in all areas of her life. Moreover, the suggestion that mental health is a predictor of the impostor phenomenon raises concerns. One could argue that living with the impostor phenomenon causes feelings of low self-worth and can lead to burnout and depression, though it is difficult to determine whether the impostor phenomenon exists before the mental health symptoms. In addition, perfectionist tendencies among those with impostor feeling were identified in Clance and Imes's (1978) study, whose findings continue to be supported by current impostor phenomenon research.

As women transition into higher level academic programs and experience increased competition, they are often forced to juggle multiple roles as student and employee, and possibly parent. Managing the demands of these multiple obligations may lead to feelings of failure or self-doubt. Researchers studying the graduate school environment have investigated the presence of the impostor phenomenon and how it impacts persistence and outcomes for graduate students. Two of these studies focused primarily on women's experiences (McEnery, 2014; Studdard, 2002). Both McEnery (2014) and Studdard (2002) completed their research as part of their doctoral studies, using forms of qualitative research. Studdard was interested in how impostorism shaped the behaviors and graduate experiences for women doctoral students. Utilizing a qualitative approach and applying feminist theory and women's development theory, she found that the women in her study experienced pain and stress, and felt as if they did not measure up. They constantly compared themselves to others and questioned their own abilities.

For the participants in Studdard's (2002) study, new tasks created feelings of impostorism, since these represented times for which participants had no frame of reference. Times of evaluation and criticism increased impostor feelings for the participants, in addition to writing tasks. In reviewing these situations, it becomes clear that feelings of impostorism increased during times of uncertainty. Three of the participants discussed their competing commitments as mother, student, and employee. The participants experienced limits to their education based on gender roles. For example, one participant shared that she was questioned about her marital status when she inquired about a doctoral program, implying that she would not have time for her education if she were a wife. Studdard's research offers insight into the narratives of women who live with the impostor phenomenon, helping to illuminate the ways the

impostor phenomenon impacts the decisions a woman makes and the societal demands that are placed on her in the graduate school environment.

McEnery (2014) used narrative inquiry as a way of understanding how women in doctoral programs experience the impostor phenomenon. The sample size for this study was small, comprising four women, and therefore, as the author noted, the results are not generalizable. McEnery noted that, though there were themes within the study that supported Clance & Imes's (1978) findings, she focused on other themes such as (1) an overall sense of feeling different than their peers, whether from life experience or struggling to fit in with their chosen field; (2) the pursuit of careers outside of academia, careers in the corporate world, or applied practice as their experiences within academia fuel impostor experiences; (3) a desire for one's internal self to be consistent with one's external self, to remain authentic and retain one's true self; (4) gender in the academic environment, as the participants experienced discourse around the male-dominated research culture in academia; and (5) gaining an understanding of the benefits of a trusted mentor within the program helping to facilitate the doctoral process.

Similarly, McEnery (2014) found that women struggled with competing commitments. One participant in the study expressed feeling that school and work came at the expense of raising a family. For another participant, being a parent added to a feeling of otherness and a lack of belonging, increasing her feelings of impostorism. Another participant indicated that her competing commitment was that of being a daughter, struggling to balance her mother's expectations. Facing challenges associated with family expectations has been a common theme in the impostor phenomenon literature since Clance and Imes's (1978) study. Whether these expectations are internal (i.e., perceived expectations) or external (i.e., the need to manage multiple obligations), family expectations have been shown to impact feelings of impostorism.

Craddock et al. (2011) employed a case study approach to explore the impostor phenomenon in a small group of doctoral students. Within this sample of six (three males and three females), there were similarities to the Studdard's (2002) and McEnery's (2014) studies. For example, Craddock et al. (2011) found that family expectations increased impostor feelings. The expectation to achieve academic success triggered perfectionist behaviors and a fear of failure. In addition, increased familial and career obligations led to increased impostor feelings.

The common theme in the studies highlighted in this section is that women often balance multiple obligations, trying to be perfect for those in these spaces and to live up to internal and external expectations, leading to feelings of doubt and impostorism. Significant impacts result from attempts to manage these competing commitments, as discussed in the following section.

Internal and External Impacts of the Impostor Phenomenon

Previous impostor phenomenon research has focused on the impacts of living with feelings of self-doubt and impostorism (Hutchins, 2015; Hutchins et al., 2018; McLean, 2017; Neureiter & Traut-Mattausch, 2016; Sanford et al., 2015; Tao & Gloria, 2019). These studies have primarily examined if and how impostor feelings impact women's persistence, career advancement, and mental status.

A particular area of interest has been women who pursue career paths historically dominated by men. Tao and Gloria (2019) looked at persistence and self-efficacy in women in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) programs and found that women were more likely to complete their doctorates in a timely fashion when there were other women in the program. Their study included 224 women at a university in the midwestern United States. Using the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS), the Persistence/Voluntary Dropout Decision Scale, the Graduate Student Self-Efficacy Scale, and the Research Training Environment Scale,

they found a significant negative association between impostorism and perceptions of graduate student self-efficacy, the research training environment, and persistence attitudes (Tao & Gloria, 2019). The study showed that there was increased persistence when participants perceived ample opportunities to engage in research with peers and mentors. Increased persistence was correlated with a greater representation of women. Notably, the link between impostor feelings and persistence was stronger in the group with the higher percentage of women. Tao and Gloria suggested that perhaps the women in these groups experienced cognitive dissonance and wondered what was wrong with them for feeling this way. However, the study was limited because there was no explanation for the outcome of the results; the research would have benefitted from a qualitative component to improve the understanding of these outcomes.

McLean (2017) conducted a similar study, examining whether impostorism heightened sensitivity to negative feedback, resulting in less persistence (i.e., higher rates of attrition) and lower graduate school aspirations when striving for higher education, and whether that was particularly true for women. The participants in this study included 664 university students, of which 72.7% were women. The CIPS, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and the Mindset Scale were used as measurement tools. The study findings showed that the female participants reported stronger impostorism than men, though within this participant group, negative feedback reduced graduate school aspirations among women. While this is concerning, the outcomes of the study showed that, regardless of feedback, the male participants were less likely to aspire to graduate school. McLean's general findings support the conclusion that impostor feelings can impact a person's future career and academic success.

In Sanford et al.'s (2015) study of 29 women in leadership positions, the participants attributed their impostor feelings to youth or a lack of experience, and not giving themselves

credit for personal successes. The study explored how successful women discussed the presence of the impostor phenomenon in their lives, and how women leaders resisted feelings of fraudulence. Through surveys and interviews, the authors found that impostor feelings negatively impacted the careers of women in three areas: career advancement, self-worth, and communication with coworkers (Sanford et al., 2015). The women in this study reported that they second-guessed their abilities and self-worth for promotions and leadership positions. The results also showed, however, that participants gained courage and confirmation from mentors and partners to resist impostor feelings. According to Sanford et al. (2015), "The women in our study who lacked impostor feelings admitted that experience helped them gain confidence" (p. 39). Indeed, this theme of the countervailing influence of experience offers hope for women who live with the impostor phenomenon.

Hutchins (2015) investigated the impostor phenomenon among academic faculty, offering insights into how the phenomenon manifests itself within the context of workplace and career. According to the study results, faculty did experience moderate levels of the impostor phenomenon, and emotional exhaustion was positively related to the phenomenon. It is important to explore this connection further using narratives to understand how burnout manifests in women with impostor phenomenon and to explore the strategies that may be used to counteract these feelings.

In their qualitative study, Hutchins et al. (2018) used conservation of resources theory to explore the relationship between the impostor phenomenon and emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction among university faculty. This theory "…suggests people will seek to develop and stockpile resources to offset future possible losses, but when under stress, people will act to conserve and protect their remaining resources" (Hutchins et al., 2018, p. 33). Their findings

suggest that those who experience high levels of impostor feelings "deplete critical resources needed to avoid psychological strain in part because of their use of avoidant coping strategies, and in how their experience of emotional exhaustion contributes to low job satisfaction" (p. 31).

Neureiter and Traut-Mattausch (2016) also sought to understand the impostor phenomenon in relation to career development. They conducted one study with 212 university students—70% of whom were female—using the German translation of the CIPS, the German version of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, vignettes that described scenarios in the work context, and the German version of Gould's Career Management Scale. Their findings revealed a high fear of failure in university students, low motivation to lead among those with impostor feelings, and less career planning and motivation. Using the same measures that were used as in the first study, Neureiter and Traut-Mattausch's second study was conducted with 110 employees at an international airport in Germany. They found that fear of success was the strongest predictor of impostor feelings. The researchers noted, "As impostor feelings make it hard to plan a career, for students as well as for working professionals, it is particularly important to take the impostor phenomenon into account when thinking about career-development processes" (p. 12). This connection with fear of success recalls Horner's (1972) findings, which highlighted that there has been little substantial change in women's relationships to success over time.

To better understand how women make sense of their impostor feelings, I turned to theories of adult development. In the following section, I discuss women's development as framed by Gilligan (1982/1993) in an effort to illuminate how women connect to others and extends the care of others to the care of self and in connecting women's impostor feelings to the broader context of gender and power. I then present constructive-developmental theory as a way

to understand how a woman's way of making meaning of impostor feelings and experiences may become more complex over time and allow for the impostor phenomenon to become object, allowing her to reflect on her impostor feelings instead of being controlled by them.

Women's Development

The first theory for exploring a woman's development was proposed by Carol Gilligan in 1979. With a background in psychology and feminism, Gilligan focusses her research on the ways women talk about their lives, the language they use, and the connections they make. Her early work provided a means of understanding women's development which had not been considered before then. Previous models of development attempted to fit women into existing models of human growth which were based on the development of men (Gilligan, 1982/1993).

Gilligan (1982/1993) worked with Lawrence Kohlberg in the early 1970s studying moral development and found that his research "was blind to the particularities of voice and the inevitable constructions that constitute point of view" (p. xviii). She felt that by adopting a man's life as the norm, Kohlberg's work was subject to observational bias (Gilligan, 1979), and that therefore there was an imbalance in understanding human development.

In her book *In a Different Voice*, Gilligan (1982/1993) detailed three different studies she conducted. The first study, the "college student study," explored identity and moral development in the early adult years, and found that women were uncertain about their right to make moral statements and were subject to judgments made by the men who supported them. The second study, the "abortion study," looked at the relation between experience and thought, and the role of conflict in development. The results showed that women experienced a conflict between the self and other. The last study discussed in her book was the "rights and responsibilities study," in which Gilligan collected data about participants' conceptions of self and morality, experiences of

moral conflict and choice, and judgments of hypothetical moral dilemmas. The data revealed that women experienced tension between taking responsibility for themselves and their responsibility for others. Gilligan (1982/1993) wrote, "Describing a life lived in response, guided by the perception of others' needs, they can see no way of exercising control without risking an assertion that seems selfish and hence morally dangerous" (p. 143). Gilligan's findings illuminated that women's development is more relational and more about connection than separation. As Gilligan stated,

> Male and female voices typically speak of the importance of different truths, the former of the role of separation as it defines and empowers the self, the latter of the ongoing process of attachment that creates and sustains the human community. (p. 156)

Gilligan also discussed in her book the changes in women's rights and their impact on women's moral judgements. The feminist movement helped women notice that the notion of care extended to care of the self, that women were worthy of equality, and that there was a way to be in the world with others while also being there for themselves.

Understanding women's development provides a foundation for exploring the multiple life experiences of women—such as childhood, marriage, and career—which elicit feelings of self-doubt and impostorism. To understand how women internalize and make meaning of these experiences, I turned to constructive-developmental theory.

Constructive-Developmental Theory

Among the many lenses that can be used to examine the impostor phenomenon within the context of adult learning and development, constructive-developmental theory, as first posited by Kegan (1982, 1994), is particularly beneficial. According to Kegan, adult development is rooted in how individuals create meaning from their experiences and how they evolve as they make

sense of those experiences and their interactions with others. The application of constructive-developmental theory to the impostor experiences of women provides a basis for exploring these experiences over time.

Constructive-developmental theory centers on how people make meaning about themselves and their place in the world around them across the lifespan, but particularly during adulthood. Since, according to Clance (1985), the impostor phenomenon begins in childhood and persists through life, constructive developmental theory offers a framework for exploring how women develop in relationship to their impostor feelings, to examine the impostor phenomenon at the different stages of a woman's life, and to consider how she makes meaning of the situations that trigger her impostor feelings. Women experience the impostor phenomenon in multiple domains of their life—in the context of friendships, familial relationships, motherhood, career, and school (Clance, 1985)—and have been living with impostor feelings for at least the past 40 years. Examining a woman's experiences through a constructive developmental lens provides a different way of understanding persistence of impostorism in a woman's life. Drago-Severson (2014) maintained that "a person's way of knowing shapes how she understands her responsibilities as a learner, parent, partner, and worker" (p. 3). Constructive-developmental theory offers a new perspective on a woman's experience with the impostor phenomenon as her ways of knowing expand and grow. As Kegan (1982) wrote, the theory

> studies the relationship of the organism to the environment (what biologists call "adaptation"), the relationship of the self to the other (what biologists call the "ego"), and the relationship of the subject to the object (what philosophers call "truth"). (p. 293)

Evolutionary Truces

Kegan's (1982) constructive-developmental framework comprises five stages, or evolutionary truces. The first stage is the impulsive self. This stage typically occurs in early childhood and manifests in the child's acting on their impulses. Stage 2 is the instrumental self, when the individual becomes aware that "things no longer just happen in the world…. I now have something to do with what happens" (Kegan, 1982, pp. 89–90). Stage 3 represents the interpersonal or social phase of development in which one is concerned with their needs and is strongly influenced by how others see them. The individual is both concerned with interpersonal relationships and subject to them, making them less able to reflect objectively on these relationships. In Stage 4, the individual is better able to reflect on their interpersonal relationships and establish their own identity, separate from the identity that others have assigned them. Kegan (1982) stated, "A strength of this is the person's new capacity for independence, to own herself, rather than having all the pieces of herself owned by various shared contexts" (p. 101). If one reaches Stage 5, they can have their own identity while remaining open to the ideas and identities of others. They are in a place where there can consider alternate ideas. Table 3 outlines each stage, or evolutionary truce (Kegan, 1982), and how the impostor phenomenon may present at each stage.

Table 3

Kegan's (1982) Evolutionary Truces and Their Relationship to the Imposter Phenomenon

Stage, or Evolutionary Truce	Impostor Phenomenon Manifestations
Stage 1: Impulsive (infancy/early childhood)	• Childhood experiences can lead to messages about the importance of being smart • Talents and achievements are atypical of parents and siblings • Families saw them differently than the way the world saw them • Believe their families thought their accomplishments were unimportant or unimpressive
Stage 2: Imperial (childhood to adolescence) • Oriented toward rules • Subject to own wishes and desires • Unable to take the perspective of others	• Impostor cycle and unnatural kind of frenzied, excessive hard work usually comes from ever-present fear of failure and need to be special • In order to be loved, one must live up to family expectations
Stage 3: Interpersonal (post-adolescence) • Oriented toward the views of others • Can take perspective of own needs, but leans toward pleasing others	• Fear of failure: takes drastic measures not to err or to appear foolish in front of others • Fear of success: for many women, a high level of success may interfere with their relationships • Concern about separation and rejection • Tries very hard to please others • Goes to great efforts to care for people and protect them, and to make sure their feelings are never hurt
Stage 4: Institutional (variable) • Oriented toward own judgments and values • Does not view conflict as a threat to relationships	• Ability to see impostor feelings as separate from the self • Impostor phenomenon becomes object ("I know it exists, but I am not defined by it")
Stage 5: Inter-individual (typically after 40, if achieved) • Constant exploration of roles • Not tied to one identity • Self-transforming	• Multiple roles can co-exist ("I can be wife, mother, employee, without having to be perfect in all roles")

Within the stages of development, Kegan (1982) described the existence of "holding environments," or "psychosocial environments which hold us (with which we are fused) and

which let us go (from which we differentiate)" (p. 116). As Kegan explained, people experience multiple holding environments in their lives, and how one is held in these environments impacts their ability to move to the next stage. It is particularly important to consider the holding environment as it pertains to women living with the impostor phenomenon. After all, a woman is never just a woman. She is a product of her environment, which consists of those around her, her culture, and her relationships: "The person is more than an individual" (Kegan, 1982, p. 116).

Kegan (1982) also described the holding environment as a "culture of embeddedness," phrasing that might be easier to understand in the context of the impostor phenomenon, as a woman becomes embedded in a world where she is cycling through multiple psychosocial environments (e.g., school, work, family), domains which are themselves embedded in different cultures; in turn, these cultures become a function of how she makes meaning of the world around her (Kegan, 1982). Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2012) described the three functions of a holding environment: (1) to hold well, so that it meets the person where they are and accepts how they make sense of their experience; (2) to allow for letting go by challenging the person to grow beyond their current way of knowing; and (3) to provide continuity and stability.

Women often experience internal challenges that hinder their ability to establish a stable holding environment, including low self-esteem, fear of failure, fear of loss, and high levels of self-doubt (Clance & Imes, 1978). Because these internal challenges are experienced by women living with impostor feelings, understanding how women make sense of these challenges—and perhaps even develop a relationship to them—fosters a developmental perspective onto the impostor phenomenon which illuminates a woman's changing capacities.

To illustrate these changing capacities, Kegan (1982) used the image of a helix to demonstrate people's "movement" in their struggle to balance the tensions of growth and development. He described this helix as "a continual moving back and forth between resolving the tension slightly in the favor of autonomy, at one stage, in the favor of inclusion, at the next" (Kegan, 1982, p. 108). Importantly, Kegan stressed that this model does not favor the notion of separation and autonomy (typically considered in relation to men's development), but includes integration (typically associated with women's development), suggesting that this model of adult development is inclusive of men and women. Given that the impostor phenomenon is known to impact women more intensely and more often than men (Badawy et al., 2018; Barr-Walker et al., 2019; Cusack et al., 2013; McLean, 2017), using Kegan's model of adult development allows for a better understanding of how a woman grows and develops since it does not aim to fit women into a theory of male development.

Kegan's (1982, 1994) work was influenced by that of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg. Drawing on Piaget, Kegan explored the ways people construct meaning in the physical world around them. Piaget's work focused on children and the subject-object balance of cognitive development, finding that children are subject to the perceptions of how the world is physically organized (Kegan, 1982). Kegan believed that the subject-object relationship continues in adulthood: "That which is 'object' we can look at, take responsibility for, reflect upon, exercise control over, and integrate with some other way of knowing. That which is 'subject' we are run by, identified with, fused with, at the effect of" (Kegan, 2000, p. 53). He went on to explain,

> When a way of knowing moves from a place where we are "had by it" to a place where we "have it" and can be in relationship to it, the form of our knowing has become more complex, more expansive. (pp. 53–54)

In addition to this subject-object integration, constructive-development theory incorporates the ways one socially constructs their place in the world. To clarify this relationship, Kegan (1982) extended Kohlberg's study of moral development which examined the development of social and moral meaning making, that is, one's sense of right and wrong. Kohlberg considered how one makes sense of the social world; within his moral stages, one begins with an egocentric view, with no consideration for the interests of others, and progresses through six stages to a place of respect for the perspective of others (Kegan, 1982). In combining the ideas of Piaget and Kohlberg, Kegan created an integrated framework of adult development.

Gap in the Literature

Research has shown that one's racial, gender, and professional identity impact impostor feelings and that competing commitments and perfectionist tendencies contribute to the impostor phenomenon. Research has revealed other impacts of impostorism such as emotional exhaustion and decreased persistence. Most studies to date have been conducted with college students and current professionals. However, few, if any, studies have addressed the life experiences of women who live with self-doubt and impostor feelings over the lifespan, creating a significant gap in the imposter phenomenon literature. This gap in the knowledge base makes clear the need for further research in this area. Exploring how women make meaning of their impostor phenomenon throughout life will contribute significantly to the literature about adult development and growth.

Drago-Severson (2016) stated, “The greater perspective that we can take on ourselves, others, our relationships and larger systems, the better we are able to manage complexity and also give back to others” (p. 67). Examining women’s experiences of the impostor phenomenon from a constructive-developmental perspective can offer substantive insights into the ways in which a woman can grow in relation to her feelings of impostorism and whether she can manage the complexity of these feelings. The inclusion of women’s development theory in this research offered a critical foundation for exploring the multiple life experiences of women, such as childhood, marriage, career, etc., eliciting feelings of self-doubt and impostorism. The use of these two theories in partnership with one another provided an opportunity to understand the impostor phenomenon from the outside in, fostering an appreciation of the internalization of external influences on women and how they make meaning of these experiences.

Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature around impostorism, including a definition and description of the impostor phenomenon. I discussed the theories that guided my study: constructive-developmental theory and women’s developmental theory. Finally, I discussed the gap in the literature and how this study advances the understanding of women’s experience of the impostor phenomenon over the lifespan.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative interview study was to explore the lived experiences of the impostor phenomenon in women over the age of 60 across their lifespans in order to gain a better understanding of their life transitions and the inner world of the impostor phenomenon. The research question that guided this study was: How do women over the age of sixty reflect on a life in relationship to the impostor phenomenon?

Study Design

I conducted a qualitative interview study grounded in constructivist epistemology. Given my interest in understanding women's relationship to the impostor phenomenon, using a qualitative design offered the space to explore how the participants made meaning of their feelings within the social constructs they inhabited. The Listening Guide method of psychological analysis (Gilligan, 2015) provided the foundation for discovering the multilayered experiences of the women I interviewed. Gilligan (2015) described the Listening Guide as

> a way of analyzing qualitative interviews that is best used when one's question requires listening to particular aspects of a person's expression of her or his own complex and multilayered individual experiences and the relational and cultural contexts within which they occur. (p. 169)

The Listening Guide method is described in more detail in the data analysis section.

Qualitative Research

I selected a qualitative research methodology for this study because I was concerned with understanding women's experiences and the impact of those experiences on their impostor phenomena. Qualitative research seeks to enhance understanding of a particular phenomenon or experience, instead of predicting or controlling for a specific variable. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) wrote that "qualitative design is focused on understanding given social settings, not necessarily making predictions about those settings" (p. 385). In addition, my qualitative approach was inductive since I held no preconceived notions entering this research. Qualitative research allows for social and educational researchers to describe, interpret, and explain human experience (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) without controlling for particular variables. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), "The qualitative research approach demands that the world be examined with the assumption that nothing is trivial, that everything has the potential of being a clue that might unlock a more comprehensive understanding of what is being studied" (p. 5). By approaching this study qualitatively, I was able to explore women's life experiences as a way to understand their feelings of impostorism. As Merriam and Simpson (1995) maintained, "The key philosophical assumption upon which all types of qualitative research are based, is the view that reality is constructed by individuals in interaction with their social worlds" (p. 97).

