DISSERTATION

THE IMPOSTOR PHENOMENON:

A LOOK AT THE OUTSIDE, THE INSIDE, AND THE OTHER SIDE

THROUGH SCHOLARLY PERSONAL NARRATIVE

Submitted by

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements

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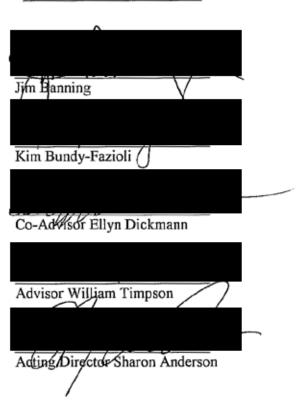Fall 2009

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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE DISSERTATION PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY ANDREA L. TAYLOR ENTITLED: THE IMPOSTOR PHENOMENON: A LOOK AT THE OUTSIDE, THE INSIDE, AND THE OTHER SIDE THROUGH SCHOLARLY PERSONAL NARRATIVE BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

THE IMPOSTOR PHENOMENON:

A LOOK AT THE OUTSIDE, THE INSIDE, AND THE OTHER SIDE

THROUGH SCHOLARLY PERSONAL NARRATIVE

The purpose of the study was, first, to fully explore the research related to the psychological construct of the Impostor Phenomenon and then to share personal experiences that would help inform and enlighten others as I had been informed and enlightened during the process. In order to accomplish this I researched and documented a comprehensive look at everything published from 1974, the year that Dr. Pauline Rose Clance and Dr. Suzanne Imes coined the term, to the date of this dissertation. Included in this study were all dissertations and peer-reviewed journal articles that directly speak to the topic; excluded were masters' theses. A separate Impostor Reference page is provided (see p. 162).

My goal from the beginning was to engage the reader in the research and the narratives that followed so as not to be boring (Jensen, 2004) while I sought to answer my initial research question: Does writing my story from the perspective of an "impostor" help me and my readers to discover and understand the basis for and impact of the Impostor Phenomenon in our lives? Then, like most qualitative inquiries, a secondary question surfaced: How does one move on from a blighted childhood to flourishing adulthood?

My hope is that by writing a Scholarly Personal Narrative I have provided evidence that this methodology "can reach, and even surpass, a professional school's highest scholarly standards" as Nash (2004, p. 3) asserts it can, and to provide "validity of an alternative form of intellectual inquiry" (p. 4).

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

He has turned for me my mourning into dancing (Psalms 30:11).

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

You have to be willing for it to look bad . . .
before it looks good.
Author Unknown

One Thing Leads to Another

I remember reading this quote in an art book I checked out from the library

several years ago. After being profoundly un-artistic my whole life, I found myself one

day wanting to watercolor. No rhyme. No reason. But I went with it anyway. That was

seven years ago. Recently I sold three originals that had been on display at our local

Starbucks. Amazing! The quote (above), quite similar to Anne Lamott's (1994) "shitty

first draft" (p. 21), greatly relieves my anxiety about needing the painting to "look good"

during all stages of the creative process. When I sit down to paint I tell myself that this is

"just practice." In so many ways, I found that the dissertation process was like the artistic

process, and I had to self-talk my way through it, being willing for the early drafts to

"look bad."

When presented with the opportunity to enter the Ph.D. program in Educational

Leadership, Renewal, and Change at CSU, I jumped at it—much like I jumped into art! I

"(re)connected with my dream" (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002, p. 115) and knew

it because I felt "suddenly passionate about the possibilities (my) life holds (p. 116). I

went directly to Barnes and Noble and found the most current book available on

education reform: *Tough Choices or Tough Times* (NCEE Report, Dec. 2006). It both

excited and disturbed me and led me into research that connected with my passion. After

conferring with my new advisor, I launched out on an independent study to investigate

the report and then analyze and synthesize the published responses that were pouring in

from across the country. I spent about a year gathering data and writing drafts, intending

to use what I was learning as the focus for my dissertation.

But one thing led to another, and I soon found myself sharing my personal story,

first as a student in my own classes, and then as a guest in others'. "You won't really hear

what I have to say until you begin to know who I am" (Taylor, Personal Journal, 2007)

was my rationale. "Having personal experience with the subject matter affects one's

credibility in the eyes of students" (Timpson, Canetto, Borrayo, & Yang, 2003, p. 25).

So I told about my early years, growing up in a broken and alcoholic home; about

dropping out of school, getting married, having babies, and then being abandoned. I

spoke about taking 17 years to complete a BA in English, getting secondary teaching

credentials while raising four little ones—mostly by myself. I shared about relocating to

Seattle and creating a school for street kids while working on a Masters degree in

Curriculum and Instruction. I spoke about their poverty, homelessness, and the need to

provide quality education for those in the margins. I concluded those talks with my next

dream—*The Intentional School*—another chance at education for disadvantaged youth.

But it was the *responses* to my personal story that helped change the direction that my

dissertation was to take.

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Emergent Design

</div>

The Emerging Researcher

When I made the decision to write my story as the topic of my dissertation, I was

faced with the methodology question. Do I seek to discover what kind of researcher I am

by examining my academic strengths, my learning styles, my natural inclinations towards one thing over another? Or do I seek a methodology that best matches the topic I have chosen? I wondered if an experienced researcher could *just tell* what would be most appropriate for me by observing how I approached inquiry in general. I discovered what kind of artist I was in just this manner: after sharing previous work with my new art instructor and mentor, I positioned myself right next to her and painted, week after week. Then one afternoon she announced to the little group of artists working around the table that I was an artist in the "minimalist-impressionistic tradition." So there I was . . . named and grounded in my *knowing*! Finding my way in the research world was not as simple as that, however.

The Emerging Methodology

I initially thought that I would write an auto-ethnography of my educational journey. I even had a working title: *From GED to Ph.D. and Beyond: One Woman's Journey*. Because there was not a class available at that time that would help me with this particular methodology, I elected to do another independent study, this time on auto-ethnography. I began reading books, many of which I purchased, and articles, all of which I printed from on-line sources or copied from handbooks : Atkinson & Coffey (2001) on ethnography; Booker (2004) on story theory; Ellis & Bochner (2000) on auto-ethnography and personal narrative; Ellis (2004) on the methodology of auto-ethnography; Fiske (1990) on ethnosemiotics; Goodall (2000) on writing in the new ethnographic genre; Leavy (2009) on the arts in research; Nash (2004) on Scholarly Personal Narrative; Neumann (1996) on alternative forms of qualitative writing;

Schwandt (2001), the dictionary of qualitative inquiry; Scott-Hoy (2008) on passionate researching; and Wolcott (1999) on a way of seeing.

I was feeling purposeful and directed and well on my way, knowing just what I was doing. Or so I thought. Then I came face-to-face with something that has hindered and distressed me my whole life! This discovery came about as a result of talking with one of my professors about the struggles I experience as a doctoral student. After listening patiently, she mentioned an article that she had read recently and said I probably would find it interesting. When I read it I saw myself so clearly! The discovery of the Impostor Phenomenon led me to yet another shift in the direction for my dissertation. In the literature, the Impostor Phenomenon is "discussed in terms of self psychological theory" (Langford & Clance, 1993, p. 495) and defined as the inability of some intelligent and high achieving people to internalize their own successes. They, instead, internalize their failures and attribute their successes to other factors such as luck or circumstance (Clance, 1985). At that point, I saw that my dissertation was an *emerging process* as well as an *emerging product*.

The Emerging Topic

I carefully read everything I could find on the Impostor Phenomenon, and the more I read the more convinced I became that I had a different kind of story to tell than I first envisioned. Memories began surfacing as I continued researching, and during times of reflecting, I began to discover why I did some of the things I did. I was getting to some of the underlying issues (Timpson et al., 2003). Plotnik (1996), an author and publisher on writing, talks about putting *thoughts into words* and says that this need to share ourselves—who we are and what we think—seems to come from deep within us. When

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this "longing for expressiveness" (p. 6) moves us to get what is *in* us *out*, the result is relief and joy. He says that "unexpressed, this particular richness of a life is lost in the mall of generic memory. We barely know what an experience was until we shape it into words that somehow distinguish it" (p. 9). I made the move from generalized remembering to reconsideration and contemplation by disciplining myself to log the memories as they surfaced so that I could later write about them as completely as possible. Beyer (1971) says that

> when we mentally process something—reflect upon it—take it apart—reassemble it in new ways—we are learning more than just the information we are working with. By relating it to our present structure of knowledge, we make it mean something to us (in Gunn, Richburg, & Smilkstein, 2007, p. 190).

Reflection was leading me to self-awareness which "means having a deep understanding of (my) emotions . . . strengths and limitations . . . values and motives" (Goleman et al., 2002, p. 40). Goleman et al., believe that this kind of effective reflection brings about a kind of transparency that is demonstrated by "an authentic openness to others about one's feelings, beliefs, and actions" (p. 47). As an educator, I believe that it is important for me to be able and willing "to think about the same thing in more than one way" (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 5). I am being challenged to find a new way to see things and then to articulate and communicate them (Bolman & Deal). In effect, I am redefining *who I am* in relationship to this new-found information and *who I am becoming* as a result of my discoveries.

I am beginning to see myself, for example, as an emerging storyteller—willing to share my experiences with my colleagues and my students (Riccardi in Coughlin, Wingard, & Hollihan, 2005). This contradicts my old feelings of introversion. But "large-scale change begins from a personal stance and cascades outward" (Riccardi, in Coughlin

et al., 2005, p. 321). As I begin to change on the inside, I should see a change in people around me, including connections with my sphere of academic and personal influence.

Putnam (2000), Professor of Public Policy at Harvard, has identified a significant social change which he discusses in his book, *Bowling Alone*. He writes that we live in an overall state of "disconnectedness" (p. 27), especially in the academy, and that there is a growing need to reconnect. hooks (1994), educator and author on issues of racism in the academy, agrees and says that teachers are in the classroom to "offer something of ourselves to the students" (p. 139). I am expecting, as a result of my research project, to become a better teacher—better able to "join self and subject and students in the fabric of life" (Palmer, 1998, p. 11). Orr (2004), Professor of Environmental Studies and Politics at Oberlin College, believes that our planet is in desperate need of storytellers. I am responding to Orr's plea by telling my story as an "impostor."

The Emerging Research

I now had my topic . . . and my methodology, or did I? While reading the literature on auto-ethnography, I came across *Liberating Scholarly Writing: The Power of Personal Narrative* by Robert Nash (2004). In the Forward of that book Witherell, professor and educator, wrote: ." . . Nash has offered a compelling intellectual and philosophical case for the importance of personal scholarly narrative in academic research and writing" (p. vii). Nash's (2004) first guideline in writing a Scholarly Personal Narrative is to have a central theme or message which he calls a "construct" (p. 56). In the literature, the Impostor Phenomenon is defined as a construct and is "discussed in terms of self psychological theory" (Langford & Clance, 1993, p. 495). I saw that the Impostor Phenomenon construct could easily provide the structure called for

in a Scholarly Personal Narrative. Nash believes that it is necessary to "integrate your material in some orderly way" (p. 56) and I began mentally formulating a way to do it.

As I reviewed Nash's (2004) book I discovered that his theoretical framework for Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) comes from the works of Jerome Bruner, Richard Rorty, and Ruth Behar, among others. Their positions on the theory that undergirds this methodology will be discussed in more depth in chapter 3. "The ultimate intellectual responsibility of the Scholarly Personal Narrative scholar is to find a way to use personal insights gained in order to draw larger conclusions for readers" (Nash, 2004, p. 18).

The Research Text

So I decided to write my life story of an "impostor" as a Scholarly Personal Narrative (Nash, 2004). Nash describes Scholarly Personal Narrative as writing that "combines story and scholarship"; is "concrete and abstract"; is "both particular and general"; is "down-to-earth and theoretical" (p. 12). He further describes Scholarly Personal Narrative as one that "construct(s) narratives that (are) honest, self-disclosing, and scholarly all at the same time" (p. ix). He believes that Scholarly Personal Narrative "takes qualitative research one major step further" (p. 18). As I read his book and pondered the implications of attempting to write my story of an "impostor" in the challenging way that he described, I became convinced it was right for me. My Committee agreed. If I constructed a scholarly personal narrative, my story would be composed "in such a way that the (reader) would be touched and maybe even enriched" (p. 21). This was my hope.

At that point in the process I found myself researching on two fronts: everything I could find on Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) and the thirty-year span of

dissertations, articles, and books on the Impostor Phenomenon as I continued to ponder my research question. I determined to provide a comprehensive look at the research done on the Impostor Phenomenon and have provided that in the Literature Review in chapter 2. Then, in chapter 3, I more fully explored the theoretical foundation for Scholarly Personal Narrative. But first—the research question.

The Research Question

Does writing my story from the perspective of an "impostor" help me and my readers to discover and understand the basis for and impact of the Impostor Phenomenon in our lives?

The Research Method

I have read, reread, high-lighted, and taken notes on Nash's (2004) work on Scholarly Personal Narrative, and then moved on to read or review the works he references: Jane Tompkins (1996), Richard Rorty (1989, 1999), Paulo Freire (1972), Jerome Bruner (1977, 1983, 1996), Ruth Behar (1996), bell hooks (1994, 2003), and Witherell and Noddings (1991). In addition to the SPN folks, I considered what some of the authors I studied during the auto-ethnography project had to say about narrative research: Richardson (2000), Ellis and Bochner (2000), Cortazzi (in Atkinson et al., 2001), Plummer (in Atkinson et al., 2001), Berger (2001), Goodall (2000), Leavy (2009), and Neumann (1996). I also looked at some of the writers that write about writing: Cheney (1991) on creative non-fiction, Jenson (2004) on personal creativity, Plotnik (2000) on expression, Richardson (2000) on writing as inquiry, and Lamott (1994) on writing and life. I have retrieved and read the one dissertation written in the SPN methodology that I could find (Brogden, 2007) but continued to search for others. I felt

compelled to do all of this additional research in order to gain a firmer philosophical

foundation for writing my dissertation as a Scholarly Personal Narrative. My struggle

was to stay focused and directed in this endeavor, trusting that I would *emerge* from it

more scholarly, *more personal*, and *a strengthened narrator.*

The Emerging Literature Review

I challenged myself to find a way to write a literature review in the structure of

Scholarly Personal Narrative. Originally thinking I would write a traditional one, I had

already assembled chronologically the 114 abstracts in a 3-ring binder and reviewed each

one again, seeking major themes that could act as the structure for it. (I used abstracts

from dissertations and journal articles only; masters' theses were not included in this

study.) I then rearranged the abstracts according to 5 themes: 1) those studies that dealt

with the construct itself, comparing or contrasting it with other self-psychological

constructs such as depression, anxiety, fear of failure, etc. 2) those studies that dealt with

the scales used to measure IP characteristics and the level of intensity; 3) those studies

that researched demographic information on "impostors"; 4) those studies that focused on

either academic or vocational connections to the IP. The last theme I determined to be of

significance was 5) those studies that focused on help for the "impostor." After re-sorting

the abstracts according to theme, I made sure that I had all 114 under one of the above

themes. In addition to the dissertations and journal articles I found five books that were

directly related to the Impostor Phenomenon.

As I was outlining the first section of the literature review I began to wonder how

I might write this in a more Scholarly Personal Narrative way. Galvin (2004 recommends

that the researcher narrow the number of studies by focusing more directly on the topic or

by including only those studies that were done in the last five years. I *could* limit the number of studies by using those that directly relate to the academy. I had not sorted them that way and would only do it if I found that this was the best approach. Or I could select only those studies done in the past five years. If I were to do this, I would be working with 4 dissertations, 10 articles, and 1 book in a more focused overview of the most current literature.

What I really wanted to do, however, was use the seminal work (Clance, 1985) and a subsequent article (Langford & Clance, 1993) as the structure for telling personal experiences as an "impostor." While reading through this particular book and the article several times, I longed to linger a bit, ponder my understanding of the theory, have the opportunity to reflect and respond to what is being said about "me" by personal stories that illustrate what was being described, moving the discussion back and forth between the clinical and the personal. As warranted, I could refer to other studies that directly related to what I was sharing. Nash (2004) believes that "radical introspection and storytelling in scholarly writing have both particular (offering value for the storyteller) and universalizable (offering value for others) possibilities for professionals" (p. 3). He wants "faculty to value personal written expression to the extent that, if students choose to do this kind of writing (and a growing number wants to), it will be an acceptable (and respectable) genre for conducting certain kinds of research" (p. 3). I was determined to give it my best effort.

After some discussion with my committee, it was decided that a better structure for the Literature Review would be to use the Personality Profile of the "impostor" that I

had drawn from the literature as a way to organize what I had found and to save my personal experiences of an "impostor" for a later chapter.

What follows is an overview of the Impostor Phenomenon in order that the reader will have a schema for all that follows.

The Impostor Phenomenon Introduced

In the literature, the Impostor Phenomenon is "discussed in terms of self psychological theory" (Langford & Clance, 1993, p. 495) and will provide the construct that will frame my stories in chapter 4. As I began to share this topic, I discovered that my peers in the doctoral program, as well as the graduate students I taught, expressed interest in it. Then I read that as many as 70 percent of the population in general experience the Impostor Phenomenon at some level in some circumstances (Clance, 1985). This gave me confidence that many of you who read my story will not only be able to *see me*—but may be enabled to see yourself—or someone you know, as well.

In researching the Impostor Phenomenon I found that the vast majority of studies are clinical in nature, either comparing or contrasting this little-known construct with other psychological constructs or testing the validity of the measurement instruments. To date I have not found a single qualitative study that describes the Impostor Phenomenon from "the inside"—one written from the perspective of someone who experiences its effects. Neither have I found any literature that fully explores this construct from *the other side*—reframing it in a positive way. I do this in chapter 5. The purpose of my research is to explore this psychological construct in terms of personal experiences. Because I am telling my story, I am using the female pronoun throughout the dissertation

when discussing the "impostor." A further discussion of gender issues associated with the Impostor Phenomenon is included in chapter 2.

One of the characteristics of this phenomenon is that the "impostor" remains silent in the face of opposing viewpoints or in stressful situations. The first step in overcoming the Impostor Phenomenon is *recognition* (Clance, 1985). The second step for me was this research project.

The Impostor Phenomenon History

The Impostor Phenomenon was discovered and then named by two psychotherapists, Dr. Pauline Rose Clance and Dr. Suzanne Imes, who were colleagues and researchers in the Atlanta area in 1974. They began to see clients and students who were intelligent and high achieving, but who doubted their success and stressed about their abilities (Clance, 1985). After years of counseling clients and researching this phenomenon, Clance defined the typical "impostor" and created the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIP, 1985) that measures the intensity that an "impostor" could experience.

Although "impostors" come from different economic and social backgrounds, from different fields, are at various levels of their careers, and have different talents and abilities, they all have intense feelings that characterize this phenomenon.

> Impostors believe they are intellectual frauds who have attained success because they were at the right place at the right time, knew someone in power, or simply were hard workers—never because they were talented or intelligent or deserved their positions (Clance, 1985, p. ii).

The so called "impostors" have "done well in school, earned the correct degrees, received awards and praise from their colleagues, and advanced rapidly in their careers" (p. i). But this has never been internalized. "Impostors" do not enjoy their successes

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because they don't believe they deserve them. As a professor and practicing

psychotherapist at Georgia State University, Clance recognized the "impostor" symptoms

among her students, other faculty, and among the staff (Clance, 1985). The early research

done on this topic reveals 12 dissertations (published between 1979 and 1989), 11 articles

(published between 1978 and 1989), and 3 books (Clance, 1985, 1986; Harvey, 1985). A

comprehensive look at this body of research is presented in chapter 2 under the heading

of *Early Studies of the Impostor Phenomenon* (see page 23).

The Impostor Tests

 Clance (1985) developed The Impostor Test, later renamed the Clance Impostor

Phenomenon Scale (CIP, 1985) in order to help people "determine whether or not they

have 'impostor' characteristics and, if so, to what extent they are suffering" (p. 19). It is a

20-question Likert-scaled self-report measurement that has been fully researched to give

a quick answer to any who might be wondering if they are an "impostor." When I saw

that the actual test was in Clance's (1985) book, I sat right down and took it and was

amazed at the degree to which I related to the questions. Really! I am a classic case!

I later found Harvey's (1985) book on the Impostor Phenomenon, and it also

contains a test that she developed to "help psychologists identify these feelings in the

course of their research and compare their findings" (p. 109). She provided additional

questions to aid readers in exploring their own "impostor" issues.

The Impostor Components

There are six components of the Impostor Phenomenon according to Clance

(1985) that are described below. I use the female pronoun for simplification and because

I am writing my personal story of an "impostor" in chapter 4. It just seemed logical. It is

important to note that not all "impostors" experience all of the components; however, the higher the score on the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIP), the more components you are likely to experience.

The first component is the impostor cycle which Clance (1985) describes as a treadmill experience. The person is faced with a new challenge or need to perform and then experiences feelings of anxiety, self-doubt, and dread" (p. 51). Her need to do well triggers one of two automatic responses: she either procrastinates . . . or she digs in and does intense and prolonged hard work. Either way, she suffers. She is constantly thinking, "How good am I really?" (p. 25). When the challenge has passed, the "impostor" experiences only a brief time of relief and happiness. "But the next time a similar situation arises, the whole vicious cycle is repeated, and the success of the previous project is negated" (p. 26). Time after time the "impostor" experiences the same pressure:

"A speech is given—the response was excellent, the applause was loud.

A test was taken—the ("Impostor") received an A.

An interview was given—the Impostor got the job" (Clance, 1985, p. 117). None of these experiences are internalized, however, and the suffering continues.

The second component of the Impostor Phenomenon is "the need to be special, to be the very best" (Clance, 1985, p. 26). This stems from experiences in early childhood when she is the top performer. But in later years when she cannot retain that position, she feels like a failure. The "impostor" is not comforted by the fact that she is among the exceptional people in her field, no longer the best.

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The third aspect of the Impostor Phenomenon is referred to as the "Superwoman (and Superman) Complex" (Clance, 1985, p. 26). The "impostor" believes that she should be able to do anything attempted with ease and with perfection. When this does not occur, she feels like a failure. This impossible position often causes the "impostor" to feel overwhelmed.

The fear of failure is the fourth component frequently experienced by the "impostor" (Clance, 1985). In order to avoid this unpleasant experience of failing, the "impostor" frequently goes to great lengths (by over-preparing) to make sure that she doesn't make a public mistake. Shame and humiliation are usually found at the root of this fear, and are associated with early mistakes and less-than-top performance in childhood. It is interesting to note that the high goals set as an adult are usually self-imposed, and the failures are usually noticed only by the "impostor" (p. 27).

"Impostors" cannot or will not believe the evidence that they are "indeed intelligent and/or successful" (Clance, 1985, p. 27). Clance, in her counseling practice, saw examples of people distorting and discounting praise they received which enabled them to continue to believe that they were failures. This "denial of competence and discounting praise" (p. 27), is the fifth component of the Impostor Phenomenon.

The last component listed by Clance (1985) is the "fear of and guilt about success" (p. 27). Her research seemed to show that women experience this aspect of the Impostor Phenomenon because they fear that their personal success will interfere with their relationships with the men in their lives. Men experience this aspect of the Impostor Phenomenon because they fear being seen as more successful than their fathers. Also, if "impostors" perceive "their successes as atypical of their family, race, sex, or the region

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in which they live (they) may experience guilt about those successes" (p. 28). In both cases, the fear is related to separation and rejection. Another factor in this component is that "impostors" are afraid that success may bring more responsibilities and that they will not be able to repeat their success in subsequent tasks.