My qualitative study design allowed for a naturalistic inquiry into understanding women's feelings of self-doubt and impostorism by looking at the whole picture, including women's relationships within the systems they inhabited. Utilizing an interpretive philosophical framework, I could more fully explore and comprehend how a woman's reality was socially constructed.

Interpretivist Approach

I adopted an interpretive lens for this research. Though, as Merriam and Tisdell (2015) noted, "constructivism is a term often used interchangeably with interpretivism" (p. 9), for the purposes of this study, I use *interpretivist*. I sought to explore how women interpreted and made sense of their impostor phenomenon experiences in the worlds they lived in, and how the wider social environments impacted these understandings (Grbich, 2013). The goal of this interpretive approach was to understand why and how the impostor phenomenon was present and to make sense of these experiences from each participant's point of view (Tracy, 2013). From an interpretivist perspective, reality is socially constructed. Glesne (2016) explained, "The ontological belief that tends to accompany interpretive traditions, therefore, portrays a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever changing" (p. 9). Numerous interactions with other people, environments, and ideas impact one's experience. As Johnson-Bailey (2003) shared, "Basically, stories exist on several levels—the macro through the micro—which include the community, regional, national, cultural, and individual" (p. 126). Using this approach allowed me to understand the stories of the participants on multiple levels, within the family unit, the academic and professional milieu, and on a broader societal scale. While each individual shared a story similar to the other participants, her experience was unique to her.

Because the subject of this study was the experience of the impostor phenomenon by women over the age of 60 across the lifespan, employing an interpretivist approach helped me understand how the participants made meaning of their experiences. It allowed me to conduct an in-depth inquiry into women's experiences of the impostor phenomenon and to gain insights into how societal influences, family differences, human actions, and life phases impacted their feelings. These influences are particularly relevant to an investigation of the impostor

phenomenon, as the external influences that one experiences often perpetuate the internal feelings that support impostor feelings. As Dewey (1938) observed, “An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment” (p. 43). The use of a qualitative design offered me the space to place experiences within the various contexts of past and present, and to situate them within a woman’s personal and social interactions. This chapter includes detailed descriptions of the study’s participant selection process, the phases of data collection, the interview process, and data analysis, considers the trustworthiness of the research, and offers a subjectivity statement.

Participant Selection

I used purposeful sampling in the selection of participants for this study. Purposeful sampling involves identifying a particular setting and the people who will provide the relevant information and answer the research questions for the study (Tracy, 2013). Given that the intent of the study was to examine the experiences of the impostor phenomenon in women over 60 across the span of their lives in order to gain a better understanding of their life transitions and of the inner world of their impostor phenomenon, I developed a list of criteria for selecting participants who might provide the relevant information needed for this study. This method of participant selection is referred to as criterion-based selection, whereby participants are selected based on certain characteristics or attributes (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

According to the initial selection criteria for the study, participants needed to: (1) be female and over the age of 60; (2) have 15 or more years of career experience; (3) be a member of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI), an organization that meets the intellectual, social, and cultural needs of individuals 50+ in the Athens community (OLLI, 2019); (4) have a graduate degree; and (5) complete the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS). I chose these selection criteria because women who live with impostor feelings are often high-achieving and

professionally successful (Clance & Imes, 1978) and therefore would be able to discuss their impostor phenomenon experiences in the educational and occupational contexts. Since I was interested in understanding the impacts of the impostor phenomenon over time, women over 60 could share their experiences in the context of family, school, and work over time. I chose membership in OLLI as another criterion based on the consideration that women in this community were still seeking learning in some form through this venue, whether for pleasure or to increase their knowledge in a particular area. Because the impostor phenomenon is experienced by high-achieving women (Clance, 1985; Clance & Imes, 1978), I reasoned that women participating in a learning community over the age of 60 were likely to be high-achieving, and would provide substantive data (Saldaña, 2011).

My intent was to invite participants from the OLLI community at the University of Georgia, but after receiving two responses to the email call for participants through OLLI—and after months of COVID-19 lockdown—in January 2021, I adjusted the selection criteria. Participants would now need to: (1) be female and over the age of 60; (2) have 15 or more years of career experience; and (5) complete the CIPS. The removal of the degree-completion criterion was based on feedback from one of the participants who shared that women going to college during this time would not need an advanced degree to advance in the business field. She indicated that women in the education field would need a graduate degree to advance to administrative roles. Due to the lack of response from the OLLI membership, I decided to seek participants outside of this organization; therefore, the removal of this criterion was necessary.

Participant Profiles

This study included a diverse group of 24 women who came from different educational and career backgrounds, and family histories. All the participants were White, middle-class

women over the age of 60, residing in the United States. Of the 24 participants, 11 were invited to participate in a 1- to 1.5-hour semi-structured interview to discuss experiences with self-doubt over the course of their lives. The first two interviewees were invited to participate in the interview because they were the only ones who responded to the invitation; the remaining nine interviewees were selected based on their Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS) score. Those who scored higher than 50 were invited, as those who score over 50 experience moderate, frequent, or intense impostor feelings (Clance, 1985). I invited women from various professional backgrounds in an effort to better understand the impostor phenomenon across occupations. Table 4 summarizes the participant profiles (all of the women in the study are referred to by a pseudonym of their own choosing). A detailed profile of each interviewee is provided in the remainder of this section.

Table 4

Participant Profile Summaries

Pseudonym (chosen by participant)	**Age Group**	**Education**	**Career**	**Marital Status**	**CIPS Score**
Abigail *	Late 60s	Doctorate	Educator/University Faculty	Married	53
Bernadette *	Late 60s	Associate	Photo lithographer	Married	77
Carmen *	Late 60s	Specialist	Educator	Married	82
Chloe *	Over 75	Bachelor's	Educator	Married	50
Elizabeth *	Late 60s	Master's	Dietician	Married	66
Hillary *	Early 60s	Master's	Librarian—university	Married	73
Jenny *	Early 60s	Master's	Educator	Divorced	73
Mary *	Over 75	Doctorate	College Professor—Finance	Married	36
Megan *	Early 60s	Master's	Marketing/Insurance	Married	47
Michelle *	Over 75	Specialist	Educator/Administrator	Widowed	78

Pseudonym (chosen by participant)	Age Group	Education	Career	Marital Status	CIPS Score
Nanc *	Early 60s	Bachelor's	VP Risk Management & Product Development	Divorced	65
Cricket	Early 60s	Bachelor's	Real Estate/Program Manager	Divorced	85
Lizbelli	Early 70s	Doctorate	University Faculty	Divorced	34
Therese	Over 75	Master's	Social Worker	Married	61
Wendy	Late 60s	Bachelor's	Preschool Director	Single	74
Jean	Over 75	Bachelor's	Educator/Child Welfare Supervisor	Widowed	67
Susie Que	Early 60s	Master's	Sales and HR	Divorced	54
Marcia	Early 70s	Master's	Educator	Married	41
Barb	Early 60s	Bachelor's	Insurance/homemaker	Married	67
Sue	Late 60s	Unknown	Legal Secretary	Married	44
Lisainky	Late 60s	Associate	Nurse	Married	62
Athensgal	Early 70s	Bachelor's	Marketing	Married	58
Wreath Lady	Early 60s	Unknown	Property Manager/University Business Office	Married	50
Liz	Early 70s	Bachelor's	Sales/Ad Agency Rep & Pres/Chamber of Commerce Executive	Married	58

Note. * Invited to participate in an interview. Invited interviews are listed alphabetically at the beginning of the table.

Abigail

Abigail was a married woman in her upper 60s. She was the oldest of three children, with a younger brother and a younger sister. Her brother held a master's in business administration and was an electrical engineer and at the time of the study was teaching at a university. Her sister had a master's degree and taught technical writing. Abigail had a doctorate in French linguistics and had been a university professor for 30 years. Regarding parental education, her mother went to secretarial school, and her father had a bachelor's degree.

After graduating from Michigan State University with an undergraduate degree, Abigail taught English in an inner-city middle school for 6 months, when she realized this was not her passion. She applied and was accepted to graduate school to study French literature, starting in a degree program that combined linguistics and literature. At the end of her master's studies, she needed to take an exam to pursue her doctorate. She was very nervous about the exam because the entire class before her had failed, but she passed, whereupon she decided to pursue her doctoral studies in linguistics in Indiana. After graduation, she moved to Wisconsin and remained on faculty for 30 years. During this time, Abigail had a national profile, edited a professional journal for many years, co-authored a textbook, and was the founding director of the University of Wisconsin–Madison Language Institute and of the doctoral program in second-language acquisition

Abigail responded to the second call for participants that I posted on the Nextdoor social-networking app. She emailed me on January 8, 2021, expressing interest in my research study. She advised me of her background and asked if she would be a good candidate. I responded on the same day and stated that she would be a perfect candidate. I emailed her the IRB consent form, which outlined the time commitment and a clearer explanation of the study, for review and indicated I would contact her in a few days to discuss the study in detail. After reviewing the form, Abigail emailed me to express her desire to participate. I emailed her links to the demographic profile and the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale. We decided to meet virtually via Zoom for an interview, which took place on January 15 and lasted for just under an hour.

At the opening of the interview, we discussed the Zoom interview process and transcription (with which she was familiar as a university professor). There were pictures of family on the wall behind her, as well as a bulletin board, and there was a sewing machine in the

room. After a bit of troubleshooting on Zoom, we were able to get started. I asked if I could call her by her first name, and she agreed.

Bernadette

Bernadette was a married woman in her late 60s. She had a biological brother and sister. Her sister had become a legal secretary after graduating from high school, and her brother was in sales. She had two stepsiblings—a stepsister who was the same age and worked as an intensive-care nursery nurse, and a stepbrother who had an engineering degree. Neither of her parents was college-educated. Her father had worked for the phone company, and her mother had been a stay-at-home mom. When her parents divorced, her mother went to work in the casinos and became a pit boss (a position generally held by men). Bernadette shared that though her parents had not directed her to go to college, they had not dissuaded her, either.

Bernadette completed her associate degree in graphic arts and had a 32-year career as a photo lithographer, a field dominated by men. She shared that she was one of two women who worked as a lithographic stripper; women in this field were primarily in the front office or in binding. When that industry went digital in the early 2000s, she returned to school, earned an associate degree in medical assisting, and worked as a certified medical assistant for 6 years.

Bernadette responded to the second call for participants posted on Nextdoor. In her email sent on January 9, 2021, she indicated that she had served as a journeyman tradesperson from 1976–2008 and that she was interested in participating. I sent a reply email with the IRB consent form, which she returned by mail and which I received on January 31. I sent another email to Bernadette on February 1 with the links to the demographic profile and the CIPS. She immediately completed the surveys, and we scheduled an interview for February 4 via Zoom.

Bernadette's interview lasted for 1 hour and 12 minutes. At the opening of the interview, I asked about the pronunciation of her name and commented on how pretty it was. She thanked me, and I thanked her for taking the time to speak with me. I shared my surprise at the number of women who had responded to my post on Nextdoor and explained that we would discuss her educational, career, and family background to gain an understanding of her life experiences. I inquired specifically about what a photo lithographer does because I was not familiar with the term. She explained that in her work, she would shoot film and transfer to flats. From the flats, she would burn plates. There were multiple layers so that each exposure added another element. Her official job title was "stripper." During the interview, Bernadette appeared to be seated in a craft room. On the wall behind her, there were drawings and quilts. She had a kind face and smiled, which made it feel as though we had known each other for some time. We conversed easily.

Carmen

Carmen was a married woman in her late 60s. Carmen suffered from mitochondrial disease, a chronic illness. She came from a family of five siblings. Her sister was 4 years older and held a master's degree. She had three brothers, one older and two younger, all of whom had undergraduate degrees. Carmen grew up in southern California. She held a 2-year degree in Spanish and French, a 4-year degree in Spanish, and a teaching certification (California required an additional year of education to receive the teaching credential). She was bilingual and biliterate. She had taught first and second grade mostly, and each lesson she taught was taught in both Spanish and English. She would explain the lesson in one language and then repeat the lesson in the other language. She taught for 20 years. Carmen's father held two master's degrees, and her mother held a master's degree in geography and had served in the Navy during World

War II. Though her mother had an advanced degree, she did not work outside the home after she had children. Carmen's mother was sick during Carmen's entire life and died of cancer when Carmen was in her 40s. Carmen's husband had a doctorate in biochemistry. Carmen responded to the second call for participants posted on Nextdoor. She sent me an email on January 9, 2021, stating she was interested in my research study. I responded immediately with a copy of the IRB consent form, outlining the specifics of the study, and told her that if she was interested, I would ask her to complete the demographic profile and the CIPS and possibly participate in an interview. Upon receipt of her completed surveys, we agreed to meet via Zoom on January 19. Our interview lasted for 1 hour and 21 minutes.

Carmen was wearing a black blouse with blue flowers and a light blue blazer for the interview. She appeared to be sitting in her living room. At the opening of the interview, I shared a brief overview of my research and thanked her for participating. I told her that my interest in this subject stemmed from my own feelings of self-doubt. She shared that while these feelings were not comforting, they were normal. We discussed her educational experiences, her family background, and her illness. I shared that my sister suffers from a chronic illness, so I was able to understand a little about her experiences. The ability to share this experience with her allowed for a feeling of comfort. Though she had spent 20 years as an educator, she shared that her temporary job as a census taker was the most fun job she ever had. She enjoyed meeting with people and chatting with them about their lives. She mentioned that her mother would have loved that job.

Chloe

Chloe was a widow over the age of 75. She grew up in Florida and spent her first two years after high school at a junior college in Ocala. Her good friend transferred to a small school

in Alabama and, since she was ready to get away from home, she transferred to that same school. She met her husband, got married, and transferred to Georgia for her final year of college. She has a bachelor's degree in education and taught health and physical education for 32 years. She taught seventh through ninth grade in one county for 13 years and then moved to another county where she taught first through fourth grade. Neither of her parents went to college. Her mother stayed at home to care for the family, and her father held various jobs over the years. She had three brothers. One brother had a doctorate in clinical psychology, one joined the Air Force and became a pilot, and the other joined the Navy and then attended college.

Chloe was recruited for the study by Michelle, my insider at OLLI. I emailed Michelle the IRB consent form along with copies of the demographic profile and the CIPS. She shared the forms with Chloe, and I received the signed documents in the mail in March 2020. Due to COVID-19, we did not complete the interview until January 4, 2021. The interview was held via Zoom and lasted for 1 hour. Chloe sat in what appeared to be her kitchen for the interview. There were pots hanging on the brick wall behind her.

I opened the interview with a brief overview of the study and explained that we would discuss her educational, career, and family background to gain an understanding of her life experiences. I shared that she scored moderately on the impostor phenomenon scale and that my score was much higher, at which we both laughed. The laughter seemed to break the ice. Chloe and I had had a prior relationship, as she was a volunteer when I worked at the AU/UGA Medical Partnership. During the interview, I connected with Chloe on a personal level. Both of my sisters had attempted suicide, and her son had attempted suicide twice. I could understand her feelings of doubt about being a good parent, as well as paying attention to the signs of depression in our loved ones. Chloe exhibited a feeling of helplessness and shared that she was "mediocre."

I would disagree. She went to college, got married, raised a family, and returned to her career as an educator. She remained strong in the face of adversity when her son attempted suicide and remains close to both of her children.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth was married and in her late 60s. She was born an only child in central Ohio and moved to Kentucky when she was 11. Her father was an executive, but he did not have a degree. Her mother, whom Elizabeth described as a career woman, worked in retail sales. Elizabeth graduated valedictorian of her class from an all-girls high school. She received a 4-year scholarship to a local, private Catholic college. As part of the dietetics program, she was required to complete an internship. She applied for internships that combined graduate school and internship so she could work on her master's degree simultaneously. She completed a Veterans Administration internship in Ohio, and after 17 months, she had completed the requirements for the master's degree.

Elizabeth worked as a registered dietician for 45 years. Twenty-eight of those years were spent working as a nutrition and health specialist at the University of Georgia. She worked mainly in curriculum development for extension agents. Elizabeth met her husband during her undergraduate studies. He holds a doctorate in adult education.

Elizabeth responded to the first call for participants. She was a member of OLLI. We spoke on the telephone on February 26, 2020, and I shared more information about the study. After our call, I emailed her copies of the IRB consent form, the demographic profile, and the CIPS. She mailed the completed forms to my office, and I contacted her via email on March 5 to schedule an interview. We agreed to meet at River's Crossing, the building on campus that houses OLLI, on March 23 at 2:30 pm. Due to COVID-19, we were unable to complete that

meeting. On March 18, I sent her an email advising that we should hold off due to the pandemic. She agreed and stated that she was comfortable with a phone or Zoom interview. I followed up with Elizabeth on June 16 to schedule a time to meet via Zoom.

The interview was completed on June 22, 2020, and lasted for approximately 1 hour and 28 minutes. Elizabeth and I had been previously acquainted, since she had volunteered when I worked at the AU/UGA Medical Partnership. Elizabeth was seated in a yellow room during the interview. There were pictures of flowers on the wall behind her. We spent 13 minutes at the beginning of the interview catching up and sharing our feelings about the pandemic. She talked about having to keep her husband occupied during lockdown. Elizabeth was very comfortable using Zoom, which she had been using often during the pandemic.

Hillary

Hillary was married and in her early 60s. She was the first in her family to go to college. Her father was a carpenter, and her mother was a postal carrier. Hillary had one brother, who did not pursue college. She received a scholarship to attend a small local college and worked part-time at her father's company as a switchboard operator to pay the difference between her scholarship and the cost of tuition. After 2 years, she transitioned to a student worker position in her department of study (political science). She was offered a scholarship to a doctoral program at a top-ranked university in Ohio. Hillary accepted, but after starting the program, she felt homesick and left after one quarter. She returned to her alma mater and got a job working in the library. She and a friend decided to go to library school. She ultimately earned a master's degree in library science and had been a university librarian for 25 years.

Hillary was familiar with my research and volunteered to be a participant. She was not part of either call for participants. She had assisted me with my literature review and was

interested in participating as a woman who lived with feelings of impostorism. On December 11, 2020, I emailed her copies of the IRB consent form, the demographic profile, and the CIPS. She returned all of the materials to me via campus mail, and we scheduled an interview via Zoom for January 14, 2021. The interview lasted for just over an hour.

I started the interview with a reminder about the research study and thanked her for participating. Due to our prior relationship and Hillary's time constraints, we did not engage in small talk. After the initial introduction, I began the interview. Hillary opted to keep her video muted, so I was unable to see her facial expressions during the interview.

Jenny

Jenny was divorced and in her early 60s. She was raised in Florida and had three siblings. Her older brother was a doctor, her younger sister was a massage therapist, and her younger brother had not pursued a college education and was deceased. Jenny's father had been a mechanic and her mother a stay-at-home mom. Jenny held a bachelor's degree in agricultural communications and had been enrolled in the first agricultural journalism program. Jenny joined the Future Farmers of America (FFA) program when she was a junior in high school and excelled. She earned the national-level degree and went on to participate in a year-long internship in Washington, D.C., at the National FFA Center, spent a summer on a farm in Ireland in a leadership position, and served on the staff at their national convention. She spent 3 years as a preschool director and working other part-time jobs while her three children were young, though she worked primarily as a stay-at-home mom. She returned to school when her children were halfway through elementary school, earned her master's degree, and went to work as a middle school teacher. She had more than 20 years' experience in the education field and, at the time of the study, was teaching early childhood education to high school students.

Jenny responded to the second call for participants that was posted on Nextdoor. She emailed me on January 9, 2021, indicating interest in my research study, informing me of her background, and asking if she would be a good candidate for participation. I responded on the same day and stated that she would be a perfect candidate. I emailed her the IRB consent form for review and told her I would contact her in a few days to discuss. After reviewing the form, Jenny emailed me indicating her desire to participate. I emailed her links to the demographic profile and the CIPS. I received the completed documents on January 14 and emailed Jenny to inquire about her interest in and availability for an interview. We decided to meet virtually via Zoom for an interview, which took place on January 18 and which lasted for 1 hour and 25 minutes.

Jenny was seated on her couch for the interview. I thanked her for participating at the start of the interview and shared that her score on the CIPS was 73, suggesting that she experienced frequent feelings of self-doubt. I informed Jenny that I scored high as well. We spoke briefly about her recent teaching and the fact that she was teaching in person (rather than remotely due to COVID-19). She shared that her son-in-law knew me from leading a course at OLLI in 2021. Her son-in-law was the IT professional at River's Crossing. We talked briefly about pets since my lab mix poked his head into the camera view, and we joked that small dogs do not suffer from self-doubt. She shared that she currently had a cat since her lab was deceased. Sharing our pet stories created a certain comfort and rapport, allowing us to ease into the interview.

Mary

Mary was married and over the age of 75. She had a doctorate in finance and was a retired college professor. Her father had been a pastry chef and her mother a bookkeeper. Mary

had two brothers, one older and one younger. Her older brother was deceased, and her younger brother, who had an undergraduate degree, owned a window and door company.

Mary responded to the first call for participants. She emailed me on January 10, 2020, and stated that she would be happy to participate in my study. I responded via email on January 14, thanking her for her interest, and I attached copies of the IRB consent form, the demographic profile, and the CIPS. I did not receive a response, so on January 22, I sent a follow-up email. Mary replied that she was on vacation and would contact me after January 30 to set up a time to meet. I received an email from her on February 6 inquiring about the length of time needed for the interview. I responded immediately to let her know that I would require approximately one hour. In reply, she indicated that she had a meeting on campus on February 10 and could meet with me following that meeting. I confirmed the time of 3:30 p.m. and reserved a room at River's Crossing for the interview. She emailed me on February 10 at 2:48 p.m. informing me that her meeting had ended early and asked if I could come earlier. I was able to meet with her at 3:00 p.m.

Mary scored the lowest on the CIPS, with a score of 36. I had not had an opportunity to review the forms prior to our meeting since she shared them at the interview. She was an active member of OLLI and was a member of the institute's finance committee. Upon meeting with me, she shared that she did not have impostor feelings or feelings of self-doubt, and that she thought it was important for me to hear from someone without these feelings.