The Impostor Roots

Children who develop "impostor" characteristics are from families that foster them. They hear descriptions of themselves and develop their self-image from them. "These messages given to us when we are very young stay with us and have a profound effect on the self-image we develop" (Clance, 1985, p. 32). Parents instruct their children about actions and behaviors; they assign "attributes to each child, and by the stories that are told and the messages that are given, the child begins to take on the characteristics that the family has described" (p. 32).

Clance (1985) has defined four common elements of the family of the "impostor." The first element includes inconsistent messages and images that are presented to the child from an early age. There is a difference between what the child receives at home and what she receives outside the home, "from teachers, friends, neighbors, or other relatives. When this happens the child doesn't know what messages to believe . . ." (p. 33).

Expected high performance can be another message that is presented to the child at an early age and is the second common element found in families of "impostors" (Clance, 1985). The family may spend time telling and retelling stories of other members' great successes, stressing the ease in which the successes were earned. Being

smart, learning quickly, and "maneuver(ing) well in the world" (p. 33) become the family tradition that the "impostor" must follow.

The third common element that often occurs in families of "impostors" is the child's perception of herself as "different." Clance (1985) refers to this as "the square peg trying to fit in the family's round hole" (p. 34). This "impostor" child views her talents and/or abilities as being distinct from the other members' which then leads to feelings of insecurity around those issues.

The "impostor child" does not receive praise or acknowledgment for her abilities from the family. This fourth and final element of the "impostor's" roots occurs for many reasons, according to Clance (1985). Some parents don't want the child to become arrogant about her talents and abilities; others worry that their praise could cause the child to stand out from her peers. Other parents may choose another child in the family to be what Clance calls "the star" (p. 34), receiving all the accolades and attention. Some families just expect the child to be bright and successful and don't bother to verbalize their pride in her; and some parents save their "bragging" for those outside the family, not letting the child know how proud they are of her.

In any case, a child from any of these kinds of families can be left to create her own self-image, resulting in feelings of fraudulence. Clance (1985) believes that it is really important that the "impostor" be able to *remember* the family messages and then "decide if the messages were incorrect and need to be changed" (p. 43). One of my research tasks was to be diligent in *remembering* the messages that I received as a child.

The Next Step

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive look into the body of research I found on the topic of the Impostor Phenomenon. I carefully gathered everything I could find published during the subsequent years since the Impostor Phenomenon was named in 1974. I found a total of 119 published studies between 1978 and 2008, including dissertation, journal articles, and books. (I did not include masters' thesis.) I assembled the 114 abstracts of dissertations and journal articles I located on the Impostor Phenomenon chronologically in a 3-ring binder. I was surprised at what I did *not* find: At the time of this writing I have not found a single published study from the perspective of and written by an "impostor" among the existing literature.

Chapter 3 details my journey of exploration as a Scholarly Personal Narrative researcher into the body of knowledge of the Impostor Phenomenon. But first I must admit to a struggle as I went through the process to come to the point of willingness to write my story. It is a journey that progressed from initial refusal, to reluctance, to reconsideration, and finally to excitement.

My initial refusal to connect myself to the word "impostor" seemed reasonable to me. I believed that the word had negative connotations at the outset . . . and that some people wouldn't move beyond their automatic response to think negatively. I worried that when asked what my dissertation was about, I would have to go into a lengthy discussion to defend myself. I have been overly sensitive when it comes to other's opinions and reactions. It was something I worked on all through the dissertation process.

As I moved reluctantly towards a more personal stance with the topic, I still felt a little cautious. How could I write about my personal experiences using the "impostor"

construct without using the word "impostor"? It really was a perfect framework to use to tell my story in this kind of academic setting. It was limiting . . . and that was just what I needed—something to structure and focus the narrative around.

Several months passed during which I considered and then reconsidered how I was going to handle the topic and my personal story together. Time with the topic did help me. I became fascinated with the studies that I was uncovering and excited about what *I was not finding*! No one else (that I could find) had written from the perspective of an "impostor" in the published literature. That fact encouraged me greatly to move ahead—to be brave, and to write as honestly and courageously as I could in order to "show" what the more empirical studies could only "tell."

The traditional way to approach the methodology portion of the dissertation—chapter 3—is to provide detailed and accurate descriptions of how the research was done, including the research design and rationale for it. For support and grounding in the philosophical underpinnings of narrative research I looked to Coffey & Atkinson (1996), Creswell (2007, 2009), Lincoln & Denzin (2000), Miles and Huberman (1994), Nash (2004), Richardson (2000), and Willis (2007).

Nash (2004) acknowledges that Scholarly Personal Narrative "is a methodology without a well-established, research template" (p. 55) but suggests that it "begins with a nagging need on the writer's part to tell some kind of truth. And the best way to tell a truth is to tell a story" (p. 55). I agree with him.

Because Nash (2004) believes that "radical introspection and storytelling in scholarly writing have both particular (offering value for the storyteller) and universalizable (offering value for others) possibilities for professionals" (p. 3), I told my

story in chapter 4 by writing my personal experiences in vignette form. Nash (2004) asserts that "not all research needs to be replicable, validated, testable, or measurable in the same scientific ways in order to meet scholarly criteria" (p. 5).

In chapter 5 I discussed the new learning that I acquired during the experience of doing Scholarly Personal Narrative and how the research process changed my understanding and subsequent reframing of the Impostor Phenomenon.

Conclusion

Because I see myself as an emerging artist *and* an emerging researcher, it seemed appropriate to pair the two in describing the emergent process of discovery I experienced—uncovering new things all along the way. Openness to rethinking my position at several stages of the research process led me into new territory. And I love new territory! The challenge for me was to stay focused and yet remain open as I moved forward with the complex topic of the Impostor Phenomenon and the challenging method of Scholarly Personal Narrative. The research I have done in both areas connected me with bodies of knowledge that I might never have come across otherwise. This accumulation of research data will provide rich new areas of discovery as I move beyond the dissertation.

What follows in chapter 2 is a comprehensive "look" at the existing literature on the Impostor Phenomenon. The headings used in chapter 2 are arranged chronologically and according to the personality profile on a typical "impostor" drawn from the research: Early Studies of the Impostor Phenomenon; Studies of the "Impostor Child"; Studies of the Impostor Teen"; Studies of the "Impostor Adult"; Non-Profile Related Studies; and Current Studies in Conclusion.

The purpose for my study was to fully explore the research related to this psychological construct and then to share personal experiences that would help inform and enlighten others as I had been informed and enlightened during the process. My personal goal was to engage the reader in the research and the narratives that followed so as not to be boring (Jensen, 2004).

CHAPTER 2: A COMPREHENSIVE LOOK AT THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The existing literature on the Impostor Phenomenon spans a little over 30 years—from 1978 to the present time and includes 60 dissertations, 54 articles, five books and one new website (copyrighted 2009 as a workshop for recovery from the IP). All are presented in the following five sections of this chapter. A complete bibliography of the research done on the Impostor Phenomenon can be found as Impostor References.

I chose to take a non-traditional approach to the review of literature usually found in chapter 2 of a dissertation because I wanted to make a contribution to the field of study. I have provided future researchers with everything that I found, and I have presented it in such a way as to "unfold" it as it occurred, using the very terminology of the original researcher as found in the various abstracts. I have accomplished this by providing:

1) A chronological look at the published studies done on the Impostor Phenomenon from 1978 – 1989. These early studies include 12 dissertations, 10 articles, and 3 books. I have also written a summary conclusion.

2) Specific studies that pertained to the personality profile I created. I sorted the studies to correspond with the "Impostor Child", the "Impostor Teen", and the "Impostor Adult" to deepen the insight into this psychological construct. The Personality Profile can be found as Appendix A. I provide the reader with a look at 31 dissertations, 28 articles, and 4 books along with a summary conclusion.

3) The most current writing on the subject (2007 – 2009): 1 dissertation, 4 articles, and 1 website. While these numbers seem to indicate a tapering off of research interest in the Impostor Phenomenon, I believe that the topic is still an important one and that additional autobiographical approaches could bring new insight into this psychological construct. I also conclude this section with a summary.

4) The personality profile of a classic "impostor" that I constructed from the seminal work done by Clance (1985) and supported by an article written by Langford and Clance (1993). I intentionally used the female pronoun "she" in order to subtly prepare the reader for my personal stories that follow in chapter 4. Even though the research is mixed as to whether gender plays a part in who experiences "impostor" feelings, it is interesting to note that 90 percent of the dissertations I found were written by women. There seems to be a feminine interest in the Impostor Phenomenon not shared by our masculine counterpart.

5) The studies that, in my opinion, did not fit into the profile structure, but needed to be included in order to provide the complete picture of the existing literature on the Impostor Phenomenon. There are 27 such studies in this section.

Early studies of the Impostor Phenomenon

1978 - 1989

In the fall of 1978, two psychotherapists published the first article on the Impostor Phenomenon in *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice* (1978). Clance and Imes had coined the term in 1974 after having spent five years observing and studying this psychological construct among their clients and students at Georgia State University (Clance, 1985). In this inaugural article titled *The Impostor Phenomenon in High Achieving Women: Dynamics and Therapeutic Intervention*, they define the Impostor

Phenomenon as "an internal experience of intellectual phoniness which appears to be particularly prevalent and intense among a select sample of high achieving women" (Clance and Imes, 1978, p. 241).

The authors describe what they refer to as "clinical symptoms" (p. 242) and list them as: "generalized anxiety, lack of self-confidence, depression, and frustration related to inability to meet self-imposed standards of achievement" (p. 242). They draw from the work of Deaux (1976) for their understanding of attribution theory. This initial research seemed to indicate that women—unlike men—attributed their success to luck or effort, not to their ability.

The authors describe the family dynamics that they believe contribute to the formation of the "impostor" from an early age (p. 243) and list four different types of behaviors which maintain the position of an "impostor" once it has been assumed: hard work; intellectual flattery; silence in the face of opposing views; and approval-seeking (p. 244). Suggestions for help for the "impostor" are discussed in this article.

Not long after this article was published, Imes (1979) presented her dissertation as part of her Ph.D. work at Georgia State University. The major purpose of her study was "to examine relationships between internalized Femininity/Masculinity and impostor-related versus non-impostor-related causal attributions to academic and professional achievements in high achieving women and men, specifically university faculty members" (p. x).

> It was concluded that the high achievers who lacked a strong sense of themselves as possessing either positively masculine or feminine traits were the group most likely to experience the lack of self-confidence and achievement-related anxieties inherent in the impostor phenomenon (p. xii).

"This study was the first empirical investigation of some aspects of the impostor phenomenon . . ." (p. x).

The next published study was a dissertation in 1980 by Matthews at The University of Tennessee. Her findings led her to propose a theoretical rationale for an intervention workshop that she hoped might be of help to "impostors." Ironically, the most recent published work on the Impostor Phenomenon that I have found as of the date of this writing is a website offering a *workshop* for "sufferers" who want to "recover" (Young, 2009).

Before I go on, a brief interlude is needed. I have a confession to make: I am a subjective being in the midst of the objective environment of the academy. Upon being exposed to the idea of the "impostor" for the first time, I emotionally responded—to the topic—and to the authors—of the article. It was August 11, 2008. One of my professors had left a copy of Langford and Clance's (1993) article in my cubby in the mail room at the University. I walked out of the Education building reading it, hardly looking up as I made my way across campus to our little unit in student housing. My heart pounded and my eyes watered on-and-off during that first read—so strong was my identification with the text.