Mary had an undergraduate degree in education and taught social studies for 2 years before getting married and staying at home. As she shared, she had been a "traditional woman at that period of time." Her husband held a doctorate, and Mary commented that she had typed every last word of his 150-page dissertation. Mary returned to school to earn her master's in

business administration in the early 1970s. At the time, she said, there were "maybe 10% women in the MBA program." She performed well academically and was encouraged to pursue a doctoral program. She was the first woman to graduate and pursue a career in teaching at the university level.

Megan

Megan was married and in her early 60s. She had a bachelor's and a master's degree in business administration and had been in the marketing/insurance industry for 40 years. Megan worked for two major healthcare organizations for about 30 years. She spent the first years of her career in property and casualty insurance. She was the oldest of three, with two younger brothers. Both of her brothers were deceased, and neither had completed college. Her mother had earned an associate degree but had been a stay-at-home mom. Her father had a degree in accounting and had worked in the corporate market.

Megan responded to the first call for participants through OLLI. She emailed me late on January 14, 2020, to say that the study sounded interesting and that she would like to participate. I responded on January 16, thanking her for agreeing to participate and to indicate I was excited to start collecting data. I attached a copy of the IRB consent form, the demographic, and the CIPS. Megan emailed me on January 23 and included digital, signed copies of the forms. I replied to thank her for completing the forms and advised that I would be in touch soon. After reviewing the forms, I emailed her on March 6 and asked if she would be interested in meeting for an interview. She replied and indicated she was available on March 23 or March 25. We decided to meet on March 23. I reserved a room at River's Crossing for the interview. However, on March 18, I sent Megan an email advising that it would be best to postpone our meeting due to the pandemic. She agreed.

I contacted Megan via email on July 6, 2020, to inquire about her comfort meeting via Zoom. She responded on July 10, letting me know that she was comfortable with Zoom. After inquiring about her availability, we met via Zoom on July 21. The interview lasted for approximately 1 hour. During the first 5 minutes of the interview, I reminded Megan about my research study. She expressed interested in my program of study as well, and we briefly discussed the learning, leadership, and organization development program.

Michelle

Michelle was a widow over the age of 75. She was the oldest of four girls. She had completed a specialist degree and worked in the K–12 education field for 42 years. For 10 of those years, she had worked part-time. She was a high school teacher for one year, teaching economics and problems of democracy, then transitioned into an administrative role, serving as principal of a middle school and then an elementary school. Her undergraduate studies had focused on economics and political science. She wanted to attend law school, but women were not attending law school at that time. After consulting with her advisor, she decided to pursue a career in teaching. Her mother had been a secretary before becoming a stay-at-home mom, and her father had worked for Coca-Cola. Both parents had received a college education. One of her sisters worked as an information technology (IT) specialist, another sister was a stay-at-home mom, and her youngest sister was a teacher.

Michelle was my informant at OLLI. She and I had a prior relationship from when she had volunteered at the medical school where I worked. I emailed her on February 20, 2020, to inquire about my research and to find out if she could provide any insight into why I had only received two responses to the email call for participants. She told me that she had not seen the email request that was sent through the OLLI listserv, but she was very interested in

participating. She said she would be happy to help recruit participants. I sent her a recruitment flyer to share with others. At the time, Michelle was planning a vacation trip, so we did not communicate again until March 3, when I emailed her copies of the IRB consent form, the demographic profile, and the CIPS. She shared the forms with Chloe and returned them to me by postal mail.

Due to constraints brought on by the pandemic, we were unable to meet in person and chose to meet via Zoom on July 9, 2020. The interview lasted for 1 hour and 23 minutes. We spent the first few minutes discussing my research topic and catching up on our personal lives. Michelle was seated in her kitchen for the interview. There were plants on top of the cabinets, and the counters were neat. My prior relationship with Michelle allowed for a conversational approach to the interview.

Nanc

Nanc was divorced and in her early sixties. She had completed a bachelor's degree in marketing and had a career in risk management operations and software development (specifically artificial intelligence for managing risks) that had spanned 25 years. Her first job after college was selling health insurance programs to the teamsters, unions, and large corporations. She stated that she was one of two women in the industry at that time. She was the first in her family to go to college. She had three brothers, two older and one younger, the latter of whom was a college graduate. Her parents had been high school educated. Her mother had been a stay-at-home mom and her father the head of sales and co-owner of a company.

Nanc responded to the second call for participants that was placed on Nextdoor. She emailed me on January 9, 2021, indicating interest, and I responded by sending her a copy of the IRB consent form and a little more information about the study. She was interested in

participating, so I emailed her links to the demographic profile and the CIPS. Upon reviewing her documents, I contacted Nanc to schedule an interview. We agreed to meet via Zoom on January 21, but a conflict arose in her schedule and she canceled. We rescheduled and were able to meet on January 29. The interview lasted for 1 hour and 17 minutes.

Nanc kept her video muted during the interview, so I was unable to see her face. I thanked her for participating and offered a brief overview of the research study. I chose to interview Nanc because of her education, experience, and CIPS score, and because she was a single parent. I thought she could provide a different perspective as a single mother working in a male-dominated field.

Data Collection

This study received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from the Human Subjects Office at the University of Georgia on December 18, 2019. I designed the study to consist of two phases. In the first phase, participants would complete a demographic profile (see Appendix C) and the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (see Appendix A). In previous studies examining the impostor phenomenon, researchers have asked participants to complete the CIPS (Cokley et al., 2015; Hutchins, 2015; Hutchins & Rainbolt, 2017; Hutchins et al., 2018; Lige et al., 2017). The CIPS includes 20 items that allow the participant to indicate their feelings on a Likert scale, ranging from "not at all true" to "very true," which offers a tool for evaluating whether the participant has impostor feelings and, if so, to what extent. If the total score is 40 or lower, the respondent has few impostor characteristics; if the score is between 41 and 60, the respondent has moderate impostor phenomenon experiences; a score between 61 and 80 indicates the respondent has frequent impostor feelings; and a score higher than 80 indicates the respondent often has intense impostor phenomenon experiences. The higher the score, the more frequently

and seriously the impostor phenomenon interferes in a person's life (Clance, 1985). According to Hutchins (2015), the CIPS has acceptable reliability ($a \geq .80$).

I would select participants who had moderate to frequent impostor phenomenon experiences, according to their CIPS scores. By including the CIPS, I sought to ensure that the participants possessed impostor characteristics and were not just experiencing self-doubt or exhibiting perfectionist tendencies. Women can have one or two characteristics of the impostor phenomenon, or be perfectionistic, without necessarily feeling like an impostor (Clance, 1985).

I would ask participants to complete a demographic profile in order to gain a better representation of their academic, personal, and professional lives. This profile included information about each participant's level of education, profession(s), age range, birth order, number of siblings, and marital status. The reason for including demographic information in this study was to understand the family dynamics and the achievements of the participants. Since a woman gains much of her fundamental view of her competence from her family, namely parents and siblings (Clance, 1985), the demographic profile helped illuminate early influences. I included a question about marital status on the profile because prior research has shown that romantic partners can help women resist feelings of impostorism (Sanford et al., 2015).

The CIPS and the demographic profile would be completed by any woman who met the specified sampling criteria for the study. My plan was to score the submitted CIPS, review the demographic profile, and select 10–12 women with the higher CIPS scores to participate in a 1- to 1.5-hour interview to discuss moments in their lives when they had experienced intense feelings of self-doubt and a questioning of their abilities and accomplishments. These interviews would comprise the second phase of the study.

However, due to conditions outside my control, I did not complete the data collection as planned. I attempted to recruit participants from the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute but received only two responses. The outbreak of COVID-19 then limited further recruitment. Consequently, my selection criteria were updated (and approved by my major advisor) based on feedback I received from one of the participants. Specifically, this participant brought to my attention that women at this age would not need an advanced degree to advance their career unless they were in the education field. Therefore, the degree requirement was removed from the selection criteria. Because of the pandemic, activities at OLLI were limited. With this in mind, the requirement of OLLI membership was removed from the selection criteria, allowing all women over the age of 60 with career experience to participate.

Calls for Participation

The first call for participants was issued on January 10, 2020, through the OLLI on campus, via the institute listserv, targeting women who had experienced self-doubt despite having achieved success in their academic and work life. The recruitment email can be found in the appendix documents as Appendix D. Additionally, a recruitment flyer was posted in the lobby of River's Crossing. As noted earlier, the initial selection criteria required that each participant (1) be a female over the age of 60; (2) have 15 or more years of career experience; (3) be a member of OLLI; (4) have a graduate degree; (5) complete the CIPS. Prior studies have relied on self-identified participants (Hutchins, 2015; Hutchins & Rainbolt, 2017; Hutchins et al., 2018; Lige et al., 2017). I received two replies from this recruitment email. I sent each respondent a reply, which included the demographic profile, the CIPS, and the IRB consent form.

I did not receive any additional responses from the first call, and on January 22, 2020, I contacted the OLLI branches at Clemson University, Furman University, and Emory University since they were within driving distance from my location. Emory and Furman agreed to publish my call in their newsletters, but I did not receive any responses as a result of those announcements. Though my intent was to use the CIPS as a screening tool for selecting women with higher scores to interview, I decided to move forward with interviewing the two women who replied to my first email. I contacted the first respondent and scheduled an interview that would occur in the educational building that houses OLLI. I reserved a conference room through the assistant to the graduate coordinator and met with Mary on February 10, 2020.

On February 19, 2020, I contacted one of the OLLI members to inquire about my call for participants. I had a prior relationship with this member when I worked at the medical school and hoped she could provide insight into why I had only received two replies. She said that she had not seen the call but would be happy to participate and help with recruitment. I immediately emailed her the recruitment flyer to share with OLLI. I sent her the demographic profile, the CIPS, and the IRB consent form for her completion. Her assistance as a key informant (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) helped in recruiting two additional participants since she had personal connections within the organization and could discuss the research study with her friends and acquaintances.

Due to time constraints related to work, I was unable to schedule an interview with the second respondent during February 2020. I emailed her with my apologies and asked if she could meet on March 23, 2020. She emailed me her completed forms, and we confirmed the date. Not long after we communicated via email, however, the COVID-19 lockdown was instituted, preventing the interview from moving forward as planned. Neither of us felt comfortable

meeting in person, so we decided to reconnect at a later date. Unfortunately, life remained in flux due to the pandemic and I did not contact her until July 10, 2020, at which time we decided to meet via Zoom.

Because of the pandemic, I did not conduct any interviews until July 2020, when I realized that face-to-face interviews were an unlikely possibility. The women who had expressed interest in participating in this study were comfortable with Zoom interviews, so I was able to complete three more interviews in July and August. Yet, with such a small number of participants, I needed to find an alternate way to recruit participants, which led me to issue a second call for participants.

Throughout the pandemic lockdown, I had taken to viewing neighborhood happenings posted on the Nextdoor app. I noticed a pattern of individuals reaching out to one another with comments such as, “Hi, I’m Joan, I am a retired high school teacher who has lived in the neighborhood for thirteen years.” It occurred to me that there were women living in my own neighborhood who could provide insight into the impostor phenomenon. Thus, on January 8, 2021, I posted a call for participants on Nextdoor:

> Help a PhD Candidate. I am a PhD candidate at the University of Georgia in the Learning, Leadership, and Organization Development program. I am working on my dissertation, trying to understand how women over the age of 60 describe times of self-doubt and instances when they questioned their abilities and accomplishments during their lives. I wonder if there are any women here who would be interested in participating in my study. My direct email address is cheryls@uga.edu. I am happy to answer any questions you may have. Thanks in advance!

I received 13 replies on the Nextdoor app and 15 responses via email from women interested in participating. I converted the demographic profile and the CIPS to Qualtrics surveys for easier completion by the participants. I responded to each inquiry with an overview of the study, and, for those interested in participating, I emailed links to the demographic profile and the CIPS. I attached the IRB consent form and advised that if they could not sign and return it, they could send an email stating their consent to participate in the study. I received 20 responses from women indicating their interest in participating in the study.

I created an Excel spreadsheet with the names, chosen pseudonyms, education, marital status, career, and CIPS scores of all respondents. As I received responses, I entered relevant information on the spreadsheet. I created a file in One Drive, titled "IP Data," and saved each document in the folder. I reviewed the demographic profiles and the CIPS scores. Many of the respondents had careers in the education field, but in an effort to solicit diverse perspectives across different careers, I invited women from a variety of career backgrounds to participate in interviews.

Interview Process

Interviews represented the primary method of data collection for this study. As deMarrais (2004) stated, "Qualitative interviews are used when researchers want to gain in-depth knowledge from participants about particular phenomena, experiences, or sets of experiences" (p. 52). Considering my interest in exploring women's experiences with the impostor phenomenon, qualitative interviews provided opportunities for in-depth conversations about these experiences. The process of interviewing is one "in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study" (deMarrais, 2004, p. 55). While there were specific questions I included in the interview, the interview method

consisted of two phases: the narration phase and the conversation phase (Kim, 2016). During the narration phase, I asked questions such as, “Tell me about the first time you experienced feelings of doubt about something you achieved.” I allowed each participant to give a full narration of the event, with minimal interruption by me. Questions beginning with “Tell me about” yielded rich data and allowed me to begin understanding the participants’ values and individual sense of self. This open-ended prompt gave participants a certain amount of freedom and choice (Kramp, 2004) and allowed each interview to follow a natural course covering all of the ground the interviewee wanted to cover (Kim, 2016). The narration phase let me be a listener and observer.

The second, conversation phase served as more of a semi-structured interview, during which I asked for clarification or introduced additional probes that supported my research interest and built upon the participants’ responses. Since I conducted interviews while transcribing data, I made subtle changes to the interview guide, adding probes and adjusting the order of the questions. The interview guide is included as Appendix B and served as the basis for the conversation (deMarrais, 2004). At the conclusion of each interview, I made notes about what worked and what did not, including my reflections about the interview.

The notations made during the interview helped me recall impressions, occurrences, or salient details about the interaction with each participant. These notes were written during the interview or immediately following to preserve my recollection. They allowed me to reflect on the tone of the interview, my impressions, the interview setting, and my own feelings. These reflections informed my subjectivity statement as well as the final data analysis. In addition, this space allowed me to reflect on what worked or did not work during the interview and to consider follow-up questions for the participant.

Data Analysis

Merriam (2002) stated that, "in qualitative research, data analysis is simultaneous with data collection" (p. 14). In this study, my data analysis began during the interview process. As I spoke with each participant, I considered the commonalities of experiences that all participants shared. I reorganized my interview guide to ensure that I was asking the appropriate questions to support the study's purpose. This strategy presented an opportunity to highlight emerging themes and concepts across participants (Merriam, 2002) and to adjust my approach to each subsequent participant interview.

The first interview was transcribed using Happy Scribe transcription service. Upon receipt of the completed transcript, I reviewed the document while listening to the recording and made any necessary edits. This transcription was not completed until June 2020 due to conflicts with work and the pandemic. The remaining interviews were completed using the Zoom video-conferencing platform. Each interview was video- and audio-recorded. The audio transcript was accurate enough to enable me to edit the document to include any pauses, laughter, or other verbal cues. Additionally, the video recordings of the interviews allowed me to review and document any physical gestures (e.g., shoulder shrugs, head tilts, smiles) during the interview. These physical gestures and facial expressions added richness to the data and my data analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I reviewed the Zoom audio transcripts within 1 week of each interview so that I was able to reflect on the interview while it was still fresh in my mind. As I completed each interview transcript, I placed it in a file on OneDrive labeled "Dissertation Data," giving me easy access to the transcripts.

The data were analyzed using (Gilligan et al.'s (2003) Listening Guide method in an effort to better understand the inner world of the participants and their relationships to the self,

society, family, and culture. The analysis drew on Gilligan's (1982/1993) work centering on identity and moral development. Though Gilligan utilized the method in research she conducted in 1982, the effort to systematize Listening Guide began in 1984 and lasted nearly a decade (Gilligan et al., 2003). This analytical method has been used to understand women's experiences of rape (Johnstone, 2016); lesbianism and bisexuality and sexual objectification (Chmielewski, 2017); COVID-19 (Daphna-Tekoah et al., 2020); abusive childhood sexual experiences (Geib, 2012); father-daughter relationships and women's empowerment (Schmidt-Levesque, 2015); and mother-daughter relationships (Eddy, 2019); and in exploring the reflection papers of dietetics students (Petrovic et al., 2015).

The Listening Guide method includes a series of sequential listenings, which, in the context of this study, helped me "tune in" to different aspects of the participants' voices. Each listening involves a review or reading of the interview transcript. As Gilligan et al. (2003) described, "The Listening Guide is a method of psychological analysis that draws on voice, resonance, and relationship as ports of entry into the human psyche" (p. 157). There are four sequential "listenings" in the analysis process, accounting for the fact that the psyche is not monotonic and that, at any time, there are multiple voices co-occurring (Gilligan et al., 2003). The first listening of my data consisted of two parts. In the first part, I was concerned with the plot—that is, the social context, the people present, what was happening, and what stories were being told. I paid attention to emergent themes. In the second part of the first listening, I attended to my own reactions and responses to what was being told. I paid close attention to the places where I felt a connection to the participant, as well as my emotional reaction to the stories told. As a researcher, I found it difficult to remain detached from the topic of study, as I live with feelings of self-doubt and impostorism. Gilligan (2015) stated, "Listening for the plot directs

researchers to locate themselves in relation to the data and explore their own feelings and thoughts about the persons they have listened to and the material gathered" (p. 71). In some ways, this step in the analytical process became an exploration of self, providing me with insight into my own feelings of self-doubt and impostorism.

The second listening involved focusing on the first-person voice of each participant—represented by the "I"—and to hear how she spoke about herself (Gilligan et al., 2003). First-person statements often reflected a stream of consciousness, amplifying what the participant knew about herself. From each interview, I extracted every instance of "I" along with the verb and any pertinent words, creating an I-poem for each participant. Each I-poem was written exactly as it was stated. The poems presented in the findings chapter used the actual words of the interviewees.

During the third listening, I focused on contrapuntal voices, which "may be in tension with one another, with the self, with the voices of others with whom the person is in relationship, and the culture or context within which the person lives" (Gilligan et al., 2003, p. 159). These voices are not conflicting; rather, they are in dialogue with the self. In this study, these contrapuntal voices added another layer of understanding to the participants' experiences and feelings of self-doubt and impostorism. Using the research question as a guide, I listened for instances of dialogue with others, society, and self, which provided insights into the participants' relationships and how these voices may have impacted their self-doubt over time. Throughout this listening, I considered the complexity of self and other. As I listened for these voices, I underlined sentences or passages in which I heard another voice, using the following guide:

- straight red line: self;
- straight green line: others' words;

- straight purple line: pride in self or achievement;
- straight orange line: societal roles or pressure; and,
- squiggly red line: family member.

I did not use predefined categories during this step in the analysis, in order to allow themes to emerge (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016). During this listening, I considered the participants' inclusion of others, the social climate, and their references to self. In a Word document, I created a table of themes from this step in the process. In some cases, one passage connected to two themes, and that was noted on the table. This table helped me visualize any commonalities across the participants. Although not all of the participants' contrapuntal voices fit each category, I began to see similarities in their stories, illuminating common themes.

The final listening involved the presentation of the findings. I returned to the purpose of the study, which was to understand the experiences of the impostor phenomenon in women over the age of 60 across the span of their lives in order to gain a better understanding of their life transitions and the inner world of their impostor phenomenon. I set about addressing the research question: How do women over the age of 60 reflect on a life in relationship to the impostor phenomenon? The data analysis showed that the participants' reflected on: (1) their own self-doubt; and (2) their persistence/determination. In addition, participants discussed social norms, gender roles, and family in relation to their feelings of doubt. The findings are described in more detail in Chapter 4.

Ensuring Quality

While the findings generated from this research were significant, it is important to address the quality of the study. Roulston (2010) "use[d] the term 'quality' in the sense of demonstrating excellence" (p. 83). Other terms pertaining to quality in qualitative research

include *validity* and *reliability* (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), *rigor* (Tracy, 2010), and *trustworthiness* (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). As Roulston (2010) noted, there are several ways that quality is exhibited in a qualitative study. One way is through data triangulation, in the form of multiple interviews or the inclusion of documents or artifacts. Data triangulation can support a researcher's understanding of participants' views or enhance portrayals of the stories shared. A second approach to ensuring quality is through an awareness of researcher subjectivity, whereby the researcher shares their positionality before and during the research process. A third approach involves providing detailed accounts of participant selection, data collection, and analysis, including changes made to the research process and the reasons for doing so. An audit trail—consisting of, for instance, interview transcription, a researcher journal, or field notes—allows the researcher to show their work and provide a path to the outcomes. Another strategy for ensuring quality is conducting a member check, in which participants review the researcher's interpretations of the data and provide thoughtful feedback (Merriam & Simpson, 1995). In short, a researcher can ensure quality in a study by being transparent and honest about the research.

I employed several strategies for ensuring quality in this study. First, I provided comprehensive explanations of my data collection and analysis. Tracy (2010) referred to this strategy as rich rigor. A detailed description of the research process and outcomes allows the reader to "look closely at the sample and the specific procedures for data collection and analysis" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 145) and contribute to their level of trust in the reported findings. The participant sample was appropriate considering the research question and study purpose, and I created a transparent audit trail, which included written interview notes and reflections, interview transcriptions, and the organization of the data.

Second, I used member checks to ensure quality in the study. This step permitted the participants to confirm the information and narratives in my findings, adding to their credibility (Creswell & Miller, 2000). After completing the findings chapter, I emailed each interviewee a copy of the chapter draft and asked them to review the findings and provide feedback for my review. Upon receiving their comments, I made edits and/or additions based on that feedback. Seven of the 11 interviewees responded, and from those replies, I made only three edits. The other four participants indicated they were satisfied with my findings and were interested in reading about the other women's experiences.

The third approach I used to ensure quality in the study was to compose a subjectivity statement. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) stated,

> The qualitative researcher's perspective is perhaps a paradoxical one: it is to be acutely tuned-in to the experiences and meaning systems of others—to indwell—and at the same time to be aware of how one's own biases and preconceptions may be influencing what one is trying to understand. (p. 123)

In my subjectivity statement, I considered my understanding and interpretation of the impostor phenomenon as well as my reactions to the data analysis. This transparency illuminated how my own feelings of self-doubt impacted this research.