During a third reading I penciled a first draft of the characteristics of an "impostor" drawn from that article which later became the Personality Profile (see Appendix A). Then I used that list to *unofficially* elicit my little sister's response to it. That was on September 1, 2008. She showed only a slightly less intense experience than me. I hadn't at that time come across the Clance Impostor Phenomenon (CIP) Scale (1985) or any other measurement instruments. We talked for a long time about our early

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memories on that cool Colorado afternoon at Starbucks. My mind raced from one "impostor" experience to another in such rapid succession that I couldn't have taken notes of them if I had tried.

My research led me first to all of Clance's work because I considered them to be the definitive word on the topic: she was the first to recognize it and then to name it. My consideration was based, in part, on my emotional response, as I look back. I know that now because when I found Harvey's (1981, 1985) work I felt a loyalty to Clance that I didn't understand and that I was uncomfortable with. It brought to mind a proverb I had read: "He who states his case first seems right, until his rival comes and cross-examines him." I did not want Clance's "case" to be cross-examined . . . and, yet . . . I knew that as a researcher that was an entirely inappropriate stand to take. I fought the battle between my subjective self and my objective self long into the dissertation writing process.

Harvey's (1981) doctoral work was done at Temple University. For "impostor" references, she used the Clance and Imes (1978) article, a special topics paper she had written in 1980, and a paper on the Impostor Phenomenon presented at the American Psychological Association meeting in Montreal (Stahl, Turner, Wheller, and Elbert, 1980). Harvey's (1981) research on gender, along with Imes (1979) and Lawler (1984) indicate that men have "impostor" experiences on the same frequency as women; in fact, Topping (1983) "found (that) males in her sample were considerably more likely to experience the impostor phenomenon than were the females among university faculty" (in Birett, 2007, p. 26). One of Harvey's most important findings—for my own study— was that "impostor" experiences seem to be restricted to areas of achievement and not to an over-all self-esteem domain. Another interesting facet of her research was the

development of the first published instrument to test for impostor characteristics among her clients and her students (Harvey Impostor Phenomenon Scale (HIP, 1981).

Three dissertations followed Harvey's (1981): Hirschfeld (1982) titled "The Impostor Phenomenon in Successful Career Women" from Fordham University. "The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of self-perception, perception of parental career orientation, tolerance of ambiguity, and attribution of causality for career success on the impostor phenomenon" (Abstract). Hirschfeld's research suggests that "successful career women who suffer from the phenomenon have not identified and internalized those aspects of themselves that have been responsible for their career achievements" (Abstract).

Topping (1983), the second dissertation to follow Harvey, titled "The Impostor Phenomenon: A study of its Construct and Incidence in University Faculty Members" is from the University of South Florida. The results of her study "suggest that the IP is a construct distinguishable from others and that the I-P Scale (Harvey, 1981), with refinement, may be a useful way to measure the IP in large populations with relatively little investment of time" (Abstract).

Lawler's (1984) qualitative study is titled "The Impostor Phenomenon in High Achieving Persons and Jungian Personality Variables" from Georgia State University.

> The primary focus was to explore relationships between the impostor phenomenon and aspects of Jungian psychological type. The secondary purpose was to investigate differences between persons who experience the impostor phenomenon to a great extent (high impostors) and persons who experience the impostor phenomenon to a small extent (low impostors) (Abstract).
> The major finding of this study indicates that introverted persons are more vulnerable to experiencing the impostor phenomenon than extraverted persons. The results also suggest that introverted persons who prefer sensing as their perceiving function are more vulnerable to experiencing the impostor phenomenon than persons of other psychological types. No statistically significant

relationships emerged between the impostor phenomenon and the judging function, judging-perceiving index, or the inferior function (Abstract).

On September 11, 1984, Daniel Goleman (of *Emotional Intelligence* fame), wrote a column in The New York Times defining the Impostor Phenomenon. He quotes Clance and Imes (1978) and Harvey (1981) and describes this self-psychological construct in laymen's terms for the general public.

Harvey (1985) published her dissertation research in book form the same year that Clance (1985, 1986) did. Here again—I read Clance's book first and termed it the seminal work. But both books cover approximately the same territory: Personal accounts of students and clients (pseudonyms, of course); family issues that produce "impostors"; ways to become free from the effects; and measurement instruments authored be each of them. Both authors are repeatedly cited in later research.

The following year yields four journal articles on the topic of the Impostor Phenomenon. Topping and Kimmel write an article in *Academic Psychology Bulletin* which is published in the summer of 1985. Using Topping's research from the 1983 dissertation, they examine the construct validity of the Impostor Phenomenon (IP) using Harvey's (1981) measure of this construct. Then Kerr (1985) publishes an article in *Roeper Review* that "describes internal and external barriers to achievement that prevent gifted women from realizing their full potential" (Abstract). In *Academic Psychology Bulletin*, Gibbs (1985) publishes an article that discusses "an examination of the relationship between instrumentality and social power and between expressivity and social weakness . . . in an attempt to explain why so little change has occurred in gender roles in recent years" (Abstract). Also that same year, Matthews and Clance (1985) publish an article in *Psychotherapy in Private Practice* using Matthew's doctoral

dissertation research done in 1980. The purpose of this article is to discuss the treatment

of the impostor phenomenon in psychotherapy clients. The findings suggest that

> a critical element in the therapeutic treatment of the impostor phenomenon is that
> the therapist should take the client's doubts and fears seriously. Group
> psychotherapy can be beneficial in letting clients know that there are other
> persons who are bright and experience the same impostor phenomenon (Abstract).

> Treatment is also the topic of the next article published. Steinberg (1986) wrote in

Women & Therapy that

> group therapy offers a way of permitting women to gain a better understanding of
> the phenomenon; share their own feelings and experiences within a safe
> environment; and learn more rational styles of thinking about such areas as
> making mistakes, anxiety, and differences between "smart" and "stupid" people.
> As thoughts and behaviors change, symptoms diminish (Abstract).

> In 1987, one dissertation and three journal articles were published. With Clance as

the advisor on her dissertation committee, Dingman (1987) wrote about the Impostor

Phenomenon and social mobility. The purpose of this study was to "investigate the

relationship between social mobility, interest patterns, and the impostor phenomenon"

(Abstract).

> Results indicate that the relationship between social mobility and the impostor
> phenomenon is different for women than it is for men. Social mobility was found
> to be a significant predictor of the impostor phenomenon for female subjects. That
> is, impostor phenomenon scores rose with an increase in social mobility scores.
> This finding did not hold true for male subjects. The men in this sample were not
> less socially mobile than the women, nor did they have lower impostor
> phenomenon scores. Thus, it appears that women who are socially mobile are
> more vulnerable to the impostor phenomenon, while socially-mobile men are not.
> No relationship was found between interest patterns on the Strong-Campbell
> Interest Inventory and the impostor phenomenon (Abstract).

> The first of three articles published in 1987, Clance and O'Toole write in *Women*

& Therapy using research from her dissertation done at Georgia State University. In this

article the authors list the 10 top features that describe the typical female "impostor": 1)

The Impostor Cycle; 2) Introversion; 3) Dread of Evaluation; 4) Terror of Failure; 5)

Guilt About Success; 6) Great Difficulty in Internalizing Positive Feedback; 7)

Generalized Anxiety; 8) Overestimating Others While Underestimating Oneself; 9)

Defining Intelligence in a Skewed Manner; and 10) False and non-affirming Family

Messages" (p. 56). She also shares IP treatment issues and Clance's (1985) CIP

instrument (p. 60-63).

Edwards, Zeichner, Lawler, and Kowalski (1987) publish an article in

Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, and Practice titled "A Validation Study of the Harvey

Impostor Phenomenon Scale" which "factor analyzed the 14 scale items of the Harvey

Impostor Phenomenon Scale (HIPS) by J. C. Harvey and C. Katz (1985)" (Abstract).

"Findings point to the general construct validity of the impostor phenomenon as

measured by the HIPS" (Abstract).

The third article published in 1987 appeared in *Women & Therapy* and was titled

"Achievement Related Fears: Gender Roles and Individual Dynamics." In it Sherman

(1987) "discusses fear of failure (FOF) and fear of success (FOS) with particular regard

to women and suggests that therapeutic management of FOF depends on the individual's

capacity for achievement" (Abstract).

As I continue the chronological review of the literature on the "impostor"

published during the first decade, I came to Haislett's (1988) dissertation from California

School of Professional Psychology. Her study was designed to "explore the

'interpersonal' roots of impostor feelings illustrated in victims of childhood incest"

(Abstract).

> Findings showed that the incest survivors experienced the interpersonal and
> intellectual impostor phenomenon significantly more extensively; had
> significantly higher depressive attributional style for negative outcomes; and were

characterized as having significantly higher levels of Powerful Others Control and less perceived Internal Control than the control group (Abstract).

This is the first mention of the possibility of the IP affecting "interpersonal" aspects of a persons' life, not just intellectual.

Smith-Clark (1988) published her dissertation titled "The Impostor Phenomenon: A study of the Construct in Registered Nurses" at the California School of Professional Psychology at Los Angeles. "This study set out to explore the nature and existence of the impostor phenomenon, a subjective experience of intellectual phoniness demarcated by dissonance between an individual's public image of high achievement and internal feelings of incompetence" (Abstract).

> The results of this study lent support to the past finding that the impostor phenomenon was related but distinguishable from self-monitoring behavior. The relationship between self-esteem and the impostor construct was stronger than in previous research. Thus the two constructs were separate and distinguishable. To gain a better understanding of the developmental aspects of the impostor phenomenon, this study explored its relationship to birth order. First-born individuals were more likely to experience a lower intensity of impostor feelings (Abstract).

The last study to be published in 1988 is a dissertation authored by Cherpas while at Kent State University. The purpose of this study was to further establish "the construct validity of the imposter phenomenon" (Abstract). Results indicate that

> (low) self-esteem was the best predictor of the imposter phenomenon, contributing 28% unique variance, while self-monitoring behavior, the attribution of one's occupational success to the domain of intelligence and ability, and measures of self-perceived occupational atypicality--ethnic background, combined, added only 12% to the predictions. Results from two factor analyses of the Imposter Phenomenon Scale indicated the scale was factorially complex and, therefore, not unidimensional (Abstract).

The research done during the decade of the 80's that provides the foundation for research forthcoming on the Impostor Phenomenon concludes with two dissertations. Cromwell's (1989) study was conducted while attending Old Dominion University. "The

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purpose of the study was to ascertain if impostors could be differentiated from non-impostors on the basis of gender, grade level, grade point average (GPA), personality characteristics and irrational beliefs" (Abstract).

> The null hypotheses relating to gender, grade level and GPA were supported by the data. The null hypotheses relating to the Need Scales of the ACL and the IBT scales were not supported by the data. The Adapted Child scale of the ACL was the best single predictor of the IP (Abstract).

DeVries (1989) studied the Impostor Phenomenon while attending Fairleigh Dickinson University in New Jersey. Her purpose, as stated in the Abstract, was to "determine the occurrence of impostor feelings and countertransference behavior with respect to: (a) prior supervision experiences, (b) openness to countertransference, and (c) amount of experience" among professional therapists.

> The results indicate that impostor feelings exist universally across theoretical orientation, work setting, gender and degree. As hypothesized, past supervision scores were inversely related to impostor feelings and avoidance in supervision. Contrary to expectation, amount of experience was inversely related to impostor feelings. No relationships were found between openness to countertransference, impostor feelings, and countertransference behavior (Abstract).

Summary of the Early Studies

In looking over the early research into the Impostor Phenomenon, five major themes stood out to me from the dissertations, articles, and books in this section. In alphabetical order they are: achievement theory, attribution theory, instrument analysis, overview of the construct, and treatment issues. While it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine the gender of article authors, I noted that all 12 dissertations were written by females. It is also interesting that 10 of the 12 dissertations were quantitative inquiries and three of them were done at Georgia State University.