Subjectivity Statement

In qualitative research, it is important for the researcher to acknowledge their biases and how those biases can affect their study. I approached this research from the perspective of a White female doctoral candidate in her 50s who has lived with feelings of self-doubt for the majority of her life. I came to this research topic as a result of my own feelings of self-doubt and impostorism. On my first day in the doctoral program, I sat in a room with approximately 10

other students. As we went around the room introducing ourselves, I was overcome with feelings of doubt about my place in the classroom. I was surrounded by lawyers, deans, and educators, and I was a program coordinator at a medical school. I thought someone must have made a mistake in accepting me to this program with these other, more accomplished individuals. At that time, I had never heard the term *impostor syndrome*, but with each passing year in the program, I heard more and more of my female colleagues use this term when describing their self-doubt, making comments like, "Oh, that is my impostor syndrome showing." I had considered several other research topics before landing on this study, but I kept returning to my own feelings of doubt about my abilities.

I returned to college after my divorce and subsequent move to Georgia. I attended school in the evening, earning my bachelor's degree in psychology. I continued with my education, pursuing a master's degree in higher education administration through an online program. I completed these degrees while working full-time and caring for my children. I applied for a doctoral program and was accepted, yet I doubted my place in the academy. I questioned my ability to bring value to class dialogues, and I felt like everyone around me was smarter. Worse, these feelings were not limited to the classroom. Over the course of my professional life, I have held similar thoughts. I returned to the workforce as a full-time employee after my divorce. Other people my age had progressed through college and career and appeared successful (in my view). By contrast, I had not finished college, and I felt like a failure. I compared my achievements, or lack thereof, to those around me. This research represented my quest to understand these feelings and, in some ways, to understand myself. I was aware of my own feelings of self-doubt throughout this research process.

Before each interview, I was filled with anxiety, fearing that my questions were stupid, wondering how I would sound; and worrying that the women I was speaking with would think I was "less than." At the beginning of each interview, I told the participants that my interest in this topic stemmed from my own feelings and experiences of the impostor phenomenon. I was very transparent about this fact. By conveying my personal feelings, the participants became aware that my feelings could have an effect on this research. I achieved transparency by providing a comprehensive account of how the research would be conducted (e.g., methods, etc.).

My feelings of impostorism influenced the direction of my inquiry. When I did not receive multiple responses to my initial call for participants, I was overcome with a crippling feeling of inadequacy—which was likely the reason I delayed another attempt at recruiting participants. I could have blamed my delay on work or the pandemic, both of which posed challenges, but the truth is that I let my self-doubt impact my study. Tracy (2010) maintained that "self-reflexivity encourages writers to be frank about their strengths and shortcomings" (p. 842). In reflecting on my feelings, I realized that, in some ways, my impostor phenomenon was a shortcoming during this research but also a strength. For example, as a woman who lives with these feelings and has researched this phenomenon, I was able to share prior research about the impostor phenomenon and to discuss what I had found to date about the subject. In doing so, I made my own feelings of impostorism object. Kegan (2000) stated,

> When a way of knowing moves from a place where we are "had by it" to a place where we "have it" and can be in relationship to it, the form of our knowing has become more complex, more expansive. (pp. 53–54)

I found that in reflecting on my own impostor phenomenon during the interview process, I realized that my impostor feelings were a result of inexperience or unfamiliarity. It seemed this

space made it possible for me to make meaning of my impostorism. In questioning how "these parts of us unlearn habits and learn new responses," Nicolaides and Lim (2020) argued that "the paradox of a surprising companionship in the process of becoming lies in living and learning through these disquieting days, expressing our vulnerabilities, turning sense making on its head" (p. 855). I think that in sharing my own vulnerabilities with the participants, I was in a better position to make sense of my own feelings in connection with society, family, and those around me.

Along with transparency, I was mindful of the power dynamics at work during the study. The space I occupied in the research process was one of power (Saldaña, 2011)—that is, I had the power to direct the conversation during interviews and to represent the story that was shared. I maintained an awareness of this positionality and considered the power dynamics at play throughout the process, using journals and self-reflection to keep myself in check. I was open about my feelings and shared my own experiences of self-doubt with the participants, remaining vulnerable, respectful, and courteous, and relinquishing some of my power during the interview process. Three of the participants from the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute knew me from my time as a program coordinator at the medical school. While these prior relationships allowed for more relational interviews, I had to be careful not to allow the relationships to increase the power dynamic or to impact our future interactions.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided an in-depth overview of the study's qualitative research design. I used an interpretivist lens to examine how the participants made meaning of their impostor phenomenon experiences. This approach facilitated an in-depth inquiry into women's experiences of the impostor phenomenon and helped me understand how societal influences,

family differences, human actions, and life phases impacted their feelings. I used the Listening Guide to analyze the data, a voice-centered relational approach “designed to open a way to discovery when discovery hinges on coming to know the inner world of another person” (Gilligan et al., 2003, p. 157). I recruited participants in two phases, first through the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute and later through the Nextdoor app. Data were collected using a demographic profile and the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale, both completed by each participant, and through semi-structured interviews. I ensured quality by maintaining an awareness of my researcher subjectivity, by providing detailed accounts of participant selection, data collection and analysis (including changes made and the reasons for doing so), by keeping a researcher journal, by utilizing member checks.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative interview study was to explore the lived experiences of the impostor phenomenon in women over the age of 60 across their lifespans in order to gain a better understanding of their life transitions and the inner world of the impostor phenomenon. The following research question guided the study: How do women over the age of 60 reflect on a life in relationship to the impostor phenomenon? This findings chapter is organized in two sections, each representing an overarching theme that emerged from the data: the influence of gender on feelings of self-doubt and determination through doubt. Despite experiencing varying levels of self-doubt, all of the participants had persisted in their careers.

The Influence of Gender on Feelings of Self-Doubt

The first set of findings in this study related to women's experiences of fear, uncertainty, and self-doubt. The participants discussed the different ways these feelings manifested over their lifespan. For some, these feelings were influenced by their gender and the social context at particular moments in their lives. All of the women grew up during a time when women were predominantly homemakers; even those women who had a career or a college education oftentimes gave up those careers to care for their family. The perceptions of the participants in this study were shaped by what they knew, had heard, and had seen, and by words that had been spoken. Gilligan (1982) shared,

> The difficulty women experience in finding or speaking publicly in their own voices emerges repeatedly in the form of qualification and self-doubt, but also in intimations of

> a divided judgment, a public assessment and private assessment which are fundamentally at odds. (p. 16)

In listening to the experiences of the participants, the difficulty that Gilligan referenced formed the foundation of the overarching theme related to these findings.

The following sections highlight the participants' experiences of fear, uncertainty, and self-doubt, each beginning with an excerpt from a specific participant's I-poem. The I-poems represent the participants' stream of consciousness and were crucial for "tuning into another person's voice and listening to what this person knows of herself" (Gilligan et al., 2003, p. 162).

Abigail

I don't know

I'm going to identify with back to childhood

I think you always wonder

Did I do this right?

I was definitely a minority figure

I mean

I was a woman

I was younger

I was in a minority field

I was worried

I wouldn't be good enough

I was the only female in the room

Abigail shared that she had always known she wanted to teach, but said, "I really had no intention of being a PhD, and that might have gone to my self-doubt." After teaching middle

school for 6 months, she realized this was not the kind of teaching she wished to pursue. Therefore, she returned to school to earn her master's degree to teach French. Though she was studying French literature, her interest was in linguistics, and she was advised that she could pursue a doctorate after the master's degree. To gain entry into the doctoral program, she had to take a literature exam, even though it was a linguistics program. She remembered feeling very nervous about the test, commenting that "the whole class ahead of me had failed." Abigail passed the exam, and went on to study linguistics.

While working as a teaching assistant in the program, she experienced strong feelings of doubt: "I think I was worried that I wouldn't be good enough. Was my French good enough?" She recalled wondering if she would get in trouble or if she would have more native speakers in her class. Abigail noted,

> I might have had more doubt [as a TA] than I would have nationally because in teaching in front of the class, if I'd make a mistake, I was told to go back the next day and say, "This was wrong, this is right." So I would correct it.

When asked whether these feelings ever prevented her from pursuing certain goals, she replied, "Some self-doubt may have discouraged me from doing certain things. There was one book contract I decided not to finish with because I just wasn't that sure it was really a way I wanted to go." Abigail felt that her feelings of self-doubt were linked to being a perfectionist, stating, "The self-doubt is linked to perfectionism, and having been a perfectionist has driven me to always try to do things better."

Abigail entered the job market at a time when higher education institutions were beginning to do language coordination in linguistics. She commented, "It was a good time in the field for a woman. I had many offers, which was unusual at the time." Abigail stressed that "a lot

of people in the field were heavily men," and "faculty wanted to hire women." While this hiring push opened up opportunities for her, she reflected, "I'm sure that marked any kind of self-doubt I would have because I was definitely a minority figure. I mean, I was a woman."

Regarding her department, Abigail recalled, "I still remember some meetings when I was the only female the room." Though she was in the minority, she achieved success in her career. She edited a journal, founded a national organization, and co-authored a textbook. Even with these achievements, however, she said that because she was "younger, and … in a minority field … I was not respected as much as others in the field." She also experienced inequities in compensation as a woman in her field. For example, she described an instance when the college she was employed by conducted an equity audit, comparing her accomplishments to other people in her age and cohort:

> There were two men that were hired a year after me and they were making bigger salaries. I put in for the equity, and I was told they had accomplished more, and it simply wasn't true. Maybe they've accomplished more if you validate literature more, but if you look at the money I brought into the university and publications that got the national reputation I've got, it's not true.

Women were measured on different scales. Abigail explained that the way she got a higher salary was by getting outside offers:

> I ended up the highest paid faculty in the department, and it was because they had to pay to keep me; so other than that, I would never have been the same on their scale; it was simply a different scale.

Abigail discussed the national organization she founded. As she shared, it started small, involving just the Big-10 schools. The department chairs of each institution would gather once a

year and discuss what was going on in their respective departments. The chair of her department and some other department chairs decided that language coordinators, the administrative unit, should also convene, and Abigail was asked to set up that meeting. She explained,

> We got there, the chairs were in one room, and the language coordinators were in another room. At the end, we were to report back. Now, as you might guess, the chairs are almost all men. And then language coordinators, almost all women. So we had a meeting for an hour and a half. We were talking about all our things to do with syllabuses and language coordination. We also talked about the feeling of being disenfranchised in the department because we got these language chairs in literature and these linguistics or second-languages people.

Abigail was to report back to the chairs, and she shared that she did not know how to phrase what they had discussed:

> I could tell them about the TA training part, and I could tell about the syllabus, but I didn't know how to bring about the fact that we felt disenfranchised, even though we've been invited to this meeting and we've never been invited to this meeting before. And this was a big deal.

Even though the language coordinators had been invited to the meeting, they still did not feel like part of the group "because they were in one room, and we were another room."

Abigail went on to describe the setting of where she had to report to the department chairs:

> So we had to report, and we went in and there weren't enough chairs, and all [the] women had lined up along the walls, and all the men were sitting in their chairs, and I had to go

> kind of [to] the front and present this, and I … really had a lot of self-doubt there—I was really nervous. I don't know what they thought because nobody ever told me.

Abigail elaborated on this annual meeting:

> Two or 3 years later, I refused to go in and to talk to them. I invited them to come to us and said they had to come to us, and they did it, and then the third year after that, they decided we'd just have a cocktail and talk together; we wouldn't report to the other rooms. So that was better, and it became a national organization, which is still running.

Bernadette

> *I always had to be faster and better*
>
> *I pushed myself*
>
> *I was constantly being tested*
>
> *I don't get it*
>
> *I got straight A's*
>
> *I graduated top of my class*
>
> *I never knew that I could do*
>
> *I just try to keep pushing forward*
>
> *I am good enough*
>
> *I can pull this off*
>
> *Can I?*
>
> *I know I'm smart*
>
> *I still always feel that there is doubt*
>
> *I'm just trying everything I can*
>
> *I don't know that I'm good enough*

When asked about her feelings of self-doubt, Bernadette shared,

> We just weren't encouraged at home really to, you know, to pursue anything. Every time you strive for something, there just wasn't that you know, "Oh, you could do it. Come on!" You know, my dad's take on college was, "Well, if you go, I'll help you buy books."

Bernadette majored in fine arts, though she admitted, "I knew I wasn't a fine artist." She was creative, and the community college offered a 2-year degree in graphic arts. She got a job through the college working for an in-house advertising agency, and her boss helped get her a job at a graphic arts house.

Bernadette worked in the printing field and was one of a very small number of women who worked as a photo lithographer. She stated, "There were women in the bindery that do the folding and gathering and stuff like that, and then women in the sales portion." She worked in a male-dominated field where she was constantly tested and scrutinized: "The prevailing people around me were always doubting, you know, that a woman should even be there." Bernadette stated that she was hazed at work, with one supervisor telling her, "You should be home barefoot and pregnant."

I asked Bernadette how her feelings of self-doubt had impacted her decisions about school or work. After a long pause, she said, "I just try to keep pushing forward, but am I good enough? Can I pull this off? Can I? Are they going to know I'm a fraud?" After the printing industry went digital, Bernadette studied to become a medical assistant. She recalled a time when she started in the medical field: "I just felt like somebody's going to find out that I don't know what I'm doing." Though she scored 98% on the national certification test, she did not know she was "good enough."

Bernadette's parents divorced when she was 7 or 8 years old and, as she shared, "My mom struggled." Prior to the divorce, her mother had been a stay-at-home mom. Her mother "thought she was going to be a housewife, and then she had to get into the only thing in town" since there were limited employment opportunities in Reno, Nevada. After the divorce, she went to work in the casinos. Bernadette shared, "She was a dealer for the longest time, and then she became the first woman pit boss." Her father remarried when Bernadette was in seventh grade, and she and her brother and sister went to live with him. Her stepmom had two children, one of whom was the same age as Bernadette and whom she described as "a mentally gifted minor." Bernadette shared, "I was just a B student in high school being overshadowed by my stepsister, who was straight A's." She went on to say,

> You know that was intimidating, and while we were seniors in high school, she was peddling down the road to the college to get college credit, while, you know, the rest of us were, you know, hanging out at lunch.

Bernadette mentioned that in recent years she had joined a quilting guild: "All these ladies, are all, you know, they have advanced degrees, they were working here at the university, and now they've retired and they're doing quilting, and so, you know, they, they're intimidating just from their credentials." Since joining the guild, she had won four ribbons for her quilt work. I asked how that made her feel, to which she replied, "It makes me feel good, that maybe I do have something with all the people doubting me and not sure of myself."

Carmen

> *I wasn't allowed to do that because I was a girl*
>
> *I have a bunch of brothers*
>
> *I want to play baseball*

I wasn't allowed to do certain things

I knew more than I thought I did

I didn't know that

I thought I was horrible

I didn't know

I never measure up

I don't feel I ever measure up

When asked about the first time Carmen felt self-doubt, she said, "I must have been a child at the time." She explained, "It's different for women today. Back in my day, we were not allowed to do many things because we were girls." She recalled a walk with her father during which she shared with him that she wanted to play baseball. Her father looked at her and said, "'No girl of mine will ever play organized sports.' I wasn't allowed to do that because I was a girl."

Carmen shared that she had always wanted to be a teacher. Carmen taught first and second grade in a bilingual classroom. She shared that she was always intimidated speaking in front of adults: "I couldn't get up in front of adults to, like, give a lesson or something…. There is a fear, feeling like you're being judged more if you're doing it in a language that they definitely understand [referring to English]." During this time, her husband was pursuing a doctorate, so she was the primary breadwinner. When she became ill, her sickness impacted her ability to function. She stated, "I was unable to do anything. I really couldn't have a job, and I was feeling really bad, you know, both physically and mentally and emotionally."

I asked Carmen how these feelings of self-doubt had impacted her choices. As an example, she talked about having to take the national teachers exam: "I'm not a good test taker. I

had to take it three times to finally pass it. That makes you feel really bad about yourself that you can't pass such a stupid thing." After failing for the second time, she talked to her principal: "I walked into the principal's office, and we chatted for a minute. I said, 'Well you know I failed the test again,' and he starts cussing. I looked at him and said, 'I'm the one who failed.'"

Carmen reflected on her second year of college. Her father was on sabbatical, and her family went to Europe for a year. Carmen was dropped off in Grenada for school. She experienced doubt about her abilities, stating, "I didn't have enough Spanish to be in the classes with the third-years." Therefore, she opted to leave the school after 6 months and travel through Europe with her family. She had recently read through her notebooks from that time and shared, "I knew more than I thought I did. Self-doubt—you know, I didn't know that, and I thought I was horrible."

Chloe

I've always had some

I never thought my confidence level was very high

I don't know where I get that

I never liked studying a lot

I probably could have been a better student

I could have been better at it

I don't know how in the world I ever made it through

I think

What did I do wrong?

I still don't understand

I don't see myself that way

I see myself really mediocre

When I asked Chloe about her experiences, she shared, “I never thought that my confidence level was very high, I guess.” Like some of the other participants, she knew she wanted a career in education: “In high school, I was into sports, so playing on teams and stuff like that. And so I just thought, you know, that was where I wanted to go.” Chloe grew up with three brothers, as did her mother. She stated, “My mother had three brothers, and her father sent all three of the boys to school, but she was a girl so, you know, different time those days, you know, [for] women.” I inquired about her mother’s support of her college pursuits, to which she replied, “I mean, it was no question that she wanted me to go to school. Yeah. She didn't get to.”

Chloe had enjoyed college. She talked about high school being cliquey. “I wanted to be a cheerleader,” she said, “[but] I never made it in high school.” She tried out in junior college and made it, adding, “But that was totally on skill—you weren't voted on, like in high school.” While her college experience was an improvement over high school, Chloe did experience judgment by others. For example, she shared that a department head “told me I would never be a good teacher, a PE teacher, because I was married”. She was told “lots of times that you don't look like a PE teacher” because she was petite and more feminine than most.

Chloe stayed home with her children for a couple of years when they were little. She recalled a challenging time when her son was in high school and suffered from depression: “For a long period of time, he hated me, hated the world.” She recounted the difficulty of this time, saying, “I don’t know how in the world I ever made it through. I kept on working, but that saved me. I look back on it and I think, “What did I do wrong? Why did I not catch this?”

Hillary

I should have known better

I think I was outclassed

I just didn't think I was smart enough to be there

I don't know why

I mean I was third in my class in high school

I just feel like sometimes I don't give the best answer

I feel like my colleagues know more

I just felt like I couldn't compete

I don't know why

Hillary's impostor feelings began when she started a graduate program. She was the first in her family to pursue a college education, and upon completing her undergraduate degree, she received a scholarship to a doctoral program. Hillary stated, "I just didn't think I was smart enough to be there." She was from a small town and had attended a small college for her undergraduate studies. She shared, "I think I was outclassed. I felt like I couldn't compete." Hillary didn't complete the doctoral program, leaving after the first quarter. She noted a lack of connections—"I didn't really know anybody"—and a lack of knowledge: "I didn't know what a paradigm was," yet she acknowledged, "I didn't flunk out my first quarter. I had a B."

After returning home from the doctoral program, Hillary returned to her alma mater for work. She pursued a master's degree and went to work as a university librarian. Her feelings of self-doubt continued, however, when she was tasked with opening the university's student learning center. Ultimately, she was demoted and told, "'We think that you're not really suited for this position,'" leading her to feel like "'Well, maybe I'm not hot spit.'" Working as a reference librarian in higher education intensified her feelings of self-doubt. Hillary shared, "I just have this underlying feeling that I'm not quite good enough." She mentioned that, while

librarians are faculty rank, they are not required to publish. “But now people are doing more of that. So now it's more people are doing it, and other people feel like they need to do it.” Hillary was intimidated by her colleagues because they “know more people in the library,” and she perceived them as more eloquent when answering questions. Hillary felt that “I don't give the best answer. I give the best answer I can, but it's not the best answer they need, I guess.” These feelings carried over into department meetings as well. Hillary stated, “I don’t speak in meetings. I don’t want to appear stupid.”

Elizabeth

I worked hard to be what I was

I better get my qualifications up to speed

I don’t want to be embarrassed

I didn’t think of myself as an impostor

I just thought I was inexperienced

The experiences that Elizabeth shared indicated that her self-doubt began in childhood. When asked to discuss her family experiences, she revealed that her mother had been a career woman and that Elizabeth had felt like an interruption in her mother’s life:

> My mother always worked, though. She worked in retail clothing sales and loved it. I mean, in modern day and time, she probably would never have had children because she was a career person. And, um, I mean, I understand that. I don't have children. I understand. But back then, you had a kid, you know—in the 50s you had kids. And so I always felt that I was an interruption in her life. It was sort of like—and the minute she got able to go back to work, she went back to work. And I went and my aunt took care of me.

When reflecting on her aunt's care, Elizabeth talked about her self-doubt:

> So I had these two houses…. I was, like, maybe, like, 6 years old [when I] learned how to write. And I wrote this thing in the paper, and I said, "My name is, my maiden name is Smith." I said, "My name is Elizabeth Smith. But sometimes my name is Jones." So even at that point, I knew that I had two families. And so I would be at my aunt's house 4 days a week or more.

Although she felt that her mother loved her, Elizabeth seemed unsure about her place in her family:

> And literally, my parents didn't pick me up 'til 7:30 at night because they would go out to dinner, and then my aunt would feed me and then they'd come pick me up. So I barely saw my mother, literally. She would go to bed really late. And once I was able to put cereal in a bowl, I never saw the whites of her eyes until she got home at night from work. So, you know, and that sounds awful. I mean, I think she loved me, but she didn't like being a mother much. It was—it wasn't her thing.

Elizabeth commented that her father spent much more time with her than her mother: "He was much more of a caregiver than she was as far as on a daily basis".

Later in the interview, the Elizabeth discussed her move to another city during middle school. As a result, she experienced a loss of friendships and encountered difficulty making new friends as the "new girl":

> I was suddenly the out girl. I was taller than everybody else. I had matured more easily. I had glasses. I had acne. I was just a mess. And I really was not well accepted in that new school compared to where I had come from. And so there was that other insecurity of being ripped from…. And we moved, like, the day after Thanksgiving, so already the

> school year had started and little cliques had already formed, and here I was just inserted into this. And so my own personal insecurities just got manifested a hundred percent more.

Elizabeth shared that she had developed an eating disorder after she moved away from family and friends:

> I mean, I never was overweight. I probably weighed about 10, 15 pounds more than I do now. And mainly that was because I just wasn't very physically active. And, you know, I've always had a big appetite. I still have a big appetite. And so I had been in seventh grade, and I went to get clothes and suddenly nothing fit the way it had before. I suddenly have curves and my mother literally said to me, “Elizabeth, you're fat.” Dangerous words. And I was really humiliated by that. And, and I focused on small flaws of my body and assumed that that was the reason why other things weren't working in my life—that if only my legs were thinner, I would be more popular.
>
> I guess … the other thing was that my mother was so controlling, and this was one thing I could control, which was my own eating habits. And so that was another thing. I suddenly had control of something, and it wasn’t that I said, “Ooh, I'm going to have an eating disorder.” It wasn't like that at all. It's like drug addiction. You do it and gradually [it] just takes over your life. And it was similar. It was similar to that.

Elizabeth’s childhood experiences of self-doubt were influenced by her parents’ interreligious relationship. She shared, “My mother was Methodist. My father was Catholic, and I was not allowed to go to her church because we were not allowed to attend non-Catholic churches.” While reflecting on this experience, she stated,

> I would not have wanted to marry somebody that did not have the same religious background as I did because I saw a mixed marriage, and it was not a good thing as far as I was concerned. My parents had separate churches and rituals, [and] never were totally comfortable with each other.

As Elizabeth's interview continued, she mentioned that she had graduated from high school as valedictorian of her class and had received a 4-year scholarship to a local college, recalling that she had enjoyed her undergraduate experience partly because "I didn't have to be this cute little high school girl anymore."

When asked to discuss a time when she was recognized for an achievement or received an award, she said,

> I've been recognized for times that I just didn't expect it and that it's been sort of astonishing. I've been surprised by getting awards , but I don't know if I've ever felt I wasn't worthy of them because I always worked very hard.

Elizabeth went on to share,

> Almost every job I've walked into, I have really not been qualified to do it. But when I get in there, I go, "Well, I better get my qualifications up to speed because I don't want to be embarrassed by what I don't know.

Jenny

> *I felt like an impostor*
>
> *I didn't have the degree*
>
> *I didn't get to do a lot of the things I wanted to do*
>
> *It was a choice I made at the time*
>
> *I wasn't sure I could make it on my own*

I would say my self-doubt goes way back

As long as I was doing traditional it was acceptable

He would make me feel like I was less than

I never heard she was proud of me

I knew she was

Jenny commented that her experiences of self-doubt were a combination of fear, self-concept, and a comparison of her accomplishments to others'. When asked about her first feelings of impostorism and self-doubt, she discussed her work with the Governor's Honor Program, which is a summer program for gifted and talented high school students in their junior and senior year: "We were not those brilliant kids at that age. So, what are we doing here, teaching these brilliant kids?" Jenny mentioned that a lot of instructors felt like, "'We don't really belong here. These kids are smarter than we are.'" Jenny did not have a teaching degree (her degree was in agricultural communications), yet she taught high school students about agriculture. She went on to say,

> I knew some of those kids knew more than I did because agriculture is so broad. There are so many specializations. Mine was livestock and animal science, but I had crops kids. I had poultry kids. I had kids that we're getting into the computerization of production, you know—they were already doing those things. I wasn't doing it, like, on family farms.

When asked to reflect on her educational background, Jenny said, "I was in the first agricultural journalism program." As a junior in high school, she had become involved in the local Future Farmers of America (FFA) program and, with the support of two people in the program, made it to the national level, though she admitted, "I always had the feeling that I didn't really quite earn that." She was one of four women in the state to earn the national-level

degree. “You know, I've always felt like there were kids that were, girls, people that were way more deserving than I was. I kind of slid under there, partly because they wanted to see me succeed.” When I asked her to elaborate on why these people wanted her to succeed, she replied, “They were old enough that they weren't threatened by women, and they saw me as a feather in their cap. It made them look good.”

After graduating, she moved to where her fiancé lived, saying, “Most of my career goals were not met,” yet, “it was a choice I made at the time.” Her supervisor told her that if she wanted to advance professionally, she needed to be willing to move to other areas, but her husband was against it. As Jenny recalled, “My husband said, ‘Absolutely not. I ain’t going nowhere.’” She stated, “As long as I was doing traditional, it was acceptable. If I went nontraditional—nope, couldn’t do that. It was too threatening.” After her children were born, Jenny stayed home to raise her family. She worked briefly in her children’s preschool and held other part-time jobs until they were about halfway through elementary school. Then, she went on to earn her master’s degree and work as a middle school teacher.

“My decisions were based on self-doubt,” Jenny reflected. “I married someone because I wasn’t sure I could make it on my own.” She said that her parents had kept their family in a bubble because they wanted their children to “do well and be safe.” Jenny said that her husband was like her mother: “Both of their personalities are highly critical.” When asked to elaborate, she stated, “The root for my mother was fear; the root for my ex is fear.” About her mother, she shared,

> It took me years to realize it was fear—she was just afraid that we wouldn't be okay for whatever reason, either we wouldn't be able to grow up and function as adults or, you know, whatever. So that was her way of trying to protect us.

Regarding her ex-husband's fear, she explained, "It took a lot of years, but I understand that my ex is super traditional, and I was super nontraditional, and it scared him to death."

Jenny stated that her parents "supported all of our interests, no matter what they were, even when some were dangerous," but "if we didn't get the best grades, you know, if we weren't at the top, it was like, 'Well, you could have done better.'" About her mother, Jenny commented, "I never heard she was proud of me."

Mary

I said, "OK, let me go back and get an MBA"

I did very well

I was the first woman they put out

I was in leadership

I became professional

I became president

I edited their journal

I worked hard at mentoring women

I didn't perceive there was as much mentoring in business

I've always tried

I was the first generation to get an undergraduate degree

I was split between being a faculty member during my job and being a mother

I made the decision between family and academics

I don't regret making the decision

I think everybody has a point where they doubted what they would do

Mary came to this research study with the intent of sharing the perspective of a woman who did not experience impostor feelings; however, during her interview, she did share instances of self-doubt.

Mary earned her undergraduate degree and taught social studies for 2 years before marrying and staying home with her children for 10 years. She shared that she was "a traditional woman at that period of time…. So I stayed home, and I just hated the cooking, cleaning, or any of the domestic talents you would like to mention." She supported her husband as he completed his doctorate, stating, "I typed every last word of his dissertation, which was 150 pages." After several moves for her husband's job, and with three children under the age of 10, Mary told her husband, "You can either send me to the state mental institution [laughs] or you can let me go back to school, and frankly I don't care." Mary said, "He'd make the much better mother. He's much more nurturing."

Mary went on to earn a master's in business administration. She noted that "there were maybe 10% women in the MBA program." She said, "I did very well, and they encouraged me to consider a doctoral program. They had had one woman in the doctoral program. I was the first woman they put out who actually had a career teaching at the university." Mary explained that there were very few women in finance at that time: "Finance is one of those areas where you actually have some power and you could go out and you could get a PhD in finance [and] you could probably go out to the real world where you get ahead." She recalled a time at the end of her first year in the doctoral program when she had to take a math skills test; if she did not pass, she would have to leave the program. Mary explained,

> So we took this test … in a blue book with no name attached. And then the whole finance faculty graded it, and there were seven of us. They were sure I was last. I was first. So everybody was shocked, including me.

Mary shared her feelings about being denied a promotion to a tenured position:

> Well, it did make you question your self-worth and your achievement. When they say, "No, we're not sure we're going to give you the tenure." They gave me tenure, but they didn't give me a promotion to associate; those normally go together.

When asked if there were times she experienced self-doubt, she stated,

> There were times of doubt, particularly because [long pause]—let's see, how shall I put this? My experience at university, at both schools that I taught at, was that men weren't really happy to have me there. And they would do anything they could to discourage me. And so that's an ongoing situation. That makes one question.

As a woman, a wife, and a mother, Mary had made choices. "I was split between being a faculty member during my job and being a mother". She chose her major professor because he "was really good in terms of people relationships," though he "didn't have the same representation as the guy who said he'd be my mentor." Mary shared, "I didn't think I could spend as much time as he demanded, that I knew he would demand, to get my dissertation done," and "I made the decision between family and academics."

Michelle

> *I wasn't sure I could do it*
>
> *It made me doubt so much of what I thought I was getting into*
>
> *I really almost quit*
>
> *I really did almost quit*

I think I was doubting myself

I pride myself on finishing everything

I've never finished it

I have lots of self-doubts

I think I will always second-guess myself

Michelle discussed the self-doubt she had experienced as a teacher. She started her teaching career working with high school and middle school students. She had been working as an assistant principal when she was offered an interim position as an elementary school principal. Michelle explained, "I was a high school, middle school teacher and suddenly I'm going to an elementary school where my children had been, and I wasn't sure that I could do it." She shared her concerns with a trusted mentor:

> Well, I came back and I told Bobby I did not want that position. He said, "Let me just tell you who signs your check, and it's not me. And go down there. It's an interim position. If you don't like it, or they don't like you, or it's not a fit, you come right on back up here and we'll take up where we left off, and I'll make that perfectly clear to whoever fills your shoes here." So I went down to the elementary school, and I liked it.

Michelle discussed walking the halls and observing the classes to gain an understanding of how things worked. However, the school secretary cautioned her, "'They're not really used to somebody coming in. They don't know what to do, and I'm going to suggest you sit. Just don't do that anymore.'" Michelle stated, "So, I thought about that. It made me doubt so much of what I thought I was getting into that I really almost quit." Yet, Michelle did not quit and ended up staying on at the elementary school as principal.

She shared another experience related to opening a new school. She said, “I wanted to be a pioneer and open a new school,” and the superintendent offered her the opportunity to do so but later came to her and said,

> “We're not going to give you the school after all.” And I was heartbroken, and I said—what he said [was], “We think that there's too much going on in your personal life to get a new school started.” And I was mad. I was hurt. I cried for weeks.

Michelle clarified, “My husband, he had been sick for over 25 years, and he had another batch of cancer. He had three four different kinds of cancers, and he would wane. And, you know, ebb and flow.” It was this recent bout of her husband’s cancer that prevented her from being offered the chance to open the new school.

When asked about her family background, Michelle shared that she was the oldest of four girls: “They’re best friends, and they envy me. See, I envy them because there's—they always have such fun together. They envy me because I have friends. They are each other's best friends.” She said, “We were raised in a very comfortable lifestyle,” but due to her father’s poor decisions, she stated,

> We had to sell the house at that point, and I loved my house. It was, I mean, we all lived there, there were three houses. Pop, well, he just bought a lot of land and put three houses on it and, oh gosh, you know—so I lived a better life than my younger sisters did.

Michelle shared that her mother stayed home with the children:

> She was a really good mother, and I tell you, it’s kind of like you never know how good a mother you had until you become a mother. You study for everything in your whole life except being a parent.

Michelle discussed her educational background, reflecting, “I really thought I was going to go to law school.” She met her husband, who, she said, “didn’t have two dimes to rub together,” and “things were a little shaky” with her family, so she went to her advisor for advice. Michelle recounted,

> I said, “I don't know what to do.” Women weren’t going to law school and, you know, “Do you think I can get in? I want to. I have to go to work, and so what can I do?” He said, “Well, you can be a teacher.”

She finished her degree in economics and went on to get her master’s degree in political science. She was enrolled in a doctoral program, but as principal, she was advised to get a master’s degree in leadership before pursuing the doctorate, stating,

> So I have two masters. And then I joined a PhD program and then became a principal, and I really said, … “I'll come back to that”; the six year is a stopping off place. My PhD is the only thing I've never finished.

Megan

I ended up where I ended up because there was a depression

I was actually a good student

I was a very good performer

How did I end up this way?

I think some of it is knowing the right people

I got some great support

I was always questioning

Am I doing this right?

Am I going to be criticized?

I was driven

I accomplished a lot

Megan started her career in business during the recession in 1977. She recalled,

> Back when I started in business, it wasn't—there weren't women, you know…. I ended up in business just because I had a math aptitude, and that's what I ended up doing. I ended up where I ended up because there was a depression, a recession.

After about 10 years, she was laid off, but the organization where she had worked was "very much into development." She remembered her boss saying, "'You know, you're really smart, but it really intimidates people.'" She recalled, "And then I, you know, started crying. I mean there's all these emotions, right?"

She took 2 years off and was working toward a master's degree and a certification to be a high school math teacher when she was called about a position in the healthcare field. Megan recalled,

> I said to my husband, "I really don't want to go back and do that. I want to be a teacher." He said, "You have three children in college next year; I think you need to do that". So I did.

When asked to elaborate, she said, "I would have taken a huge salary cut. I would have liked to have done it. It was fun. I really enjoyed the class work, but it was the way it was." Megan was the primary breadwinner, referring to her spouse as "Mr. Mom": "He became Mr. Mom, you know. They had to name the room parent 'room parents' that were room mom because he was now—so he was very, very actively involved."

Megan shared a story about her time in the master's of business administration program:

> I had only one bad experience…. I had a professor and he handed out the test papers. He gave us a lecture about how it was so disappointing that none of the females in the class had done well on this exam and wasn't it a shock to give me back my paper. The reason why is he thought I was a male. I mean he was so prejudiced against females.

When prompted to talk about her family background, Megan stated,

> I actually went to 10 different schools. Growing up, my father moved around. We moved around a lot with corporate America, so I never had really long-term places where I lived or didn't. I wasn't like the cheerleader or anything like that. I was never you know, successful.

She said her mother had wanted to be a lawyer, but her parents had forbidden that.

Megan said that she experienced feelings of doubt at "every jumping off point": "Even things that were successful, and in part it could have been the corporate culture, while there were positive things about it, it was also a little bit of a backstabbing culture, so you're always watching out for that." She added, "I was always questioning, 'Am I doing this right? Am I going to be criticized?'"

Near the end of our conversation, Megan posed a question to herself, "So maybe some of the self-doubt that I always had is, could I have done more? Could I have been more successful? If I had not, you know, did I play it safe?"

Nanc

> *I was the first one in my family to go to college*
>
> *I was raised with very traditional roles*
>
> *I never thought I was pretty, you know, or fun enough*
>
> *I always try to do more, so that I would be more*

Do I still have self-doubt?

I was writing in my journal the other day about why I still feel I'm not enough

I can say I don't know—what does "not enough" even mean?

I think everybody has self-doubt and bullshit

When asked to reflect on her first experiences of self-doubt, Nanc said: "Middle school years … I never thought I was pretty, you know, or fun enough." After some probing, she shared, "To be honest, I think it started like adults who sit around the dinner table, talking to the boys about football and baseball, and nobody's really interested, I mean, you know, not as interested." Nanc recalled,

> I truly believe, when I look back, that I was always looking for my father's love and—not to say love, he loved me—it was always looking for is admiration because he, the boys are playing sports. They played football. They played baseball. They were all very good at their sports, and so, you know, they were all together on that and we ate dinner every night at 6 o'clock and sit around the table. We all had our certain places, and dad would sit and talk to the boys about sports. Well, I was a cheerleader, and I was in student government or whatever and—but his conversation for me … were not, he wasn't as interested. My mother, my mother would say, "Joe, you need to go see your daughter be a cheerleader at one game, at least," and, you know, okay, you know, it just wasn't his thing, okay.

We talked more about family experiences, and Nanc said that she had grown up with three brothers. "We had very defined roles," she said. "We were the 'Leave it to Beaver' family. Mom was the consummate take care of the home, bake cookies literally every day, three meals on the table, house spic-and-span." Nanc had wanted to attend the all-girls Catholic high school,

but she was told, "'No, that's what the boys do." She went to the local public school, "learned how to cook, how to iron a shirt." She stated, "I would set the table for dinner at night, clear the table after dinner. The boys would empty the garbage. I was raised [with]in very traditional walls."

She reflected that, as a single parent, traveling for her job, she "[felt] guilty" and wondered, "Am I doing the right thing?" She added, "It's kind of like you don't have a choice." Nanc shared a story about an encounter she had with a teacher when she was traveling:

> I would always tell the teacher before I travel, like a few days before I'm traveling so if she gets uncomfortable [referring to her daughter], here's how I can be reached; that the principal has my cell phone number; my secretaries know blah blah blah. So I was engaged with the teacher and let them know what's going on. This one female teacher actually told me that I was a terrible mother and my daughter was never going to make it in life because I had to travel.

She followed up by saying, "The only thing I could think of is like, I told you, this community didn't have a lot of single working women. Like I said, I was the only one I knew, so maybe she just lived in a bubble."

Nanc continued, "My daughter goes, 'I never know how to explain my mother; she's really introverted.'" She explained further,

> I used to have to speak in front of thousands of people—that was part of promoting products. To speak in front of 1,000 people would not bother me at all, but tell me to go into a cocktail party and make conversation, and I break a sweat.

Section Summary

Each of the participants in this study had different experiences around family guidance, education, and career, yet their stories reflected a common theme of fear, uncertainty, and self-doubt. For four of the participants, being intimidated by and comparing oneself to others was a source of doubt. Three of the participants had worked in a male-dominated field and experienced different treatment in their respective workplace because they were women. Four of the participants were the first in their family to attend college, and all the participants were raised in traditional families, with the mother taking on the domestic role, regardless of her educational background. However, despite their feelings of self-doubt, these women persisted in pursuing their goals.

The next section discusses the second finding that emerged from the study, related to determination through doubt. Each of the participants exhibited varying levels of fortitude and persistence in pursuing their aspirations. Though all participants discussed achieving their goals while holding self-doubt and impostor feelings, some participants were more purposeful in their pursuits.

Determination Through Doubt

At different times, the participants in this study experienced a drive—what was revealed in their stories as determination—to achieve their personal goals in spite of their self-doubt and impostor feelings. All of the women discussed the ways they kept failure at bay and persisted in achieving their educational or professional goals.

The following I-poem is a compilation of excerpts from the participants' "I" statements which summarizes their determination through doubt:

I got less worried

I think the risk is less

I can do this

I pushed myself

I knew I was good at things

I am good enough

I can pull this off

I was a producer

I'm a person that is very self-motivated

I graduated valedictorian of my class

I got a free 4-year scholarship

I was third in my class in high school

I was a straight-A student

I was the first one in my family to go to college

I got my master's

I deserved everything I got

I worked hard to be what I was

I worked really hard to be creative

I was willing to learn

I'm totally qualified for the job

I worked hard at mentoring women

I've always tried

I was a mentor

I built programs

I was equipped

I was driven

I accomplished a lot

I wanted to be a pioneer

I was runner-up for Teacher of the Year in Georgia

I was 10th district Teacher of the Year

I'm an organizer

I'm a smarty pants

I started my first job when I was 15, and I never not stopped working

I always try to do more so that I would be more

At the close of my interview with Nanc, she made an important comment: "I think you either take self-doubt and you use it as a growing tool—"I'm going to overcome this" or "I'm going to learn that." Right? You use it to your advantage, or you let it suck you down." For example, Nanc mentioned that, while her parents supported her decision to go to college, no one knew anything about it. She stated, "Dad's off at work. My mom's in the driveway. She's got her apron on, wooden spoon in her hand. I get in my red '67 Mustang and I drive myself off to college." She had nowhere to live:

I saw some posters about a sorority rush, and thought, "If I get into one of those, maybe I can live in one of those pretty houses." So I rush so that I would have a place to live. Nobody said that "'No, no, no, when you're a pledge you don't live in the house.'" Determined, she finagled her way into living in the house. She shared, "My brothers had never gone to college, nobody else in the family, so they had no experience. I certainly didn't, either. I just thought,

‘Okay it’s another step of education and I’m going to do that because I want to make a lot of money.’”

Nanc talked about her initial job selling “health insurance programs to the teamsters and to the AFL-CIO, to unions to big corporations.” She said she did “quite well” at the job, considering “we’re the only women in our industry at the time.” She explained that, at this time, business was done on the golf course followed by lunch. She would meet the group for lunch because, as she stated, “I was pretty good at closing the deal.” She continued to set the scene:

> I'm 20, and I was no saint in college, but these guys all drink. It was the proverbial two-martini lunch back then, and I drink white wine, right, but so they go around and they're ordering and everybody's ordering scotch on the rocks and bourbon, and I’m like, well, shit, I can't order white wine—it's just I’m telling you, you had to fit this mold. So I thought, ‘Well, what can I order that I’m not going to drink—I don't want to get drunk because I gotta do this,” so I ordered a vodka martini which enabled me to be accepted.

After moving on from the sales industry, Nanc moved into product development and software. She did not let her lack of knowledge in that field prevent her from advancing because, as she said, “I did understand end users.” She worked with two gentlemen, and they became a “very effective trio.” She took their concepts and helped turn them into products that customers could actually use.

There were variations of determination and persistence among the other study participants as well. For example, Elizabeth talked about persistence: “I worked very hard to be what I was. There were people in my high school class that I knew were smarter than me, but they didn’t work as hard.” While enrolled in her dietetics program, Elizabeth expanded her textbook knowledge to better assist the people she served. She explained,

> I literally took childbirth classes. I took Lamaze and Bradley classes even though I never had children so that I would know about the childbirth process. I learned so much about breastfeeding that I was really a great breastfeeding counselor, even though I never breastfed myself. It was just an obsession for me to know as much as I could because I needed to be able to help the person, no matter what their question was about their pregnancy.

As an extension agent, she explained, Elizabeth was the first specialist on her floor to have her own computer:

> And so it was, like, that was my proudest moment because … I literally went to a training and did not know how to turn on the computer. I did not know the switch. I did not know where it was. By the time I left, I was doing my own graphics. I was doing it. You know, everything.

For Elizabeth, this determination to learn was not only a way to reach her goals: "That ability to learn on the job, that really made it very rewarding for me".

Abigail discussed achieving tenure and working in academia: "As you proceed in academia, at least in my case, you get more and more assured because people can't take anything away from you." When asked to elaborate on this thought, she stated, "Doubt is always linked to risk. Doubt may still be there, but there aren't as many consequences." Abigail referred to a book she used to read to her children called *The Little Engine That Could*, by Watty Piper. In this story, the train, referred to with the pronoun *she*, is traveling along to bring toys and treats to all the boys and girls. When her engine breaks down, the toys try to get other passing trains to assist. The two newer, shinier engines (referred to with the pronoun *he*) decline to help, as does an older, rustier train. A little blue engine, also referred to with the pronoun *she*, comes along and

agrees to try, saying, “I think I can, I think I can, I think I can.” Upon reaching the destination and delivering the toys and treats to the boys and girls, she says to herself, “I thought I could. I thought I could. I thought I could.” Abigail said that this story made a significant impression on her, with its message “that if you work hard enough, you do it. You do it.” She added, “I don’t know if I can do this huge project. I’ll just start it, and little by little, after a while, it will have its own momentum.” Abigail said, “I think a lot of what I’ve achieved has been [through] sheer perseverance.”