There were three journals that published seven of the 10 articles: *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, and Practice* (2), *Academic Psychology Bulletin* (2), and *Women and*

Therapy (3). I discovered that Dr. Clance is on the editorial board of several journals, including *Psychotherapy*: *Theory, Research, and Practice.*

It was in these early years that three books were published on the topic of the Impostor Phenomenon. Clance's two: (1985) *Impostor Phenomenon: Overcoming the Fear that Haunts Your Success* and (1986) *The impostor phenomenon: When Success Makes You Feel Like a Fake* (the same book by a different publisher); and Harvey's (1985) *If I'm So Successful, Why Do I Feel Like a Fake?: The Impostor Phenomenon.* Both authors cover basically the same material and each provides a measurement instrument for determining impostor characteristics. The names of Clance, Imes, Matthews, Topping, Harvey, and Lawler are repeatedly cited by the researchers that followed them.

The early research conducted and published during the 1980's lays a foundation for presenting subsequent studies as they relate to an aspect of the classic personality profile of an "impostor."

<div align="center">

Specific Studies on the Impostor Phenomenon

1990 - 2007

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Studies on the "Impostor Child"

Family issues are at the root of the "impostor child's" early experiences (Clance, 1985, p. 32). I selected seven dissertations and nine articles that I felt would provide a closer look of the literature on family dynamics that are associated with the initial stirrings of "impostor" feelings in a child. Most of the dissertations were written during the decade of the 1990's. I attempted to discuss them chronologically where possible.

I find it interesting that while there are 16 studies that speak directly or indirectly about "impostor children", there are 24 characteristics that describe the "impostor child"

in the personality profile I constructed. This seems to me to be an area where additional

research may be needed—in order to understand the roots of impostor issues and to help

parents avoid watering the little seeds of "impostorism."

Marcantuono (1990) wrote his dissertation titled "Unveiling the Impostor: An

Experimental Analog of the Impostor Phenomenon" while attending Fairleigh Dickinson

University. His

> study sought to investigate the tenability of an experimental analog of the
> impostor phenomenon. Two models were proposed, one model representing the
> etiological factors of impostor phenomenon in children who are unempathically
> reinforced for precocious intelligence who later meet with failure, and the second
> model representing the etiological factors of impostor phenomenon in children
> who are unempathically reinforced for precocious sensitivity who later meet with
> academic success" (Abstract).

> Analysis indicated that under conditions of response certainty subjects with low
> self-acceptance had elevated levels of impostor phenomenon on the Impostor
> Phenomenon Scale. Other results demonstrated a positive correlation between
> impostor phenomenon and depression, a negative correlation between impostor
> phenomenon and self-regard, and a negative correlation between impostor
> phenomenon and years of experience in nursing (Abstract).

Langford (1990), under the direction of her advisor, Dr. Clance, wrote a

dissertation at Georgia State University titled "The Need to Look Smart: The Impostor

Phenomenon and Motivations for Learning."

> The purpose of this study was to determine if the impostor phenomenon, an
> experience of insecurity and sense of intellectual phoniness in achievement
> situations, is associated with a performance goal motivation pattern, in which
> one's primary aim in academic endeavors is to look smart" (Abstract).

> The results were interpreted as evidence that people who experience the impostor
> phenomenon are motivated by the need to look smart to others. Previously
> identified impostor behaviors were explained as logical outcomes of that
> motivational set. The results also added to the validity of the impostor
> phenomenon construct by demonstrating behaviors predicted by impostor
> phenomenon theory in the laboratory for the first time (Abstract).

Then she and Clance co-authored an article (Langford & Clance, 1993) using her research to further explore the construct in general and to provide the research used to support the personality profile that I constructed. They also outline the family dynamics resulting in "impostor children." They reference Bussotti's (1990) study at length because she purposed to

> determine if the impostor phenomenon would be associated with distinctive family interactional patterns, or if, within their families, impostors would have atypical role assignments related to their unique intellectual or social abilities and that these designations would be influenced by gender and birth order (Abstract).

Her study sought to measure several aspects of family life: the support that family members gave to one another; and how much, if any, family members experienced freedom to be open with each other (Langford & Clance, p. 497).

As mentioned above, Bussotti's (1990) research was used to support Langford and Clances' (1993) proposition that "people who experience impostor feelings are likely to come from families in which support of the individual is lacking, communications and behaviors are controlled by rules, and considerable conflict is present" (Langford & Clance, p. 497). These family characteristics seem to nurture the "impostor child" need to please other members of the family. Lack of support and individual development, along with parentification experiences, may cause the "impostor child" to develop a false self in order to cope (Bussotti, 1990; Langford & Clance, 1993).

Because of this and other references to "parentification" in the literature, I did additional research in order to understand the concept. I found that parentification is a term used by psychologists to describe what happens to children when they are burdened with care-giving responsibilities "that are above the levels and types that are developmentally appropriate and that can jeopardize their health and development"

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(Early, 2002, Abstract). The research shows that combined with a negative home environment, parentification can lead to the development of "impostor children" (Bussotti, 1990; Langford and Clance, 1993, Castro, Jones, & Mirsalimi, 2004).

Langford and Clance also found that "families in which there is a good deal of underlying conflict without channels of expression and without much active support for the child appear to foster" the following traits: "an excessive concern with impressing others and protection of the self from criticism" (1993, p. 498).

In another study it was found that children of alcoholic parents often have a sense of a false-self leading to "impostor" experiences (Teece, 1990). Her research, titled "Adult Children of Alcoholics and the Experience of the Impostor Phenomenon: The Development of the 'False Self' in a Dysfunctional Family System" focuses on adults who were children of alcoholics but provides the "likely structural damage" to children in their early years. She "investigated the development of the 'false self' in terms of the impostor phenomenon for ACOAs compared to adult children of non-alcoholics" (ACONAs) (Abstract). "Results indicated that individuation within the family system and experience of the impostor phenomenon (IP) were negatively and significantly related for both ACOAs and ACONAs, while ACOAs experienced significantly higher levels of IP and lower levels of individuation than ACONAs" (Abstract).

Following Teece's work (1990) and in a related study, Robinson and Goodpaster (1991) report in *Current Psychology: Research & Review* that a dysfunctional home due to parental alcoholism is a perfect setting for "inconsistent, unpredictable, arbitrary, and chaotic" interactions among the family members that reside in it (p. 115). Adult children of alcoholic parents report a common theme: emotional absence and unreliability of

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parents (Gravitz and Bowden, 1985, in Robinson and Goodpaster, 1991, p. 115). "The

purpose of Robinson and Goodpaster's study was to determine the effects of parental

alcoholism on perception of control and imposter phenomenon" (Abstract). Results of

analysis of variance (ANOVA) for the imposter phenomenon "revealed a significant

difference among the three groups, with the ACOA group having the highest scores and

Ss with nonalcoholic parents having the lowest" (Abstract).

Another dissertation from Georgia State University under the guidance of Clance

is Gray's (1991) study titled "Personality, Social, Familial, and Achievement Correlates

of the Impostor Phenomenon."

> The purpose of this study was to investigate the relation between prior
> experiences and the impostor phenomenon. This study provided supporting
> evidence for the current conceptualization of the impostor phenomenon.
> However, it expanded the conceptualization by suggesting a differential
> experience of this phenomenon. Impostor feelings may pertain to nonintellectual
> as well as intellectual factors. Additionally, the study emphasized the family's
> significance relative to experience of the impostor phenomenon and suggested a
> need to examine specific familial connections, for example, mother-daughter and
> father-daughter relationships (Abstract).

This is the first study to suggest that nonintellectual factors of a person's personality may

also be affected by the Impostor Phenomenon.

King and Cooley (1995) are among the researchers interested in "the relationships

between the IP and family achievement orientation and achievement-related behaviors"

(Abstract). They found that "impostor children" felt pressured to achieve academically at

a high level but without effort. In the typical "impostor" home, the child would receive

no praise for high achievement; however, in school she would, thus creating the conflict

within. King and Cooley (1995) reported their findings in *Contemporary Educational*

Psychology.

Similarly, research done by Clance, Dingman, Reviere, and Stober (1995) and published in *Women & Therapy*, found that there are societal pressures on children that affect their development.

> That which is socially desirable in males is different than that which is valued in females. In this culture, the traits expected in males seem to cluster around competence and objectivity, while for females the emphasized attributes are warmth and expressiveness (p. 83).

The researchers also discuss findings in a master's thesis that impostor feelings could be significant "for women, minorities, and other disenfranchised individuals" . . . who "ascend the hierarchy in which by *societal definition* they do not belong (McIntosh, 1985 in Clance et.al., 1995, p. 84). The research indicates that these society pressures are internalized at an early age.

In 1996, at the Massachusetts School of Professional Psychology, Beason wrote her dissertation titled "The Impostor Phenomenon: Incidence and Prevalence According to Birth Order and Academic Acceleration." Her purpose was to "investigate if higher levels of impostorous feelings could be found in first borns compared to those second or more born and in those who had been academically accelerated (Abstract).

> The results revealed a main effect for both position and gender. First borns evidenced significantly higher levels of self-perceived fraudulence compared to second borns, as did the females compared to the males. The findings clearly indicate that self-perceptions of fraudulence are prevalent in college students, particularly in females and those who are first born possibly reflecting differential socialization for achievement (Abstract).

Coskuntuna's (1997) dissertation, done at Adelphi University in New York, focused on the father-daughter relationship and masochistic tendencies in women. Her purpose for doing this study was "to determine if masochism, impostor feelings and self-esteem are related to each other" (Abstract). "Overall, the data provided support for the theoretical premise of the study: masochism and impostor feelings are associated with the

parental inability to recognize each other's, and possibly their daughter's, subjectivity"

(Abstract).

In an article published in *Personality and Individual Differences*, Thompson,

Davis, and Davidson (1998) reported that

elements of perfectionism were evident in a propensity on the part of Ss with high impostor scores to externalize success and hold high standards for self-evaluation, while being intolerant of their failure to meet these standards. Impostors' greater reporting of negative emotions, together with their tendency to attribute failure internally and overgeneralize a single failure to their overall self-concepts underscore the veracity of clinical observations which suggest links between impostor fears, anxiety, and depression (Abstract).

In another article published in *Personality and Individual Differences*, Sonnak

and Towell (2001) sought to understand "the role of perceived parental rearing style,

parental background, self-esteem, mental health and demographic variables upon

impostor phenomenon (IP) intensity" (Abstract). They found that

lower care and poorer mental health was significantly related to increasing levels of impostor scores and with Ss having attended private school reporting lower levels of impostor feelings. In addition, Ss classified as impostors were found to report significantly higher General Health Questionnaire scores (poorer mental health) than non-impostors (Abstract).

Want and Kleitman's (2006) study, also published in *Personality and Individual*

Differences, was of special interest to me. Their study examined parental rearing styles

and objective confidence in relation to the impostor phenomenon. But some of their

more interesting findings had to do with the father's relationship to the "impostor child."

They found that "the parenting style of the father emerged as an important contributor to

their study" (p. 969). They found

a correlation between lack of care and development of feelings of impostorism—but again only in relation to the input of the father. The finding that the role of the father may be especially significant in development of impostor feelings is a new and notable addition to the literature on the family background of the impostor (p. 970).

I agree that more research is needed because my experience doesn't seem to support this finding. As you will see from my stories in chapter 4, there are very few stories from my memories of my father. I attributed that to the fact that I had a relationship with him and that he cared for me—he loved and provided for me and my sister(s)—to the best of his ability. My absent mother seems to be at the root of my impostor issues—which is a surprise to me.

Summary of the "Impostor Child" Studies

Since family issues are at the root of the "impostor child", it was no surprise to find that the four main themes that surfaced in the literature were: parenting styles, parentification, environments (home and away from home), and achievement expectations. Six out of the seven dissertations in this section were written by females, all seven of them were quantitative inquiries, and three of them were done at Georgia State University. Of the nine articles looked at in this section of the "impostor child", three were published in *Personality and Individual Differences*.