Bernadette talked about working in a printing company and shared that she had found out the camera man was making more money than she was, despite that she had been with the company longer and had more responsibility. She recounted,

> So I confronted the husband and said how come he’s making more money than me? He said, “Well he's married, and he has a wife to support.” And I was like, “What does that got to do with the price of rice? … That's not my problem.” And so they raised me up to match him.

Bernadette transitioned to her second career as a medical assistant, and she was surprised to earn high grades, stating, “I got straight A’s, and I graduated at the top of my class, and you know that was something I had never knew I could do.” She pushed herself: “I got a 98% on the national test. Some of the people I went to school with didn’t pass. I know I’m smart.”

Bernadette’s determination was evident when she spoke about her ex-husband. Her first husband was a fine artist and called her work “craft crap.” However, after illustrating three different articles for quilting magazines, winning four ribbons for her quilts, and illustrating her sister’s book, Bernadette said, “You know it’s like okay craft crap. Take that!”

When Michelle took on a new role as elementary school principal, she initially experienced considerable self-doubt about her ability to perform and succeed. Yet, after deciding not to quit, she adopted a different approach:

> So I wrote—I had this thing called a Monday memo. So the next Monday memo that went out to the teachers, I started with, you know, my background and said, "For us to make this work. I'll have to use my background in leadership with your background in teaching younger students. And in that capacity, I have to be in your classroom, you will be teaching me as much as you will be teaching the students." So I asked my secretary, "Who is the most confident teachers in this building? I'll start with them." And so that's where I started.

With the support of the school community and her drive to succeed, Michelle found a way to persist through her self-doubt and excel in her leadership role.

Like Michelle, Chloe experienced self-doubt when she transitioned from middle school to elementary school teaching. She overcame this doubt by reading and preparing:

> The internet helped a lot. I would go to look up lesson plans of people that taught this age group. I tried to go to the physical education conference, and you could meet other teachers and listen to their ideas and go to different classes.

Megan, having worked in the business field, stated, "I was driven. I accomplished a lot." She reflected on her success:

> It's like, well, how did I end up this way? You know, and it wasn't luck. I think some of it is, some of it's just knowing the right people at the right time. Some of it is being present. Some of it's putting yourself out there and being willing to show what you have.

Megan felt that being in a sorority had helped build her confidence: “I was able to get some ever-increasing leadership roles, and I've learned a lot about people.” Her college advisors had helped her find the resources she needed to succeed.

Megan shared a story about her boss telling her that her intelligence intimidated people. She reflected on that moment, saying, “What is it about what I’ve done that made people feel that way? And so, you know, I always take feedback as a gift.” Megan discussed the anxiety that came with her feeling of self-doubt:

> So, maybe, as you think about it, so I was equipped for the most part to be able to be successful for a lot of different reasons, whether it's my book learning or whether it was things that people coached me through. Um, there's always that pit in your stomach, that this is just not going to be good. And so does that also diminish your, your sense of anxiety about it when you can step back and go, “You know what—it was a darn good run”?

Carmen’s determination was evident in how she achieved her aspiration to become a teacher. She shared,

> Starting my senior year of high school, I was looking for a way to get out of school. So I went to the elementary school that I’d gone to, and I helped in a classroom. So every day I would, or maybe so many times a week or something, I would leave the high school and go over to the elementary school. It was experience, and I got credit for doing it.

She had the opportunity to experience what it was like to teach in the classroom, reflecting, “With the limited options women had, I did that. You could be a teacher, a nurse, or you could work in an office.” Carmen’s father had told her, “‘You can either be a teacher or a nurse. I

won't allow you to do anything else.'" When I inquired about why these were her only options, Carmen stated, "I think it was a status thing—that teachers and nurses have a higher status."

Hillary, upon finding out that her spouse was in love with his graduate assistant, went back to school for her master's degree and completed it in 1 year while working as a reference librarian. She commended her parents for her ability to do so: "I could not have done library school if they hadn't come and stayed with the kids during the day." After completing her degree, she moved to a new state and raised her two children telling them, "'This is a new start, and we're going to just, we got to do it.'" At the time of the interview, Hillary was approximately 800 days away from retirement, continuing to support the students, stating, "There's so much stuff they don't know."

Jenny also pursued her master's degree while her children were younger. When she became burned out from teaching at the middle school level, she found a new passion for teaching as an early childhood education teacher at the local high school. She beamed, "I have loved all of it." She left a school system that was chauvinistic, stating, "It's all men in the upper positions, and many of them are not qualified" and had moved to a system that was "much, much better." Jenny ended our conversation discussing her ex-husband: "I had so little control over my life until I cut that tie. When I came here, it was my house, my job, my friends, my music venues, my pubs."

Mary commented that there were so few women in the finance field in which she worked that, "the first 10 years, we all knew each other." Despite being overlooked for tenure and promotion the first time, she said, "When I got done, I was an endowed professor teaching MBA courses and one undergraduate in financial planning." She started her doctorate when she was 37

years old and finished when she was 42 or 43, commenting, “I was the first generation to get an undergraduate degree in my family.” Reflecting on her publication history, she stated,

> I never could get into the A journals because—I don’t know about your field, but in my field, unless you’re at an A school, unless you’re at Harvard, Yale, Stanford, you’re not going to get in those A journals. I had plenty of C journals and B journals.

Section Summary

Each of the study participants discussed different ways they exercised their determination to work through their feelings of self-doubt. Whether by reflecting on feedback they had received, standing up for themselves regarding compensation, or pursuing an advanced degree, the participants found ways to look beyond their fear, uncertainty, and self-doubt to fight for their place in the world. This determination helped them overcome adversity and achieve success.

Chapter Summary

The participants in this study shared stories that revealed their relationships to the impostor phenomenon. Their reflections showed that fear, uncertainty, and self-doubt were common, rooted in and reinforced by societal gender roles and family upbringing. Though the participants experienced these feelings to varying degrees, these women were determined. Their persistence was evident in their reflections on their academic and professional pursuits. For some, parental or familial support helped them persist through their doubt. For others, their drive amplified their determination to work through their doubt to achieve their goals.

This chapter presented the study findings, which were organized here in two sections, coinciding with the two overarching themes that emerged from the data. First, the participants reflected on feelings of fear, uncertainty, and self-doubt throughout their lives, focusing on

society, family, and gender roles. While several of the participants followed careers outside of societal norms, the majority of the participants were steered toward historically female-oriented careers, such as teaching. Even though these career fields were primarily occupied by females, those in higher level positions tended to be male.

Second, the participants reflected on their persistence and determination in spite of their feelings of fear, uncertainty, and self-doubt, suggesting that the impostor phenomenon does not hinder one's determination to achieve. For some of the participants, these feelings drove them to seek learning opportunities to better prepare themselves for their career.

Chapter 5 discusses the conclusions drawn from the study findings and considers implications for theory and practice.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

My introduction to the term *impostor phenomenon* occurred during the first week in my doctoral program. As I sat in a room full of highly accomplished individuals, I was overcome by feelings of inadequacy. I felt as though someone had made a mistake by accepting me into the program, and I wondered how I would compete with these people. With each passing semester, more and more female students openly shared about their experience with the impostor phenomenon. My professors also shared their feelings of self-doubt and impostorism. The knowledge that others shared these feelings offered me some degree of comfort. Moreover, this awareness peaked my curiosity about the phenomenon, and I wondered how such accomplished women could feel like impostors. While my impostor feelings grew, I became fascinated with understanding how and why women experience self-doubt and impostor feelings, and whether there comes a time when those feelings disappear.

As I designed this study, I imagined I would rid the world of the impostor phenomenon. I believed I would unearth a secret that no one else had discovered which would liberate myself and others from these crippling feelings of self-doubt and impostorism. I now realize these were naive aspirations. As I spoke with the study participants and listened to their experiences, I learned that, although the women did experience self-doubt, they were also determined to achieve their goals. In some ways, this research represented a way for me to understand myself, though the purpose of this study was to understand the impostor phenomenon in women across their lifespans.

Two conclusions were drawn from this study. The first conclusion relates to the existence of an impostor polarity, evident in the tensions described by the study participants. They expressed varying levels of self-doubt and low self-esteem, sharing how these feelings impacted their educational and career aspirations; however, they were also determined to succeed. They managed this polarity through hard work, preparation, and determination—which led to the second conclusion, related to navigating truces. In navigating their changing identities and responsibilities, the participants succeeded beyond measure. They negotiated the tensions associated with their feelings of self-doubt, managing their impostor feelings by holding these feelings as object, and in doing so, they achieved growth and development.

I used the second wave of the liberal feminist movement to frame women's experiences of self-doubt and impostorism in the context of the larger societal and cultural milieu. The participants in my study discussed their experiences with gender roles and stereotypes, in some cases beginning with the family unit. Two of the participants were denied access to equal wages and promotion (i.e., tenure). As White, middle-class women living in America, the liberal feminist movement of the 1970s impacted their experiences, both at home and in their careers. Unlike Black women or women from lower socioeconomic classes, the participants in this study benefitted from access to education and career opportunities.

My research incorporated Gilligan's (1982/1993) work focusing on women's psychological development to better understand the impostor phenomenon. Women's development is often marked by struggles for connection and relationship, and by an internal conflict between responsibility to self and responsibility to others (Gilligan, 1982/1993). Societal norms and stereotypes have created a "framework that hinges on women being selfless—responsive to others but seemingly without a voice or desires of their own" (Gilligan & Snider,

2018, p. 109). Women have been socialized to believe that being responsible for one's needs and desires is a problem to be fixed; however, the current study suggests that the impostor phenomenon is, in fact, a polarity to be managed. Often, as women begin to disentangle their voice from the voices of others, they realize they have a responsibility to self as well as others. This realization leads to "both–and" thinking and the interdependency of two poles—doubt and determination—suggesting that women are always in the ongoing process of managing impostor feelings. As Johnson (1992) maintained, "There is a never-ending shift of emphasis or focus from one pole to the other and back" (p. 82).

Integrating constructive developmental theory into my study further highlighted this polar shift, since the ability to adopt a new perspective on one's responsibility to self and others demonstrates a navigation of truces, leading to a more complex way of knowing. Kegan (1982) defined an *evolutionary truce* as "a balance between subject and object" (p. 28). The current study showed that the participants' relationship to their feelings of self-doubt and impostorism changed over time, suggesting that women are able to experience impostor feelings without being consumed by impostorism. This new perspective allows space for self-authorship, which acknowledges an individual's capacity for independence and recognizes that one has control over one's own life (Kegan, 1982). The demands of life challenge one's ways of thinking and making meaning, compelling them to take responsibility for their lives in a way that accounts for self and others. As Kegan (1994) stated, "[we] see ourselves as the co-creators of the culture (rather than only shaped by culture)" (p. 303).

This chapter provides a summary of the study, discusses conclusions drawn from the findings, considers implications of those findings for theory and practice, describes the

significance and limitations of the research, and poses directions for future research on the impostor phenomenon.

Study Summary

The purpose of this qualitative interview study was to explore the lived experiences of the impostor phenomenon in women over the age of 60 across their lifespans in order to gain a better understanding of their life transitions and the inner world of the impostor phenomenon. I employed a qualitative design for my research inquiry. Data-collection methods included a demographic profile, the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (Clance, 1985), and one-on-one interviews. A total of 24 women completed the profile and CIPS, and, subsequently, 11 of these individuals participated in semi-structured interviews. All the participants in the study were White, middle-class women living in the United States. I used the Listening Guide (Gilligan et al., 2003) to analyze the interview data and to address the overarching research question: How do women over the age of 60 reflect on a life in relationship to the impostor phenomenon?

Discussion and Conclusions

This study revealed two findings adding to the understanding of the impostor phenomenon, one related to fear, uncertainty, and self-doubt, the other to determination through doubt. I drew two conclusions from these findings. The first conclusion is that the impostor phenomenon represents a polarity—a situation in which two interdependent but contradictory states must be maintained for success to occur over time (Sharma & Cook-Greuter, 2010). In this study, the interdependent states were fear, uncertainty, and doubt, and determination through doubt. The participants struggled with feelings of uncertainty, self-doubt, and low self-esteem, which stemmed from their gender, yet they were determined to achieve their goals in spite of these feelings. Through hard work and preparation, the participants managed the impostor

polarity. As the findings suggest, this impostor polarity functions as an infinity loop of sorts, with individual managing both poles by participating in both–and thinking. The management of this polarity creates a complexity in meaning making that supports adult development and growth.

The second conclusion drawn from the study findings relates to the navigation of truces (Kegan, 1982). The study participants reconstructed their relationship to their self-doubt, re-balancing their subjectivity. Kegan (1982) referred to this restored balance between subject and object as an evolutionary truce, in which the individual is deeply embedded in their perceptions. Kegan (1982) stated, "Every evolutionary truce is a temporary solution to the lifelong tension between the yearnings for inclusion and distinctness" (p. 108). When one is able to separate from her perceptions, she can make her feelings of self-doubt object, thus making space for a new way to make meaning. Growth occurs when there is differentiation (emerging from that which is subject) and integration (the ability to make something object; Kegan, 1982). In navigating truces, the participants managed the impostor polarity.

The study data evidenced participants' growth, differentiation and integration, and their navigation through evolutionary truces (Kegan, 1982). Although the women in the study experienced impostor feelings, they were determined to achieve their academic and professional goals. That is, they were able to hold feelings of self-doubt while at the same time growing in their determination to succeed. The following sections summarize and discuss these conclusions, as supported by previous literature and the findings from the current study.

Impostor Polarity

As the findings indicate, there are relational forces at play in reinforcing feelings of self-doubt that are commonly felt by women living with impostor feelings, such as parental influence

or family dynamics. Additionally, societal influences (e.g., gender roles, unequal pay, and inequitable opportunities) and operational, or self-imposed, feelings associated with self-doubt, such as fear of judgement or perfectionist tendencies, reinforce this doubt. Yet, the same feelings that influence self-doubt can drive one's determination to succeed, also known as both–and thinking (Johnson, 1992). A woman can have self-doubt and feelings of impostorism, and, despite these feelings, strive to achieve her goals. She is constantly managing her impostor feelings, shifting from one pole (self-doubt) to the other (determination). These poles are interdependent, with impostor feelings driving the individual to succeed, indicating that a polarity exists within the individual living with the impostor phenomenon. For instance, Bernadette, one of the study participants, used her impostor feelings as a source of motivation. Her first husband was a fine artist and had called her work "craft crap," though Bernadette shared that after illustrating three different articles for quilting magazines, winning four ribbons for her quilts, and illustrating her sister's book, she thought, "You know, it's, like, okay craft crap. Take that"!

As Johnson (1992) noted,

> Polarities are everywhere. We manage them, some better than others. Managing them poorly can be extremely costly to individuals, organizations, and nations. Managing them well, on the other hand, can be extremely enhancing for the systems in which we live.

Managing polarities poorly can be a product of either–or thinking. An example of this point of view is the resistance of the opposite pole. Sharma and Cook-Greuter (2010) stated,

> Each polarity carries a wisdom or value (upside)…. When one pole of a pair becomes a preferred pole, its interdependent opposite gets excluded, neglected, or rejected. We tend

> to describe the opposite pole in terms of downsides—of what would result if we overfocused on it to the exclusion of the pole we prefer. (p. 10)

Either–or thinking prevents the exploration of the opposite pole, which in the context of this study, is determination through doubt. Over-focusing on self-doubt leads to fear (Horner, 1972). Horner (1972) argued that most women avoid success due to anticipated negative consequences, such as social rejection, suggesting a focus on the downsides of determination through doubt.

The participants in this study referenced a lack of self-confidence in their pursuits, emphasizing that they were women, first-generation college graduates, or, in some cases, worked in traditionally male-dominated fields. Their frustration stemmed from living in a patriarchal society where their perceptions of the world were based on what they had heard and seen. Seeing men being paid more for doing the same job, feeling unaccepted because they were women, being told they could not do something because they were a girl or woman, and being measured on different, unequal scales were how these women made meaning of their place in society. The following sections discuss the interdependent states of the impostor polarity.

The Influence of Gender on Feelings of Self-Doubt

This study illuminated the tensions experienced by the participants throughout their life. The internalized feelings of not being enough or not being the person others thought they were created an internal strain. Generally, women in society are treated differently, are subject to different expectations, and hold multiple roles. These multiple roles—of wife, mother, sister, employee, daughter, etc.—subject women to intersecting identities, creating a complexity of overlapping forces and often leading to self-doubt and impostor feelings. For instance, Abigail had taught 5 days a week when most of her colleagues had taught 2 to 3 days per week, leaving her few opportunities to be present for her children. Yet, she discussed adjusting her schedule to

4 days per week; this gave her honors students more time in the language lab and gave her more time with her children (balance). Abigail shared, "And Fridays, I did play groups and stuff like that. I stayed home with the kids."

When women are offered different supports and/or directed into careers laid out by parents or societal expectations, they often struggle to author their own identity, encouraging either–or thinking. This tension can lead to confusion about who defines their purpose in life. Studdard (2002) argued,

> The Imposter Phenomenon is instilled in women in many ways, by society's messages regarding appropriate (nurturing) roles for women such as wife, mother, nurse, and teacher; by schools that steer girls/women into these appropriate roles; and by expectations that women avoid high levels of achievement or at least be willing to give up goals in order to take on the appropriate nurturing role. (p. 31)

The results of the current study were consistent with Studdard's findings: Six of the 11 interview participants had been steered into roles consistent with societal expectations for women at that time. Five of the interview participants pursued careers in fields such as printing, finance, insurance, risk management, and linguistics. For these women, their professional identity was challenged by a lack of female role models and struggles to achieve equality in their field.

Research on the impostor phenomenon and identity has suggested that impostor feelings place psychological burdens (lower sense of belonging, mood and anxiety disorders, maladaptive perfectionism) on those living with them (Clance & Imes, 1978; Cokley et al., 2015; McClain et al., 2016; Neureiter & Traut-Mattausch, 2016; Rackley, 2018). While the participants in the current study did not describe experiencing psychological burdens described in existing literature, impostor feelings can cause frustration and a lack of self-confidence, which some

interview participants did discuss feeling. As noted earlier, in describing their lack of self-confidence, the women emphasized that they were women or first-generation college graduates, or had taken jobs in traditionally male-dominated fields. Their frustrations stemmed from living in a patriarchal society where their perceptions were based on what they had heard and seen.

Other psychological burdens include emotional exhaustion and burnout (Hutchins, 2015; Hutchins & Rainbolt, 2017; Hutchins et al., 2018). Hutchins (2015) described emotional exhaustion and burnout as "work-related stress and a depletion of one's physical, mental, and emotional resources" (p. 5). These feelings often contribute to low job satisfaction and decreased motivation. In some cases, impostor feelings and self-doubt can impact persistence in academic and professional pursuits. Hutchins and Rainbolt (2017) suggested that "faculty who persistently question their professional legitimacy are at higher risk for experiencing adverse psychological outcomes with implications to career retention, advancement, and job performance" (pp. 195–196). Only three of the 11 interview participants in this study mentioned a failure to pursue professional goals, and it is unclear whether this failure was a direct result of their impostor feelings. For example, Jenny did not pursue a career in agricultural journalism due to her spouse's resistance; Hillary felt outclassed in the doctoral program she had started; and Michelle made the decision to pursue a specialist degree instead of a doctorate because the former was more relevant to her position as a school principal.

My study findings are consistent with the results of earlier research regarding competing commitments and impostor feelings (Craddock et al., 2018; McEnery, 2014; Studdard, 2002). Both Studdard (2002) and McEnery (2014) discussed the conflicting commitments of family and work or school, while Craddock et al (2018) found that familial and career obligations led to increased impostor feelings. The interview participants in the current study discussed balancing

family and work, as well as family and school. For some, this balance included a break from the workforce after having children. For others, it was about choices they made to meet the needs of family, sometimes at the expense of their career.

In summary, self-doubt and impostor feelings comprise a combination of relational forces, such as parental influence or family dynamics, societal influences (e.g. gender roles), and intersecting identities (e.g. parent, daughter, employee, student). There are psychological burdens connected to impostor feelings, such as frustration and lack of self-confidence, which could be described as destructive tension (Emerson, 2013). This combination of forces reinforces the pole of self-doubt, yet the participants in the current study also exhibited determination.

Determination Through Doubt

The study participants shared their successes, achievements, and the ways they persisted through their feelings of self-doubt and impostorism. Whether they sought the support of others, studied, pursued resources, or took advantage of learning opportunities, these women did not allow their impostor feelings to prevent them from achieving their goals. Prior impostor phenomenon research has shown that determination (the opposite pole) strengthens women's ability to persist through impostor feelings to achieve their goals (Badawy et al., 2018; Barr-Walker et al., 2019; Lane, 2015; Sanford et al., 2015). While Clance (1985) found that hard work, perfectionism, avoidance of difficult intellectual endeavors, and a push to excel were ways to prevent failure, the participants in the current study did not avoid hard work and considered their efforts to be a necessary part of their professional aspirations.

Sanford et al. (2015) found that women resisted impostor feelings by turning to mentors, partners, and other women in leadership. My study revealed similar findings in interviews with Nanc and Mary. Mary had the support of her spouse when she returned to school. She received

encouragement from those in her master of business administration program to pursue a doctorate. She was in a cohort with six military men, and as she shared, "Their view of the world was if one of us goes through, all of us to get through. So we have to work together." Mary went on to emphasize, "The men were extraordinarily supportive." Nanc discussed her job in product development, despite her lack of knowledge in this area. At the time, she worked with two gentlemen who took the time to teach her about things like engineering. Though she was hired by two strong women leaders, who opened up opportunities for her, she appreciated one of her male bosses for seeing the value she added to the company and for increasing her salary to align with her male counterparts.

The operational forces supporting persistence include motivation, preparation, and confidence, and I found evidence of these forces among the study participants. My data supported prior research showing that women with impostor feelings demonstrate greater effort through study and hard work (Badawy et al., 2018; Clance & Imes, 1978). Elizabeth took childbirth and breastfeeding classes to better serve her clients. Bernadette pushed herself to excel on the national medical assistant exam. Chloe sought resources to help her prepare for her transition to elementary school teaching. Michelle used her leadership experience to succeed in her role as elementary school principal. Megan's leadership experience in a sorority helped build her confidence. Carmen used an opportunity in high school to gain experience working with children to prepare her for a teaching career. Hillary and Jenny were resilient in using their adversity to their advantage, discussing the break-up of their marriages as an element of their success. Jenny discussed gaining control over her life after she cut ties with her ex-husband, and Hillary went on to complete her master's degree and move to a new state after her divorce. In

short, the study participants were motivated to succeed in their academic and professional pursuits.

The results of this study connect to prior research supporting the diminishment of impostor feelings over time. For example, Barr-Walker et al. (2019) reported that impostor scores decreased as years of experience increased; the same was true for participants in Lane's (2015) study. Abigail reported increased assurance and a decreased sense of risk as she progressed through her academic career. Likewise, Mary's self-doubt lessened upon receiving tenure and ultimately attaining an endowed teaching position. This lessening of self-doubt and impostor feelings over time is important to consider, especially in the context of a patriarchal society.

In summary, the findings of this study suggest that a polarity exists in relation to the impostor phenomenon. The participants made choices and sought opportunities to persist in reaching their goals, despite experiencing self-doubt and impostor feelings. They sought resources, often in the form of support from others, and reported that their impostor feelings decreased over time. This highlights a paradox: Family support and pressure, as well as societal forces and support, reinforced participants' self-doubt, but it also supported their persistence. Ahlfeld (2009) reported similar findings, noting supports such as family members, friends, and mentors, along with forces such as societal acceptance and workplace barriers as decreasing or exacerbating impostor feelings.

Sharma and Cook-Greuter (2010) maintained that "how we deal and work with polarities becomes a significant dimension to focus on in the context of enhancing our self-awareness and facilitating development" (p. 9). The ways of making meaning for the participants in the current

study expanded and became more complex over time. This complexity can lead to a more effective navigation of truces (Kegan, 1982), as discussed in the next section.

Impostor Phenomenon and the Navigation of Truces

According to Kegan (1982), "every developmental stage is an evolutionary truce" (p. 108). For each of the participants in this study, there was an established evolutionary truce. Through encounters with colleagues or family members, they experienced a need to reorganize themselves, leading to a reconstruction of a more adequate truce. For example, Bernadette, in finding out that her male colleague was receiving higher compensation for less responsibility, challenged her boss, using her voice to demand equal pay. She disembedded herself from an interpersonal space and integrated a more evolved sense of self, maintaining what Kegan (1982) referred to as "a personal self-system" (p. 101), in which she occupied a different space. This encounter allowed Bernadette to establish an evolutionary truce within the fourth order of consciousness, transitioning from being embedded in the interpersonal toward becoming an independent self (Kegan, 1982). Bernadette perceived her place in the world differently and needed to reorient herself to a new way of making meaning about her relationships with others, specifically her boss. She possessed a new capacity for owning herself, "rather than having all the pieces of herself owned by various shared contexts" (Kegan, 1982, p. 101).

To better understand how one navigates these truces, it is important to first understand how one is embedded in the psychosocial environment, or holding space. One focus of constructive developmental theory is the holding environment, a space that meets a person where they are and accepts how they make sense of their experience(s). The three characteristics of a holding space are holding securely, letting go, and remaining for recovery. A holding space supports an individual as they move through the orders of consciousness. Daloz (2012) wrote,

> A good-enough holding environment helps us to carve that boundary in a way that allows us to consolidate each new sense of self so that we can maintain meaning and coherence in the world and yet remain open to a lifetime of fresh wonders. (p. 185)

Another way to describe this holding space is as a culture of embeddedness (Kegan, 1982). A woman is embedded in multiple psychosocial environments (e.g., school, work, family), and within each of these environments there are different cultures. These cultures become a function of how a woman makes meaning of the world in which she lives.

My study illuminated tensions experienced by the participants throughout their life. Feelings of "not being enough" created an internal tension, the resolution of which led to an evolutionary truce, with the participants disembedding themselves from their impostor feelings and persisting through their self-doubt. Women experience different forms of treatment, are subject to different expectations, and hold multiple roles (e.g., wife, mother, sister, employee, daughter), subjecting them to intersecting identities and ultimately leading to self-doubt and feelings of impostorism. Self-doubt may be a product of the differing cultures of embeddedness available to men and women. Kegan (1982) stated,

> The radically different nature of traditional supports for men and women for just this kind of evolution is so overwhelming that it is hard to avoid concluding that the greatest source of difference in evolutionary level lies with the differing embeddedness cultures available to men and women. (p. 211)

The data from my study illuminated these psychosocial environments and the ways the participants navigated them. The women shared early experiences, from childhood through adulthood that exemplified how they made meaning of their psychosocial milieu.

Kegan (1982) argued that, prior to the 1960s, there were no supports for women to forge self-authored identities. During the 1960s, despite there being millions of women in the workforce, wage and salary discrimination was rampant, which only drove the women's movement (Solomon, 1985). The informal consciousness raising associated with the women's movement may have represented a form of meaning making for the participants in this study. Each participant discussed having the support of their parents while pursuing their education. Although some of the participants were expected to pursue careers traditionally associated with women, such as teaching, they still retained a space within the family unit which they were held securely and where they were free to explore their pursuits—a place to return to for recovery, supporting progression through the orders of consciousness.

The youngest participants in this study were in their early 60s, and though they did not necessarily have formal supports for their navigation of truces (Kegan, 1982), I argue that they did develop a self-authored identity. According to Kegan (1982), those who reach the fourth order of consciousness are oriented toward their own judgments and values, do not view conflict as a threat to relationships, and are embedded in their personal autonomy. In their interviews, the participants discussed their independence from their parents, spouses, etc., their unwillingness to accept a subordinate place in their career, and their rebalancing of multiple environments (e.g., work and family). These examples suggest a personal autonomy and a self-authored identity. The participants shifted away from the expectations of these multiple environments and relied instead on their internal voice, making choices based on their own belief systems. These choices reflected their determination to succeed in spite of their feelings of self-doubt and impostorism.

In summary, the findings of this study suggest that a polarity exists within the impostor phenomenon. Managing this polarity requires both–and thinking, leading potentially to a more

complex way of meaning making. This increased complexity supports a navigation of truces (Kegan, 1982) and, in turn, adult development and growth.

Implications for Practice

The findings from this study can inform employers and educators about how to better support women who live with impostor feelings. For example, Barnard (2018) studied well-being in women, focusing on work–life balance, and found that challenge, balance, and authenticity were needed to maintain well-being. Notably, Barnard found that well-being was challenged by self-doubt and anxiety exacerbated by gendered stereotypes and masculine norms of success. The results of this study support Barnard's findings and further the notion that the support of employee well-being is vital to the growth and development of individuals and organizations. Understanding how self-doubt and impostor feelings manifest over time provides insight into how women deal with the complexities and challenges of today's world, and informs adult educators' efforts to develop the skills needed to grow the capacity of individuals to meet today's demands (Nicolaides & Marsick, 2016).

This study raises awareness of impostor polarities, enabling adult educators to create conditions that support both–and thinking, allowing individuals to see the positives in both poles, and reframing one's relationship to the impostor phenomenon. The successful navigation of the impostor polarity minimizes destructive tension, such as stress and frustration (Emerson, 2013), facilitating a more complex way of making meaning. Those who lead learning environments must work with the complexity of challenges facing learners and the assumptions they hold about these challenges, and foster the capacity for constructing meaning (Nicolaides & Yorks, 2008).

Implications for Theory

This study builds on previous literature pertaining to constructive developmental theory, specifically how women make meaning of impostor polarities and navigate truces. Cox's (2016) research found that "socialized knowers experienced elements of suffering paradox, while self-authored knowers experienced elements of navigation paradox" (p. 191), suggesting a navigation of truces (Kegan, 1982). The ability to manage impostor polarities indicates a reorganization of a woman's perception of self and her environment, and hence a more complex way of making meaning (Kegan, 1994). The ability to navigate truces demonstrates the capacity for managing the impostor polarity.

Recognizing how societal influences impact impostor feelings and meaning making builds on the literature around feminist theory and women's developmental theory. During her interview, Mary discussed the lack of support from other women in her master's program, stating "We each had to fight so hard to be there." This powerful statement illuminates these women's struggles with patriarchy, family expectations, and feelings of inadequacy rooted in societal beliefs. The study data align with prior research about society and the impostor phenomenon (Clance & Imes, 1978; Clance et al., 1995; Cohen & McConnell, 2019; Studdard, 2002).

Society does not support women in overcoming their feelings of self-doubt and impostorism. In fact, Cohen and McConnell (2019) argued that "researchers should reinterpret the impostor phenomenon as a social process that produces a self-perception of fraudulence" (p. 459), stressing how an individual's social interactions impact their self-perception. My study found that societal norms reinforcing women's roles teachers, nurses, or secretaries (for instance) impacted feelings of self-doubt, as well as such outcomes as lower pay for equal work. These social influences cannot be overlooked when considering impostor feelings. Clance et al. (1995)

proposed that “the impostor phenomenon was rooted in interpersonal and social contexts, in that both the family and female gender-role socialization in a predominantly male-normal social system form the backdrop for impostor feelings” (p. 80). The qualitative data from this study support this claim, related namely to discussions about the participants’ social contexts while they were growing up, as well as expectations of career options and interpersonal relationships.

Clance and Imes’s (1978) prominent study of the impostor phenomenon considered the impacts of societal and familial influences on impostor feelings in women. These influences have been supported by women’s developmental theory. Gilligan (1982) argued,

> Girls’ initiation or passage into adulthood in a world psychologically rooted and historically anchored in the experiences of powerful men marks the beginning of self-doubt and the dawning of the realization no matter how fleeting, that womanhood will require a dissociative split between experience and what is generally taken to be reality. (p. xxi)

As society begins to emerge from COVID-19, there is evidence that unreasonable expectations for women continue. For example, Thomas et al. (2020) posited that “the pandemic may be amplifying biases women have faced for years: higher performance standards, harsher judgment for mistakes, and penalties for being mothers and for taking advantage of flexible work options” (p. 41). These biases will likely lead to continued impostor feelings in women. Women are subject to encounters with social status, power, or reproductive biology (for instance), and these different incidents shape their experiences (Gilligan, 1982/1993) and impact their ways of making meaning.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it addressed women's struggles with feelings of self-doubt and impostorism throughout their lives—feelings that often have negative impacts. The study results were consistent with prior impostor phenomenon research findings related to identity development (Badawy et al., 2018; Cohen & McConnell, 2019; Cokley et al., 2015; Hutchins & Rainbolt, 2017; McClain et al., 2016; Rackley, 2018; Stone et al., 2018) and competing commitments (Cokley et al., 2018; Craddock et al., 2018; Cusack et al., 2013; McEnery, 2014; Studdard, 2002), with gender playing a significant part in feelings of impostorism, especially in the professional milieu and the need to balance parenting and career. The study results confirmed that new endeavors intensified impostor feelings and self-doubt. However, my study findings did not fully align with prior research on the impacts of the impostor phenomenon (Hutchins, 2015; Hutchins et al., 2018; McLean, 2017; Neureiter & Traut-Mattausch, 16; Sanford, 2015; Tao & Gloria, 2019). For example, while the study participants did express a certain level of stress and anxiety related to their feelings of self-doubt, these feelings did not impact their determination to succeed. In fact, for some, their self-doubt lessened over time, due to years of experience and hard work.

Although representation of women in leadership positions has increased (Huang et al., 2019), compensation for women remains lower (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020), arguably contributing to their feelings of self-doubt and impostorism. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted that most women are still considered the primary caregiver for their children, forcing some to leave their career to care for family members (Thomas et al., 2020). Collectively, society must reconceptualize the relationship between women and social structures and offer secure

holding spaces for women to help them manage impostor polarities and navigate evolutionary truces (Kegan, 1982).

Additionally, this study offers insights into the impostor phenomenon over one's lifespan. Based on my review of the relevant literature, this is the first study to explore impostor feelings over time, and my findings suggest that a polarity exists for women with impostor feelings. The effective management of this polarity indicates a complex "navigation" that supports adult development and growth.

The study is significant because it implies that the impostor phenomenon is an individual problem with societal roots. As Gilligan and Snider (2018) stated, "The persistence of patriarchy is premised in part on women's silence and women's compliance" (p. 136). As long as women continue to be treated as less than (e.g. lower wages, unequal access to leadership positions, increased caregiving expectations), the impostor polarity will persist. While the results of this study suggest that the research participants successfully managed this polarity, changes in societal norms would potentially eliminate the need for them to do so in the future.

Study Limitations and Future Directions for Research

This study had the several limitations. First, the sampling criteria limited participant response. The first call for participants occurred in January 2020. The sampling criteria required that participants (1) be a female over the age of 60; (2) have 15 or more years of career experience; (3) be a member of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute; (4) have a graduate degree; and (5) complete the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale. After receiving only two responses from the first call, I contacted an insider at OLLI. She indicated that most women at that time would not require a graduate degree to progress in their career and suggested that I change the selection criteria. After making the change, I was hesitant to send another request for

participants through the OLLI listserv. I did contact other OLLI groups within a 2-hour drive; however, though these groups were willing to post my request for participants, I did not receive any replies.

Another limitation to the study was directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, the university decided to close campus and move to remote work. Because I am the director of continuing education, I was tasked with transitioning in-person conferences to virtual formats and processing refunds for those conferences that could not be adapted to a virtual platform. These work obligations prevented me from making any progress on participant recruitment until January 8, 2021, when I posted a call for participants through the Nextdoor app.

This research was also limited by my own impostor anxiety. After the call for participants received such a poor response, I began to doubt my research and myself. I felt as though there were more important things for people to worry about in the world than my study and that self-doubt and impostor feelings were not a priority, academic or otherwise. I felt defeated and paralyzed about how to move forward with participant recruitment, and I chose to put the research aside temporarily. After several months of self-reflection, I considered the possibility that I was not reaching the right audience in my recruitment efforts. I needed to move past my own self-doubt and finish the research. I issued a call for participants on the Nextdoor app, and I received multiple responses, ultimately allowing me to collect and analyze data. When I consider my crippling anxiety and impostor feelings, I often contemplate what incident forced me to renew my participant recruitment, which in turn has led me to consider future directions for impostor phenomenon research.

Future research about the impostor phenomenon should, for instance, apply the critical incident technique (CIT) as a central data-collection method. First described in 1954, CIT was

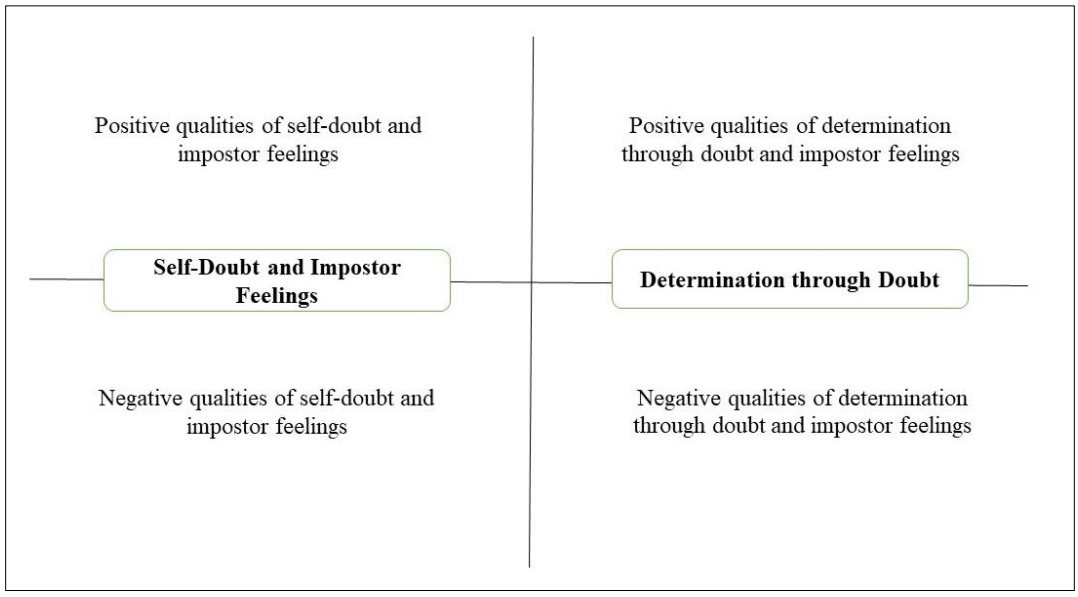
initially used in industry but has become a valuable exploratory tool in psychology, nursing, education, and medicine (Butterfield et al., 2005). Using CIT would serve as a means of examining the incidents leading to feelings of self-doubt and impostorism, as well as the incidents that have guided individuals toward persistence and determination.

Future studies should include diverse selections of participants. The participants in this study were White, middle-class women from the baby-boomer generation (i.e., born post-World War II, between 1946 and 1964). They lived during a time of change, experiencing the women's rights movement, the civil rights movement, and significant technological advancements. The inclusion of women of different racial and/or ethnic backgrounds in future research would offer another perspective, as their experiences with education and career would have been very different during this time. The inclusion of women from different generations, such as millennials (born between 1981 and 1996) or members of Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2015) would further extend the understanding of impostor feelings and how one's way of feeling or being is impacted by sociocultural events.

Finally, incorporating polarity mapping into impostor phenomenon research would offer researchers a methodological tool for data collection and analysis, providing an opportunity to make sense of impostor polarity and its complexities. A polarity map consists of four quadrants (Johnson, 1992), as seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Impostor Polarity Mapping



In the context of my research findings, the left side of the quadrant represents self-doubt, with the upper quadrant representing the positive qualities and the lower quadrant the negative qualities. On the right side of the quadrant, representing determination through doubt, with positive and negative qualities in the upper and lower quadrants. Visualizing the four quadrants allows one to "see the whole picture" (Johnson, 1992, p. 5)—that is, the benefits and limitations of each pole—and to begin to practice both–and thinking. Polarity mapping can help those living with impostor feelings and self-doubt to deal with related tensions and to understand that self-doubt and determination through doubt are interdependent and that the tension between them is a normal part of a larger phenomenon (Emerson, 2013). Polarity mapping would provide a tool for helping to make impostor feelings and self-doubt object (Kegan, 1982).

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this qualitative interview study was to explore the lived experiences of the impostor phenomenon in women over the age of 60 across their lifespans in order to gain a better understanding of their life transitions and the inner world of the impostor phenomenon. . The chapter discussed two conclusions drawn from the two major findings (related to fear, uncertainty, and self-doubt and determination through doubt). The findings suggest the existence of a polarity within the impostor phenomenon, as the study participants managed their self-doubt and determination to meet academic and professional goals. The study results further suggests navigation of truces (Kegan, 1982), with the participants achieving a self-authored identity. In navigating the truces, the participants managed the impostor polarity.

The chapter also discussed the practical and theoretical implications of the study. Among the practical implications, the findings can inform employers and educators on how to better support women who live with impostor feelings. Understanding how self-doubt and impostor feelings manifest over time has the potential to offer insights into how women navigate in the modern world. The study results also reconceptualize impostor feelings, removing the notion that women are less than since the impostor phenomenon is primarily a systemic problem. Lastly, this chapter offered suggestions for future impostor phenomenon research.

Final Thoughts

stay strong through your pain

grow flowers from it

you have helped me

grow flowers out of mine so

bloom beautifully

dangerously

loudly

bloom softly

however you need

just bloom

—Rupi Kaur (2015)

I entered this doctoral research on a mission to understand the presence of the impostor phenomenon in a woman's life and to save myself from the pain of living with feelings of self-doubt and impostorism. I preceded these final thoughts with Kaur's poem because my hope is that this study helps others to bloom as it has helped me to grow. In this moment, I find myself reflecting on my reactions to the participant experiences and critically examining my growth and development. In talking with these incredibly strong, intelligent, and driven women, I found my strength. I discovered others who shared my feelings of self-doubt and impostorism. Within the confines of the interview space, the participants and I revealed our vulnerabilities. The interview space functioned as a holding environment, in which we confirmed and recognized our impostor feelings. In some ways, this shared reality enhanced our capacity for making meaning of the impostor phenomenon.

Several times over the course of the last year and a half, I considered discontinuing the quest for my doctorate. I was tired. I was overwhelmed. My self-doubt and impostor feelings were intense, but I forged forward. I was determined. I managed my impostor polarity, mastering my anxiety and fear and reflecting on the fact that I was navigating my own growth and development through this process. I believe this experience has allowed me to see the world through a different lens, to have a new perspective on how one learns and grows. My earlier way

of making meaning no longer met my needs, and the various holding spaces I encountered gave me the space to navigate to a deeper, more complex way of making meaning of my experiences and my life. I believe I had a village guiding me on this journey, and there were three holding spaces that functioned to facilitate the navigation of truces (Kegan, 1982). First, my family held me, accepted me, and provided company on this doctoral journey. Second, my major professor, Dr. Aliki Nicolaides, challenged me to grow beyond my current ways of knowing. Finally, my colleagues and dear friends, John, Ajit, Katie, and Anil, provided continuity and stability, and they continue to do so as I "get through this thing called life" (Prince, 1984).

Drawing on my own feelings of impostorism and exploring how a patriarchal society supports these feelings has impacted my self-perception, my understanding of the impostor phenomenon, and my awareness of the strength needed to persist through self-doubt and impostor feelings. I find myself engaging differently, realizing that self-doubt comes from not knowing; as I engage with these unknowns, I gain strength. With practice and exposure to new ideas and situations, I expand what I know, and I grow through doubt, building confidence and expanding my ways of making meaning.

REFERENCES

Acker, S. (1987). Feminist theory and the study of gender and education. *International Review of Education, 33*(4), 419–435. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00615157

Ahlfeld, A. J. (2009). *The impostor phenomenon revisited: The intersection of race, gender, and professional status for women of color* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Alliant International University, California School of Professional Psychology.