Studies on the "Impostor Teen"

Once the seeds of fraudulence are sown, it doesn't take long for the evidence to surface in the adolescent's life. I could only find six studies that I believed would shed some light on this transitional time of development: four dissertations and two articles. As before, I present the existing literature in chronological order so as to understand better how researchers have built upon one another's works.

The first such study (Lester and Moderski, 1995) titled "The Impostor Phenomenon in Adolescents" was published in *Psychological Reports*. They administered an impostor phenomenon scale (not named in the Abstract) to 233 high

school students whose average age was 15.7 years. Also administered was the revised Eysenck Personality Inventory and measures of general irrational thinking and manic-depressive tendencies. "Results suggest that the feeling that one is less competent than others believe one to be and a general tendency to cover up one's true self are associated with indices of psychological disturbance" (Abstract).

In research done at the University of Ottawa (Canada), Baranowsky (1998) studied university students to "predict male or female dominated educational choices with future intent of enhancing occupational suitability" (Abstract). After administering a battery of tests, including the Impostor Phenomenon questionnaire (again not named in the Abstract), she found that "primary measures to possess only weak predictive ability for non-traditional vs. traditional study choices" (Abstract).

The purpose of Caselman's (2000) research was to "identify the gender, culture, self-perception, self-concept and social support variables which influence the Imposter Phenomenon (IP) among American and Japanese high school juniors and seniors" (Abstract). She found that "non-significant differences were found in mean IP scores between females and males; however, significant differences were found between American and Japanese subjects, suggesting that IP is experienced to a greater degree among Japanese adolescents" (Abstract).

Of special interest to me is Fruhan's (2002) qualitative study done at the Massachusetts School of Professional Psychology in which she interviewed 13 professional women to understand the feelings of fraudulence in their early professional lives. She "sought to broaden and deepen our understanding of the phenomenon" (Abstract). Her

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findings revealed that the onset of feelings of fraudulence occurred most often during the transition from childhood to adolescence, usually within the academic realm. The developmental progression of the feelings was non-linear. Women's awareness that the feeling was only a feeling was a powerful source of comfort, yet their feelings were heightened as they gained more professional responsibility and more seemed at stake (Abstract).

However, "women noted positive implications, such as increased motivation, thoughtfulness, conscientious and humility in their work" (Abstract). This was the first mention of positive implications of the Impostor Phenomenon that I found in the literature that echoes Clance's (1985, p. 126) assertion that "impostors", in general, are bright, energetic, hardworking people that are usually liked, loved, and respected. I follow this up with a fuller discussion of my thoughts on the *other side* of an impostor in chapter 5.

Lapp-Rincker's (2003) study provided limited support for the Impostor Phenomenon theory. Specifically, the negative relationship between impostor feelings and self-efficacy is consistent with theoretical suggestions that impostors underestimate their abilities. However, the lack of relationship between achievement motivation and impostor feelings is inconsistent with the theoretical notion that impostor feelings affect one's goals" (Abstract). Her purpose in doing this study was to "determine if impostor feelings and general self-efficacy, as measured by the Self-efficacy Scale (SES; Sherer et al., 1982) would be negatively correlated, and/or if impostor feelings would still predict achievement motivation even after self-efficacy was controlled for" (Abstract).

In an article by Caselman, Self, and Self (2006) published in the *Journal of Adolescence*, Caselman and colleagues sampled

11th and 12th graders in order to examine predictors of IP among adolescents. The participants completed measures of the IP, global self-worth, social support and self-concept. Gender differences were found in correlations between IP and Parent Support, Classmate Support, and Teacher Support. Multiple regression

analyses found significant predictors of IP scores for females to be Friend Support, Classmate Support and Dependability. Only Friend Support significantly predicted IP scores for males. The unique variance explained (UVE) by each of the variables was fairly modest, suggesting that the variables are explaining a considerable amount of the same portion of the variance, particularly for females (p. 395).

Caselman et al. (2006) suggest that there has not been sufficient research done to support the idea that IP feelings begin sometime in childhood (p. 397). She believes that the

impostor feelings are well established by adolescence. The purpose of (her) study was to extend previous IP adolescent research and to ascertain the best predictors of high IP scores based on the variables of gender, global self-worth, social support, and self-concept (p. 397).

She does report that "false and non-affirming family messages contribute to the development of impostor feelings" (Clance and O'Toole, 1987 in Caselman et al., 2006, p. 397) and that "adult imposters often felt misunderstood by emotionally distant parents" (Grays, 1992 in Caselman et al., p. 397). Caselman et al. report that

In view of the fact that the identification of IP feelings requires certain cognitive developmental advances (the ability to be introspective), research has primarily been limited to adults. However, adolescence is a developmental period when much self-reflection takes place. True self-awareness and introspection are poignant during adolescence and play an important role in identity formation (Erikson, 1950). Therefore, the study of IP during this developmental period is valuable in our understanding of the concepts and etiology of IP (2006, p. 397).

Summary of the "Impostor Teen" Studies

Based on the research looked at in this section on the "impostor teen", it seems reasonable to suggest that more studies on adolescents are needed in order to expand our understanding of this vulnerable group. I found it interesting that out of 119 studies in all, I found only 6 that appeared to pertain specifically to adolescence while I found 49 characteristics for them in the personality profile I created. All four of the dissertations in this section were written by females; three of the studies were quantitative, while the

fourth was qualitative. This particular qualitative study is noteworthy because it was the first mention of positive characteristics associated with persons that have been tested as "impostors." The other main themes that come from this research are the development of what is termed a "false self"; possible affects of the Impostor Phenomenon on academic choices; Impostor Phenomenon and gender/ethnicity issues; and predictors of Impostor Phenomenon among adolescents.

Studies on the "Impostor Adult"

I collected 38 studies for this section of the Literature Review: 20 dissertations, 17 articles, and 1 book all of which were published between 1990 and 2007. I chose to include college students in this section on "impostor adults" because most are out of their teens early in their higher education experience. The studies discuss the fruit that has come forth from the seeds planted earlier in the life of an "impostor."

The first study to be reviewed in this section was written by Cozzarelli and Major (1990) and published in the *Journal of Social & Clinical Psychology* in order to report "the cognitive and affective experiences of 59 'impostors' and 47 non-impostors before and after feedback on an important evaluative event" (Abstract). In this article about academic stress on college students, they found that

> impostors expected to perform less well and were more anxious than were non-impostors before a midterm examination but did not differ in exam performance. Impostors felt affectively worse and suffered a greater loss in state self-esteem (SE) after subjective failure on the exam, but they did not differ from non-impostors after subjective success (Abstract).

In her dissertation at Georgia State University, McIntyre (1990) investigated "differences in interpersonal behaviors, impostor feelings and sex-role attitudes among women in three roles: homemakers, women in traditional and nontraditional occupations" (Abstract). The results of her study of 172 white urban American women

did not support predicted correlations between the mother and daughter's reported interpersonal behaviors. A stronger relationship was found between the daughter's behavior and the perceived social behavior of the mother suggesting that the remembered aspects of the model may be more important than the self-reported ones. The age/generational differences found were higher aggressiveness and assertiveness, less passivity, more liberal sex-role attitudes and higher impostor feelings in the younger generation. Demographic and background differences among work role groups show nontraditionals having more education, greater percentage of single women, fewer children and more mothers who are nontraditional than homemakers (Abstract).

In her mixed-method dissertation at the University of New Mexico, Ward (1990) investigated "the causes IP victims assign to their successes (i.e., their attributional style) and the reasons they offer for striving for success (i.e., their motivational orientation). Differences in impostor feelings based on gender, race/ethnicity, and year in school were explored also" (Abstract).

> When the quantitative and qualitative results were combined, it was found that stronger impostor feelings were associated with a luck attributional style and an impersonal motivational orientation. The subjects with stronger impostor feelings (high IPs) valued ability and effort as explanations for success. However, since they did not believe that they were as intelligent as others or that they worked as hard as they should, they disowned their success by attributing it to luck, an explanation they did not value. The high IPs felt driven to succeed by a need to please and/or prove something to others. Despite achieving successful outcomes, they did not experience a sense of competence or efficacy. These findings also were consistent with the tendency to disown success. No differences in impostor feelings were found based on gender, race/ethnicity or year in school. From the interview data it was also learned that the high IPs often made academic and career decisions based on their unwillingness to risk failure. These findings suggest that any high achiever may be susceptible to impostor feelings and the affects can have long-term consequences (Abstract).

Eschbach, (1990) had two purposes in mind when researching for her dissertation at Washington State University:

> First, to delineate and test a causal path model proposing causal relationships among selected psychological factors related to the imposter phenomenon, and second, to distinguish the IP construct from these factors. The psychological factors included sex-role orientation, self-concept, achieving tendency, success attributions, and career commitment (Abstract).

Results indicated that self-concept (operationalized as either self-satisfaction or overall self-concept) directly affected IP intensity. Sex-role indirectly effected IP intensity through self-concept. With the self-satisfaction variable operationalizing self-concept, sex-role also directly affected IP intensity. Significant differences between high- and low-intensity IP college females were identified. Although the causal path model explained more IP intensity variability than neuroticism, this difference was not significant with overall self-concept operationalizing the self-concept variable (Abstract).

In a study done at The Fielding Institute in 1991, George

explored the effects of a combination of external and internal factors on satisfaction as a wife and as a mother in a sample of 210 married, career women. The external factors are spousal support and adequate child care, and the internal factors are sex-role femininity, traditional parental modeling, the fear of affiliative loss and the Imposter Phenomenon" (Abstract).

She found that

(t)he greatest predictors of marital disharmony were low spousal support, the Imposter Phenomenon and traditional parental modeling. The greatest predictors of dissatisfaction with raising children were the Imposter Phenomenon, inadequate child care arrangements, traditional parental modeling and low spousal support (Abstract).

"The Impostor Phenomenon in Medical Students: Personality Correlates and Developmental Issues" is the title of a dissertation done at Old Dominion University (Casselman, 1991). The purpose of her study was to examine "the presence of the impostor phenomenon in medical students as well as personality correlates and developmental factors which appear to accompany impostor feelings" (Abstract).

When both genders were included in the analyses, IP was positively related to neuroticism, Chance locus of control, and family control. When the genders were analyzed separately, significant differences emerged. IP in males was positively related to the Chance locus of control and neuroticism. Its relationship to family control approached significance in males. However, in females only neuroticism was positively related to IP. IP was not related to any of the other variables studied (Abstract).

Pankow-Roets (1991) published her dissertation at Marquette University and had some unexpected results.

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The purpose of this study was to evaluate whether a relationship exists between a student's college major and occurrence of the impostor phenomenon to determine if students of certain college major are more susceptible to impostor feelings than others. A secondary purpose of this study was to determine whether a relationship exists between an individual's attributional style and the presence of impostor feelings (Abstract).

The results of this study failed to suggest that a relationship exists between the student's choice of major and the presence of impostor feelings. College major was found to account for an insignificant amount of variation in HIPS scores. An unexpected finding of this study, however, indicated that students with low grade point averages (below 2.5) were more likely to experience impostor feelings than those with high grade point averages (above 3.6). This finding contradicts previous research which suggested that the impostor phenomenon is experienced primarily by high achievers (Abstract). I found no other studies that supported this position.

Reinert (1991) collected data "from a sample of 265 women managers to determine the relationship of the impostor phenomenon to family issues and influences in the workplace" (Abstract). In her dissertation work done at Temple University, she wanted to "test some of the previously determined risk factors with a sample of women managers" (Abstract).