Badawy, R. L., Gazdag, B. A., Bentley, J. R., & Brouer, R. L. (2018). Are all impostors created equal? Exploring gender differences in the impostor phenomenon-performance link. *Personality and Individual Differences, 131*, 156–163. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2018.04.044

Barnard, A. (2018). Well-being, more than a dream: Women constructing metaphors of strength. *Frontiers in Psychology, 9*, 1–12. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01186

Barr-Walker, J., Bass, M., Werner, D., & Kellermeyer, L. (2019). Measuring impostor phenomenon among health sciences librarians. *Journal of the American Library Association, 107*(3), 323–332. https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2019.644

Belenky, M. F., Clinchy, B. M., Goldberger, N. R., & Tarule, J. M. (1986). Women's ways of knowing: The development of self, voice, and mind (Vol. 15). New York: Basic books.

Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods.* Pearson Education.

Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. (2017). A look at women's education and earnings since the 1970s. *The Economics Daily*. https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2017/a-look-at-womens-education-and-earnings-since-the-1970s.htm

Brue, K. (2018). Harmony and help: Recognizing the impact of work-life balance for women leaders. *Journal of Leadership Education*, 17(4), 219–243. https://doi.org/10.12806/V17/I4/C2

Butterfield, L. D., Borgen, W. A., Amundson, N. E., & Maglio, A. S. T. (2005). Fifty years of the critical incident technique: 1954–2004 and beyond. *Qualitative Research*, *5*(4), 475–497. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794105056924

Chmielewski, J. F. (2017). A listening guide analysis of lesbian and bisexual young women of color's experiences of sexual objectification. *Sex Roles*, *77*(7), 533–549. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-017-0740-4

Clance, P. (1985). *The impostor phenomenon: Overcoming the fear that haunts your success.* Peachtree Publishers.

Clance, P. R., Dingman, D., Reviere, S. L., & Stober, D. R. (1995). Impostor phenomenon in an interpersonal/social context: Origins and treatment. *Women & Therapy, 16*(4), 79–96. https://doi.org/10.1300/J015v16n04_07

Clance, P., & Imes, S. (1978). The impostor phenomenon in high achieving women: Dynamics and therapeutic intervention. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice, 15*(3), 241–247. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0086006

Cohen, E. D., & McConnell, W. R. (2019). Fear of fraudulence: Graduate school program environments and the impostor phenomenon. *The Sociological Quarterly, 60*(3), 457–478. https://doi.org/10.1080/00380253.2019.1580552

Cokley, K., Awad, G., Smith, L., Jackson, S., Awosogba, O., Hurst, A., . . . Roberts, D. (2015). The roles of gender stigma consciousness, impostor phenomenon and acdemic self-concept in the academic outcomes of men and women. *Sex Roles, 73*, 414–426. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-015-0516-7

Cokley, K., Stone, S., Krueger, N., Bailey, M., Garba, R., & Hurst, A. (2018). Self-esteem as a mediator of the link between perfectionism and the impostor phenomenon. *Personailty and Individual Differences*, *135*(1), 292–297. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2018.07.032

Cox, A. B. (2016). *Adult learning in online educative spaces: A constructive-developmental perspective* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Georgia]. https://getd.libs.uga.edu/pdfs/cox_alexandra_b_201612_phd.pdf

Craddock, S., Birnbaum, M., Rodriquez, K., Cobb, C., & Zeeh, S. (2018). Doctoral students and impostor phenomenon: Am I smart enough to be here? *Journal of Student Affairs and Practice*, *48*(4), 429–442. https://doi.org/10.2202/1949-6605.6321

Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry, *Theory Into Practice*, *39*(3), 124–130. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip3903_2

Cusack, C., Hughes, J., & Nuhu, & N. (2013). Connecting gender and mental health to impostor feelings. *Psi Chi Journal of Psychological Research*, *18*(2), 74–81. https://doi.org/10.24839/2164-8204.JN18.2.74

Daloz, L. (2012). *Mentor: Guiding the Journey of adult learners*. John Wiley & Sons.

Daphna-Tekoah, S., Megadasi Brikman, T., Scheier, E., & Balla, U. (2020). Listening to hospital personnel's narratives during the COVID-19 outbreak. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *17*(17), 6413. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17176413

deMarrais, K. (2004). Qualitative interview itudies: Learning through experience. In K. deMarrais & S. Lapan, *Foundations for research methods of inquiry in education and social sciences* (pp. 51–68). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2000). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Sage Publications.

Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education.* Free Press.

Drago-Severson, E. (2014). "My turn": Women's goals and motivations in a a diploma program: A constructive-developmental approach. *International Journal of Adult Vocational Education and Technology*, *5*(4), 1–19. http://doi.org/10.4018/ijavet.2014100101

Drago-Severson, E. (2016). Teaching, learning and leading in today's complex world: Reaching new heights with a developmental approach. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, *19*(1), 56–86. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2015.1096075

Drago-Severson, E., & Blum-DeStefano, J. (2012). A new approach for new demands: The promise of learning-oriented school leadership. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, *16*(1), 1–33. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2012.741265

Eddy, J. A. (2019). *Towards a more innocent humanity: Listening to the voices of women navigating difficult mother-daughter relationships* [Doctoral dissertation, Adelphi University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Eisenstein, H. (2005). A dangerous liaison? Feminism and corporate globalization. Science & Society, 69(3), 487-518.

Emerson, M. B. (2013). *Navigating organizational paradox with polarity mapping: A classic grounded theory study* [Doctoral dissertation, Fielding Graduate University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. https://www.proquest.com/openview/fa06f6dcd3d2706a30333922dba43440/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750

Geib, M. (2012). *Coming to terms with abusive childhood sexual experiences: A listening guide study of women's stories* [Doctoral dissertation, Duquesne University]. https://dsc.duq.edu/etd/574

Gilligan, C. (1979). Woman's place in a man's life cycle. *Harvard Educational Review*, *49*(4), 431–446. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.49.4.h13657354l3g463

Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development.* Harvard University Press.

Gilligan, C. (2015). The listening guide method of psychological inquiry. *Qualitative Psychology, 2*(1), 69–77. https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000023

Gilligan, C., Spencer, R., Weinberg, M. K., & Bertsch, T. (2003). On the listening guide: A voice-centered relational method. In P. M. Camic, J. E. Rhodes, & L. Yardley, *Qualitative research in psychology* (pp. 157–172). American Psychological Association.

Gilligan, C., & Snider, N. (2018). *Why does patriarchy persist?* John Wiley & Sons.

Glesne, C. (2016). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. Pearson.

Goldin, C., Katz, L. F., & Kuziemko, I. (2006). The homecoming of American college women: The reversal of the college gender gap. Journal of Economic perspectives, 20(4), 133-156.

Grbich, C. (2013). *Qualitative data analysis: An introduction*. Sage Publications.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1982). Epistemological and methodological bases of naturalistic inquiry. *ECTJ*, *30*(4), 233–252. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02765185

Horner, M. (1972). Toward an understanding of achievement-related conflicts in women. *Journal of Social Issues*, *28*(2), 157–175. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1972.tb00023.x

Huang, J., Krivkovich, A., Starikova, I., Yee, L., & Zanoschi, D. (2019). *Women in the workplace 2019*. McKinsey & Co.

Hutchins, H. M. (2015). Outing the imposter: A study exploring imposter phenomenon among higher education faculty. *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, *27*(2), 3–12. https://doi.org/10.1002/nha3.20098

Hutchins, H., Penney, L., & Sublett, L. (2018). What imposters risk at work: Exploring imposter phenomenon, stress coping, and job outcomes. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, *29*, 31–48. https://doi.org/10.1002/hrdq.21304

Hutchins, H., & Rainbolt, H. (2017). What triggers imposter phenomenon among academic faculty? A critical incident study exploring antecedents, coping, and development opportunities. *Human Resource Development International*, *20*(3), 194–214. https://doi.org/10.1080/13678868.2016.1248205

Jackson, A. Y., & Mazzei, L. (2012). *Thinking with theory in qualitative research: Viewing data across multiple perspectives*. Routledge.

Johnson, B. (1992). *Polarity management: Identifying and managing unsolvable problems*. HRD Press.

Johnson-Bailey, J. (2003). Enjoining positionality and power in narrative work: Balancing contentious and modulating forces. In *Foundations for research* (pp. 139–154). Routledge.

Johnstone, D. J. (2016). A listening guide analysis of women's experiences of unacknowledged rape. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *40*(2), 275–289. https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684315624460

Kaur, R. (2015). *Milk and honey*. Andrews McMeel Publishing.

Kegan, R. (1982). *The evolving self: Problem and process in human development.* Harvard University Press.

Kegan, R. (1994). *In over our heads: The mental demands of modern life*. Harvard University Press.

Kegan, R. "What 'Form' Transforms?: A Constructive-Developmental Perspective on Transformational Learning." In J. Mezirow and Associates (eds.), Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000.

Kim, J.-H. (2016). *Understanding narrative inquiry*. Sage Publications.

Kline, J. B. (1973). Women's business opportunities in the 1970's. Journal of Small Business Management (pre-1986), 11, 12.

Kramp, M. K. (2004). Exploring life and experience through narrative inquiry. In K. deMarrais & S. D. Lapan (Eds.), *Foundations for research* (pp. 103–121). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

LeCompte, M., & Preissle, J. (1993). *Ehtnography and qualitative design in educational research*. Academic Press.

Lige, Q., Peteet, B., & Brown, C. (2017). Racial identity, self-esteem, and the impostor phenomenon among African American college students. *Journal of Black Psychology, 43*(4), 345–357. https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798416648787

Maykut, P., & Morehouse, R. (1994). *Beginning qualitative research: A philosophic and practical guide.* RoutledgeFalmer.

Mazerolle, S. M., & Barrett, J. L. (2018). Work-life balance in higher education for women: Perspectives of athletic training faculty. *Athletic Training Journal*, *13*(3), 248–258. https://doi.org/10.4085/1303248

McClain, S., Beasley, S., Jones, B., Awosogba, O., Jackson, S., & Cokley, K. (2016). An examination of the impact of racial and ethnic identity, impostor feelings, and minority status stress on the mental health of Black college students. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, *44*, 101–117. https://doi.org/10.1002/jmcd.12040doi:10.4085/1303248

McCutcheon, J., & Morrison, M. (2018). It's “like walking on broken glass”: Pan-Canadian reflections on work-family conflict from psychology women faculty and graduate students. *Feminism & Psychology*, *28*(2), 231–252. https://doi.org/10.1177/0959353517739641

McEnery, A. M. (2014). *Female doctoral students' experiences of the impostor phenomenon: An exploration of narratives* [Doctoral dissertation, Indiana University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I. (No. 3636195)

McEuen, M. (2016, June 9). Women, gender, and World War II. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*. https://oxfordre.com/americanhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.001.0001/acrefore-9780199329175-e-55

McLean, M. (2017). *The impostor syndrome: An obstacle to women's pursuit of power* [Doctoral dissertation, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. (No. 10799978)

Merriam, S. B. (2002). Introduction to qualitative research. In S. B. Merriam & R. S. Grenier (Eds.), *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis* (pp. 3–19). Wiley.

Merriam, S. B. (2018). Adult learning theory: Evolution and future directions. In Contemporary theories of learning (pp. 83-96). Routledge.

Merriam, S., & Simpson, E. (1995). *A guide to research for educators and trainers of adults*. Krieger Publishing.

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Wiley.

Miller, J. B. (1986). *Toward a new psychology of women (2nd ed.)*. Beacon Press.

Miller, K., Vagins, D., Hedgepeth, A., & Nielson, K. (2018). *The simple truth about the gender pay gap*. American Association of University Women.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2018). *Digest of education statistics*. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18_318.10.asp

Neureiter, M., & Traut-Mattausch, E. (2016). An inner barrier to to career development: Preconditions of impostor phenomenon and consequences for career development. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *7*(48), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00048

Nicolaides, A., & Lim, A. (2020). Undergoing the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic as ruptures in American civil society create conditions for right action. *Reflective Practice, 21*(6), 844–860. https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2020.1821632

Nicolaides, A., & Marsick, V. J. (2016). Understanding adult learning in the midst of complex social "liquid modernity." *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, *2016*(149), 9–20. https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.20172

Nicolaides, A., & Yorks, L. (2008). An epistemology of learning through. *Emergence: Complexity & Organization*, *10*(1). https://doi.org/10.emerg/10.17357.62a84a1caf1f2a1fd0d7a10333d79a3c

Petrovic, S., Lordly, D., Brigham, S., & Delaney, M. (2015). Learning to listen: An analysis of applying the listening guide to reflection papers. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *14*(5). https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406915621402

Pinel E. C. (1999). Stigma consciousness: the psychological legacy of social stereotypes. Journal of personality and social psychology, 76(1), 114–128. https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.76.1.114

Prince. (1984). Let's go crazy [Song]. On *Purple Rain*. Warner Brothers.

Rackley, K. R. (2018). *Examining the role of impostor phenomenon in the college experience* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Texas at Austin]. http://hdl.handle.net/2152/68447

Roulston, K. (2010). *Reflective interviewing: A guide to theory and practice.* Sage Publications.

Sadker, M. P., & Sadker, David Miller. (1994). Failing at fairness : how America's schools cheat girls. C. Scribner's Sons ; Maxwell Macmillan Canada ; Maxwell Macmillan International.

Saldaña, J. (2011). *Fundamentals of qualitative research*. OUP USA.

Saldaña, J., & Omasta, M. (2016). *Qualitative research: Analyzing life*. Sage Publications.

Sanford, A., Ross, E., Black, S., & Cambiano, R. (2015). Finding courage and confirmation: Resisting impostor feelings through relationships with mentors, romantic partners, and other women in leadership. Advancine Women in Leadership, *35*, 31–41. https://doi.org/10.18738/awl.v35i0.140

Schmidt-Levesque, J. M. (2015). *Voices in relationship: The significance of a father's influence on women's development of voice* [Doctoral dissertation, Trinity Western University). TWU Thesis Collection. https://twu.arcabc.ca/islandora/object/twu%3A306?solr_nav%5Bid%5D=da9e94512a2208b8149b&solr_nav%5Bpage%5D=0&solr_nav%5Boffset%5D=0

Sharma, B., & Cook-Greuter, S. (2010). *Polarities and ego development: Polarity thinking in ego development theory and developmental coaching*. http://www.cook-greuter.com/Sharma%20Cook-Greuter%20paper%20EAIF%20SUNY.pdf

Solomon, B. M. (1985). *In the company of educated women: A history of women and higher education in America*. Yale University Press.

Stone, S., Saucer, C., Bailey, M., Garba, R., Hurst, A., Jackson, S. M., & Cokley, K. (2018). Learning while Black: A culturally informed model of the impostor phenomenon for Black graduate students. *Journal of Black Psychology*, *44*(6), 491–531. https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798418786648

Studdard, E. S. S. (2002). *Behind the mask of success and excellence: Impostorism and women doctoral students* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Georgia]. UGA Theses and Dissertations. http://hdl.handle.net/10724/29439

Studdard, S. S. (2002). Adult women students in the academy: Impostors or members? *The Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, *50*(3), 24–37. https://doi.org/10.1080/07377366.2002.10401202

Tao, K., & Gloria, A. (2019). Should I stay or should I go? The role of impostorism in STEM persistence. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *43*(2), 151–164. https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684318802333

Thomas, R., Cooper, M., & Cardazone, G. (2020). *Women in the workplace 2020*. https://wiw-report.s3.amazonaws.com/Women_in_the_Workplace_2020.pdf

Toffoletti, K., & Starr, K. (2016). Women academics and work-life balance: Gendered discourses of work and care. *Gender, Work & Organization*, *23*(5), 489–504. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12133

Tomkiewicz, J., & Bass, K. (1999). Changes in women's fear of success and fear of appearing incompetent in business. *Psychological Reports*, *85*(3), 1003–1010. https://doi.org/10.2466/pr0.1999.85.3.1003

Tong, R. (2013). *Feminist thought: A more comprehensive introduction* (4th ed.). Westview Press.

Tracy, S. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight “big-tent” criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 16*(10), 837–851. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410383121

Tracy, S. (2013). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact.* John Wiley & Sons.

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020). Highlights of women's earnings 2019. Report 1089. https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/womens-earnings/2019/pdf/home.pdf

APPENDIX A

CLANCE IMPOSTOR PHENOMENON SCALE

For each question, please circle the number that best indicates how true the statement is of you. 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 at all true)	(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
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

3. I avoid evaluations if possible and have a dread of others evaluating me.

1	2	3	4	5
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

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
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

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 or knew the right people.

1	2	3	4	5
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

Note. From The Impostor Phenomenon: When Success Makes You Feel Like A Fake (pp. 20-22), by P.R. Clance, 1985, Toronto: Bantam Books.

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
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

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
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

8. I rarely do a project or task as well as I'd like to do it.

1	2	3	4	5
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

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
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

10. It's hard for me to accept compliments or praise about my intelligence or accomplishments.

1	2	3	4	5
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

11. At times, I feel my success has been due to some kind of luck.

1	2	3	4	5
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

12. I'm disappointed at times in my present accomplishments and think I should have accomplished much more.

1	2	3	4	5
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

13. Sometimes I'm afraid others will discover how much knowledge or ability I really lack.

1	2	3	4	5
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

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
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

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
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

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
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

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
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

18. I often worry about not succeeding with a project or examination, even though others around me have considerable confidence that I will do well.

1	2	3	4	5
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

Note. From The Impostor Phenomenon: When Success Makes You Feel Like A Fake (pp. 20-22), by P.R. Clance, 1985, Toronto: Bantam Books.

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
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

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
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

Scoring the Impostor Test

The Impostor Test was developed to help individuals determine whether or not they have IP characteristics and, if so, to what extent they are suffering.

After taking the Impostor Test, add together the numbers of the responses to each statement. If the total score is 40 or less, the respondent has few Impostor characteristics; if the score is between 41 and 60, the respondent has moderate IP experiences; a score between 61 and 80 means the respondent frequently has Impostor feelings; and a score higher than 80 means the respondent often has intense IP experiences. The higher the score, the more frequently and seriously the Impostor Phenomenon interferes in a person's life.

Permission To Use the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS)

PLEASE FIND ATTACHED THE REQUESTED CLANCE IP SCALE AND SCORING INSTRUCTIONS. THIS CORRESPONDENCE CONSTITUTES PERMISSION TO USE THE SCALE. I REQUEST THAT ON EACH CIPS YOU USE/DISTRIBUTE, THAT YOU HAVE THE COPYRIGHT AND PERMISSION INFORMATION PRINTED ON EACH PAGE:

Note. From The Impostor Phenomenon: When Success Makes You Feel Like A Fake (pp. 20-22), by P.R. Clance, 1985, Toronto: Bantam Books. Copyright 1985 by Pauline Rose Clance, Ph.D., ABPP. Reprinted by permission. Do not reproduce without permission from Pauline Rose Clance, drpaulinerose@comcast.net, www.paulineroseclance.com.

This clause is already on the attached CIPS copy.

If you do not want to put the name of the test or book on the scale if it may affect your research, contact me and I can send you a version of the scale without that specific information yet retaining the clause, "Under copyright. Do not reproduce without the permission of Dr. Pauline Rose Clance."

For research purposes, I also request that you send a citation and abstract/results summary of your work to me when you are completed with your research to add to the IP reference list.

For IP presentation purposes, I request that you send me a brief summary (i.e., couple of sentences) of participant (and your own) feedback about the presentation in regard to how the Impostor Phenomenon was received.

Thank you again for your interest in the Impostor Phenomenon. Please e-mail me that you agree with these conditions. You may refer participants to my website (www.paulineroseclance.com) for any interest in viewing IP articles and for my contact information.

Best,

Pauline Rose Clance, Ph.D., ABPP

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Research question: How do accomplished women who have had successful careers, full family lives, and life experiences for sixty years or more, reflect on a life in relationship to the impostor phenomenon?

- Tell me about the first time you experienced feelings of doubt about something you achieved. (Probe: What prompted these feelings?)
- Tell me about a time when you felt like you didn't belong. (Probe: How did this make your feel?)

I will use the following interview questions to gain an understanding of the woman's relationship to possible impostor experiences in the workplace:

- Tell me about your professional life. (Probes: Support? Awards? Confidence?)
- Tell me about your favorite job.
- Tell me about your least favorite job. (Probe: why was this your least favorite?)
- Tell me about a memorable work achievement.

I will use the following interview questions to gain an understanding of the woman's relationship to possible impostor experiences in school:

- Think about a time when you earned an award and tell me about it. (Probe: tell me about the award. How were you chosen?

- Think about your days in school and tell me about your favorite class. Why was this your favorite class?
- Tell me about your least favorite class. Why was this your least favorite class?

I will use the following interview questions to gain an understanding of the woman's relationship to possible impostor experiences in her personal life:

- Tell me about your family (parents, siblings, extended family).
- Tell me about your happiest family memory.
- Tell me about your saddest family memory.

APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Name:

How old are you?

_____60-64

_____65-70

_____70-74

_____75 or older

What is your marital status?

_____Single

_____In a relationship

_____Married

_____Separated

_____Divorced

_____Widowed

Do you have any siblings? _____Yes _____No

If you answered yes to the question above, please indicate the number of siblings and your birth order.

_____ # of siblings

Birth order

What is the highest level of education you have?

_____Master's Degree
_____Specialist Degree
_____Doctorate Degree
_____Professional Degree (MD, JD)

Please list your profession(s) and number of years below.

Profession	Number of Years

APPENDIX D

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Greetings,

I am a doctoral candidate under the direction of Dr. Aliki Nicolaides in the department of Learning, Leadership, and Organization Development at the University of Georgia. I invite you to participate in a research study entitled, Impostor phenomenon across the lifespan: How do accomplished women reflect on their impostor phenomenon experiences? The purpose of this study is to understand how women over the age of 60 describe times of self-doubt and instances when they questioned their abilities and accomplishments during their lives. To participate in this study, you must be (1) a female over the age of 60; (2) have 15 or more years of career experience; (3) be a member of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI); (4) have a graduate degree, (5) complete the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS).

Your participation will involve filling out a basic demographic information form and completing the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale, which should take less than 1 hour. You may be asked to participate in a 1 to 1 ½ hour in-depth interview to discuss times of self-doubt, or instances when you questioned your abilities. Your involvement in this study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty. Participation in this study may ask you to think about difficult issues but should be no more stressful than typical daily activities. If you experience discomfort you may discuss your concerns with Dr. Nicolaides or myself.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent allowed by law, precautions will be taken to protect your privacy including, the use of pseudonyms so that no individual information will be directly identifiable. The results of the research study may be published, but your name and identifying information will not be used.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact me at cheryls@uga.edu or at 706-424-4343.

Thank you,

Cheryl Kennedy