The expected relationship of atypicality to family and work settings was not supported statistically. Even the newness of position was not confirmed as it had been for students except when combined with the risk factor of being a first generation immigrant. Because so few risk factors for corporate managers matched those of students or professors, it can be deduced that work environment has a unique influence on the development of impostorism. There was a significant relationship between high impostor scores and family dysfunction. This dysfunction fell into the Rigid and Disengaged categories of Adaptability and Cohesion respectively. These findings confirmed results from the pilot study (Abstract).

"Predicting the Impostor Phenomenon in Successful Career Women" is the title of a dissertation done at the Miami Institute of Psychology of the Caribbean Center for Advanced Studies by Jamail in 1992.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of attribution of causality for career success, locus of control, and perception of parental career orientation on the Impostor Phenomenon (Abstract).

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Findings showed that younger women with less experience with their present employer had a tendency to score higher on the Harvey Impostor Phenomenon (HIP) Scale. Of identified career attributions of luck, ability, and effort, only the ability attribution was a significant predictor of the Impostor Phenomenon. Women who indicated that ability was the least important for career success were more inclined to have higher levels of the Impostor Phenomenon. Women who perceived their parents as traditional were also more inclined to have higher levels of the Impostor Phenomenon (Abstract).

The purpose of the study done in 1992 by Wilson was to "examine the effects of success versus failure feedback on the expectations, performance, self-esteem and attributional styles of 20 high imposter and 20 low imposter undergraduate student subjects" (Abstract). He found in the literature a disturbing lack of empirical research that provided any clues to how "impostors" could suffer as they do from anxiety and fear and still be successful. In his study he found that

(t)here was no significantly greater increase in expectations for high imposters in response to success feedback, or decrease in response to failure feedback as compared to low imposters. In fact low imposters produced slightly greater reactivity to feedback than did high imposters.

The second Hypothesis which predicted that high imposters would respond to success feedback with greater increases in performance and to failure feedback with greater decreases in performance when compared to low imposters, was not supported. Furthermore, the finding of no significant difference is more consistent with the defensive pessimism predictions.

The results of this study did not support the predictions of the behavioral plasticity model of the imposter phenomena (Abstract).

Hayes and Davis (1993) published their research in the *Bulletin of the Psychonomic Society*.

The Purpose of this study was to investigate relationships between interpersonal flexibility, Type A behavior, and imposter characteristics in 59 female and 24 male university students (aged 17-50 yrs)... Although no significant relationship was found to exist between interpersonal flexibility and Type A behavior, interpersonal flexibility and imposter characteristics were negatively related for men and women. Type A and imposter characteristics were negatively related for men and positively related for women" (Abstract).

The purpose of the study done by Hartsfield (1994) at Georgia State University was to "investigate whether socially-prescribed perfectionism mediates the affective response of impostors to failure feedback" (Abstract). "The results did not support the hypothesis. It was determined that high impostors' emotions were more greatly influenced by the varying levels of performance feedback than were those of low impostors" (Abstract).

The title of Niles' (1994) study done at the California School of Professional Psychology – Los Angeles is "The Impostor Phenomenon among Clinical Psychologists: A study of Attributional Style and Locus-of-control." "The purpose of this study was to determine if graduate students in clinical psychology programs differ from recent Ph.D. graduates and experienced clinicians in terms of the Impostor Phenomenon." Findings from this study indicate that "impostors scored significantly higher on measures of external locus of control than non-impostors, especially on those scales that measure the perceived influence of powerful others."

> It was found that graduate students scored higher on the impostor scale than experienced clinicians and that their attributions are internal and global for failure outcomes. They also have an external locus of control in situations with successful outcomes and an internal locus of control for failure outcomes. This is because they cannot internalize success as due to their inherent ability, but rather to external factors. When they are unsuccessful, they are likely to ascribe the reasons to factors such as effort or chance, rather than ability. The study adds further empirical evidence for the impostor construct as well as providing data on the specific attributional style and locus of control of those with impostor feelings (Abstract).

Results from a study done by Byrnes and Lester (1995) and published in *Psychological Reports* indicate that "those believing more strongly in an external locus of control tended to feel like impostors in a general sense" (Abstract). Those results were found when these two researchers

devised three subscales for J. C. Harvey and C. Katz's (1985) scale measuring feelings of inferiority. The subscales measured the extent and direction that a person hides his or her qualities. 30 elementary schoolteachers and 30 accountants working in casinos completed the scale, as well as Rotter's Internal-External Locus of Control Scale. The two groups did not differ in their subscale scores (Abstract).

To determine if there is a significant relationship between perceptions of counseling self-efficacy and perceptions of fraudulence (i.e., the impostor phenomenon)" (Abstract), Alvarez (1995) surveyed 94 counselors-in-training and found that "(t) here is a significant relationship between perceptions of counseling self-efficacy and perceptions of fraudulence (IP). Also, those counselors who reported perceptions of fraudulence also reported less satisfaction with their work" (Abstract).

Miller and Kastberg (1995) explore "how a working class background and values affect gifted women's career development in higher education and highlights conversations with 6 gifted women about experiences influenced by the distinct values and mores of their working class backgrounds" (Abstract).

The 'imposter phenomenon' in which high achieving women believe themselves to be intellectual frauds, unable to attribute their achievements to unique talents and hard work, is discussed. Although highly prized, most Ss received little encouragement toward higher education, possibly attributable to finances, sex-role stereotyping, and the lack of familiarity with higher education. Because most Ss were 1st-generation professionals there are few role models within the family, or female role models within academia. Class conflict was often a cause of a sense of not belonging, as well as a loss of connection with family and friends (Abstract).

This study done by Miler and Kastberg was published in *Roeper Review*.

In 1996 Benitez published her dissertation research titled "Achievement Conflict and Psychosomatic Symptoms."

This study explored the ramifications of the Achievement Conflict Scale (ACS) and how the ACS relates to some common emotions (depression, anxiety, and anger). The study also sought to determine if the ACS adds unique variance to these emotions in explaining psychosomatic symptoms… The ACS, which was developed for this study, encompasses fear of success, fear of failure, and the impostor phenomenon constructs ... The results of this study suggest that ACS may be a useful tool for clinicians in assessing the underlying cause of patients'

psychosomatic complaints and in determining how the expression of their anger may play a role in their physical ailments (Abstract).

Then in 1998, Gerstmann published her dissertation from Rutgers titled "Impostor Phenomenon: A test of Basic Assumptions." "The purpose of this study was to empirically address four assumptions derived from the literature about impostorism:

One: "impostors would describe others as perceiving them to be more positive than impostors perceive themselves to be" (Abstract). This first assumption "was partially supported by the finding that impostors described specific others' perceptions of them in ways similar to how they described their real and usual selves, but they described non-specific others as perceiving them to be more positive than how they described themselves" (Abstract).

Two: "Impostors would not describe themselves in a similar way to how they think others would like them to be" (Abstract). This second assumption "was supported by the finding that impostors and non-impostors both described how they thought others, specific and non-specific, would like them to be as very positive while impostors' descriptions of themselves were farther from this ideal" (Abstract).

Three: "Impostors would describe how they are when with specific others differently than how they describe themselves to be" (Abstract). The third assumption was not supported by the results.

Fourth: "Impostors would describe themselves using less positive terms than non-impostors" (Abstract). "Data support hypothesis four" (Abstract).

As we entered the new millennium, research continued on the "impostor adult." In the *Journal of Personality Assessment*, Leary, Patton, Orlando, and Funk (2000) published their collective research in subparts in an article titled "The Impostor

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Phenomenon: Self-perceptions, Reflected Appraisals, and Interpersonal Strategies." They

found that

> high impostors were characterized by a combination of low self-appraisals and
> low reflected appraisals. High impostors expressed lower performance
> expectations than low impostors only when their responses were public. When
> expectations for performance were low, participants high in impostorism
> responded differently under public than private conditions. The results did not
> support this distinction in study (subpart) 3 (Abstract).

This study (White, 2001) "sought to explore whether selected self-experience

variables, specifically, shame and self-cohesion, would be related to the experience of

perceived fraudulence in a sample of 158 doctoral students across an array of fields of

study (Abstract). White's results "suggest that one dimension of self-cohesion (goal

instability), as well as shame, are significant predictors of perceived fraudulence in this

sample" (Abstract).

In a study of 245 adult women (ages between 18 and 60) Festa (2001) conducted

research for the purpose of investigating the relationship between masochism and

attachment style. Festa suggests that the Impostor Phenomenon (as well as masochistic

tendencies and self-esteem) were "associated with the perception (of) mother as

overprotective, intrusive, controlling, not caring and rejecting" (Abstract). "Findings of

this study supported the hypotheses that masochistic tendencies are associated with

insecure attachment. As masochistic tendencies increased in women, self-esteem declined

and impostor phenomena increased" (Abstract).

Sightler and Wilson (2001) published an article in *Psychological Reports* that

discussed the correlates of the Impostor Phenomenon among undergraduate

entrepreneurs. "Results show that more intense impostor feelings were associated with an

external locus of control and a stronger perceived effect of work on family life"

(Abstract).

Findings reported by Ross, Steward, Mugge, and Fultz (2001) stated that they

"expanded our understanding of the IP in achievement and confirm earlier findings (Chae

et al., 1994) for the FFM" (Abstract). This study investigated the imposter phenomenon

(IP) in relation to common achievement dispositions and the Five Factor Model (FFM).

The research done by Turman (2001) titled "I'm Fooling Them All': The

Examination of the Imposter Phenomenon in the Undergraduate Instructor Assistant

Experience"

> sought to identify training strategies to reduce levels of the 'imposter
> phenomenon' in instructor assistants used in the basic course. Results indicate
> significant differences in the use of reading supplements and discussion, however,
> causing an increase in instructor assistants' levels of the impostor phenomenon
> (Abstract).

The purpose of this study published in the *Journal of Social Psychology* was to

"determine how well-being was correlated with endorsement of stereotypic gender roles

and with the impostor phenomenon" (Abstract). The results of their study

> support the hypotheses that (1) people with higher scores for expressive traits
> score higher for well-being stemming from positive relations with others, (2)
> people with higher scores for instrumental traits score higher for well-being
> related to feelings of autonomy, (3) people with higher scores for impostor
> feelings (and lower scores for ability confidence) score lower for self-acceptance
> and (4) for environmental mastery (September, McCarrey, Baranowsky, Parent,
> and Schindler, 2001, Abstract).

In another study, a sample of 190 college students was given the Clance Impostor

Phenomenon Scale, the Perceived Fraudulence Scale, and the NEO-Personality

Inventory-Revised in this study in order to see if the IP is related to the Five-factor model

of personality. "Results of correlational and regression analyses support the predicted

relations of imposter measures with high Neuroticism and low Conscientiousness. Facet-

level correlations shows that depression and anxiety were particularly important characteristics of those with imposter feelings as well as low self-discipline and perceived competence (Bernard, Dollinger, and Ramaniah, 2002, Abstract).

Studdard (2002) published her qualitative research in a dissertation done at the University of Georgia and then an article in *Journal of Continuing Higher Education* the same year. The purpose of this study (dissertation) was to "document how impostorism shaped the graduate experience for women doctoral students" (Abstract). She asked three questions in her study: "(1) How is impostorism manifested in the doctoral experience? (2) How do gender and race role stereotypes and expectations influence impostorism in women doctoral students? and (3) How does the educational system influence impostorism in women doctoral students?" (Abstract). Then she drew three conclusions from this particular study: "First, impostorism played out in real ways in participants' lives. Second, social position exacerbated impostor feelings for the women in this study. Third, the structure of the doctoral experience escalated participants' impostor feelings" (Studdard, 2002, Abstract).

Ross and Krukowski (2003) studies the "relationship between the imposter phenomenon as measured by the Harvey Imposter Phenomenon (HIP, 1981) scale and personality pathology as conceptualized by the DSM-III-R" (Abstract). "These results provide additional evidence for the construct validity of IP as a maladaptive personality style which emphasizes a pervasive sense of inferiority, fear, and self-deprecation" (Abstract).

The purpose of a study done by Groat (2003) at State University of New York at Albany "was to investigate the experience of social class mobility from an acculturation perspective. (Abstract).

> The impostor construct appears to fail to capture individuals' feelings of legitimacy regarding their accomplishment of a move into a new socioeconomic culture, as was hoped. However, individuals more closely identified with their past and current social class reported a greater sense of belonging and relatedness. While there was no relationship between ipso facto social mobility and psychological adjustment, social class cultural identification revealed itself as having direct implications for one's psychological adjustment, particularly one's feeling of belongingness (Groat, 2003, Abstract).

The next study "addresses the problem of student attrition within the first semester of college by examining predictors of college adjustment" (Lefkowitz, 2003, Abstract). "This study aimed to test two main hypotheses: (1) IP and self-esteem directly influence certain types of college adjustment, and (2) IP and self-esteem indirectly influence such adjustment via coping strategies" (Abstract).

"Path analyses revealed that both hypotheses were supported by the data" (Abstract). It was also found that

> IP was a significant indirect predictor of all types of college adjustment via avoidant coping, while self-esteem was a significant and indirect predictor of all types of college adjustment (with the exception of personal-emotional adjustment) via social support seeking and avoidant coping (Abstract).

In the newsletter *Academic Leader*, Zorn (2005) writes that the Impostor Phenomenon "is widespread among high-achieving people, particularly in higher education, where cultural factors contribute to the problem." As course director in the philosophy department at York University, she discovered among her peers and her graduate students widespread "impostor" experiences. She "identified five factors in the higher education culture that contribute to these feelings: aggressive competitiveness; disciplinary nationalism (highly specialized fields that don't value interdisciplinary

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work); scholarly isolation; valuing product over process; and lack of mentoring"

(Abstract). I could not find the research by this author to support her findings.

Kumar and Jagacinski (2006) published their research titled "Imposters Have

Goals Too: The Imposter Phenomenon and its Relationship to Achievement" in

Personality and Individual Differences.

> This study investigated the relationship between imposter fears and achievement goals. Both imposter fears and ability-avoid achievement goals were positively related to test anxiety and negatively related to confidence in one's intelligence. Women expressed greater imposter fears than men and were also higher on ability-avoid goals. Among men, imposter fears were primarily associated with ability-avoid goals. In contrast, among women, imposter fears were positively related to ability-approach goals and negatively related to task goals. Further, among women, but not men, endorsement of an entity theory of intelligence was associated with imposter fears (Abstract).

The dissertation published in 2007 by Birett "focused on females that have

achieved terminal degrees and work in a competitive academic environment to ascertain

if there was a connection between feelings of imposture and specific academic

disciplines" (Abstract).

> She found that from the 131 respondents, 110 (84%) of the participants met criteria for possessing moderate, frequent or intense impostor feelings. Although there was not a significant difference statistically in the average Impostor Phenomenon Scale Score between the four groups, F=2.05; df=3, 127; P=0.11, the present research also found that there was a higher incidence of impostor phenomenon feelings in the hard-applied group. In addition, the smallest average Impostor Phenomenon Scale score was found to be in the hard-pure group (Abstract).

In a very interesting article published in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*

Gravois (2007) defines, explores, and reports on the Impostor Phenomenon. He titled his

article "You're Not Fooling Anyone" and provides information on workshops conducted

on dozens of college campuses during 2007 such as The University of Texas at Austin,

Stanford, the University of Michigan, and Columbia on the topic of the Impostor

Phenomenon. In addition to the information on the workshops conducted by Dr. Valerie Young, Gravois provides a web address where persons interested in finding support can go. (You will find more on Young in the "Recent Studies" section as the website is copyrighted 2009).

The purpose of this research study was "to see if previous research is correct in predicting that impostors report that others view them more positively than they view themselves, or if instead that impostorism may be used as a self-diminishing self-presentation strategy" (McElwee and Yurak, 2007, Abstract). "Results support previous research indicating that while impostors report feeling inadequate, they do not actually feel fraudulent: They do not believe that others view them more positively than they view themselves" (Abstract).

In a book titled *Chained to the Desk: A Guidebook for Workaholics*, Robinson (2007) shares his expertise on the Impostor Phenomenon as professor, author, and private psychotherapist associated with the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. While he doesn't give the IP a full chapter in his book, he does include it in a chapter titled "Inside the Workaholic Mind" where he says that "workaholics depend on their work to define who they are and to gain a positive sense of themselves" (p. 113). He further explains—insightfully so—that "although they exceed others' expectations, they never reach their own because their standards (not unlike the anorexic's) are rigid and distorted" (p. 114), due to "underlying identity issues" (p. 115). He associates the "compulsive pattern" of workaholism with that of impostorism (p. 113).

Summary of the "Impostor Adult" Studies

Many of the 38 studies in this section discuss the occurrences of the IP in certain environments and in certain occupations, along with comparing and contrasting it to other psychological constructs.

As with the other sections, the "impostor adult" dissertations had a high percentage of female authors (87 percent). The three dissertations authored by males were 1) Wilson (1992), who noted in the Abstract, interestingly enough, that there are no empirical studies that address the issues of success and achievement *in spite of* "impostor" feelings; Niles (1994, who looked at graduate student experiences of the IP within clinical psychology programs compared with recent Ph.D. graduates' experiences; and 3) Groat's (2003) study of social class mobility and IP experiences.

Similarly, a large percentage of the dissertations in this section were quantitative studies (91 percent). The one qualitative study in this section (Studdard, 2002) documented the graduate experience of the IP among female doctoral students; the mixed-method dissertation (Ward, 1990) looked at the causes the "impostors" give for their success and the motivational factors that drive them towards success.

Many of the 17 articles I chose to include in this section were written as a result of dissertation work and reflect the same topics mentioned previously. Journals that published two or more of the articles looked at in this section are: *Journal of Personality Assessment*, *Personality and Individual Differences*, *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, and *Psychological Reports*.

Non-Profile Related Studies

1990 - 2007

I selected the following studies because they did not relate directly to the

personality profile of the classic "impostor"—either child, teen, or adult that I created. In

doing this, however, I do not intend to imply that any of them are less important in the

overall body of knowledge of the Impostor Phenomenon. I included the studies because I

am committed to a *comprehensive* look of the existing literature.

The first of the 27 studies I chose to review in this section is the dissertation

published at the University of Toronto (Canada). The author, Cohen (1990), sought to

> investigate the effectiveness of the imposter phenomenon instruments in order to
> develop a more sophisticated understanding of the way in which the Harvey I-P
> Scale and the Clance I-P Scale tap the imposter phenomenon and to refine the
> construct through examining the imposter phenomenon in a previously unselected
> sample of middle managers and technical specialists. It was found that individuals
> with a low tolerance for ambiguity, an external locus of control, and perceiving
> high degrees of environmental ambiguity were more likely to experience the
> imposter phenomenon. Contrary to expectation, increased mobility and high
> levels of achievement were not predictive of the imposter phenomenon. Findings
> from item-to-scale analyses and factor analyses suggested that the Clance I-P
> Scale is a discriminating instrument, and while the Harvey I-P Scale and Clance I-
> P Scale both tap the imposter phenomenon, they do so in different ways"
> (Abstract).

Ewing's (1990) dissertation at The Ohio State University and subsequent article

(Ewing, Richardson, James-Myers, and Russell, 1996) published in *Journal of Black*

Psychology, discuss "the existence of the imposter phenomenon in African American

graduate and professional students, and its relationship to racial identity attitudes and

Afrocentric world view" (Abstract). The research seemed to show that

> that worldview was a better predictor of susceptibility to the imposter
> phenomenon than racial identity attitudes. The greater the degree to which one's
> belief system was optimal in nature, the less likely one experienced imposter

feelings in college. When combined with academic self concept, racial identity attitudes significantly contributed to predicting imposter feelings (Abstract).

Farris (1990) took a creative turn when she chose to investigate and evaluate "differences in the way individuals who theoretically are "impostoring" through the art of acting and those without such career pursuits manifest the impostor phenomenon" (Abstract).

> Surprisingly, both the acting and control groups far surpassed other groups on the Harvey I-P scale. Additional analysis explored the relationship between the impostor phenomenon and the 16 PF scales for the two groups. These results suggest that impostor feelings are a different phenomenon among actors. While controls revealed more pathology as correlates of high impostor scores, for actors the relationship between the impostor phenomenon and various aspects of pathology was less marked (Abstract).

In another interesting twist, the dissertation by Morris (1991) titled *The Impostor Phenomenon and Personal Therapy for the Therapist*, purposed to examine "the relationship between the experience of personal therapy for the therapist, various aspects of personal adjustment, and functioning as a therapist" (Abstract).

> The results supported the previously found prevalence of impostor feelings among therapists. Valued personal therapy was only marginally related to decreased impostor feelings. The degree of certainty provided by one's theoretical framework was significantly inversely related to impostor feelings and produced the most robust correlation of this investigation. Self-acceptance and experience were significantly inversely related to impostor feelings. Amount of personal therapy, exclusive of its evaluation, and level of countertransference awareness were significantly predictive of therapist ability to encourage exploration of patients' provocative statements (Abstract).

"The purpose of this study (Jordan, 1991) was to compare and then determine whether these tests measure similar phenomena in women in a nonclinical population: The Eating Disorder Inventory (EDI), the Work and Family Orientation Questionnaire (WFO), and the Impostor Phenomenon (IP) Scale.

> The results establish that the EDI is a good inclusive measure, touching on achievement and personal unconcern, and that the EDI incorporates the concept of

impostor phenomenon in its scale structure. It is also concluded that the EDI provides an adequate measure of the core characteristics of eating disorders in a normal population (Abstract).

Fried-Buchalter wrote and published her dissertation (1993) and two articles (1992, 1997) in order to report her finding on the fear of success, fear of failure, and the imposter phenomenon among male and female marketing managers. One of the purposes reported was to see "if the FOS would be greater among female managers than among male managers" (1997, Abstract).

> Results show that female managers scored significantly higher than males on FOS, but there were no significant gender differences on FOF or the IP. Among all Ss, significant positive correlations were observed between FOF and the IP. Results were interpreted as indicating differences between culturally-based and intra-psychic fear of succeeding (1997 Abstract).

The 1992 article was published in the *Journal of Personality Assessment*; the 1997 article in *Sex Roles*.

In 1993, Holmes, Kertay, Adamson, Holland, and Clance published an article in the *Journal of Personality Assessment* in order to discuss the idea that

> many of the discrepancies reported in empirical investigations of the impostor phenomenon (IP) may be due in part to (1) the use of different methods for identifying individuals suffering from this syndrome (impostors), (2) the common use of a median split procedure to classify Ss, and (3) the fact that Ss in many studies were drawn from impostor-prone samples (Abstract).

> In this study, the scores of independently identified impostors and nonimpostors on 2 instruments designed to measure the IP, J. C. Harvey's (1981) I-P Scale and P. R. Clance's (1985) IP Scale, were compared. A total of 62 Ss participated in the study. Results suggest that Clance's scale may be the more sensitive and reliable instrument (Abstract).

Okoth, Moderski, and Lester (1994) published their research findings in *Psychological Reports* on disturbed adolescents in relationship to the Impostor Phenomenon. The Abstract states that

21 disturbed adolescents (mean age 14.7 yrs) in a supervised day-care program had higher scores on the Harvey Impostor Phenomenon Scale than did 233 regular high school students (mean age 15.7 yrs). Impostor scores were associated with scores on a measure of general irrational thinking.

Cultural and personal factors predisposing Korean Catholic religious members to experience the impostor phenomenon is the topic of Chae's (1994) dissertation, a journal article in *Journal of Personality Assessment* (1995), and then another article (Piedmont, and Chae, 1997) in the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* (Abstract). Findings indicate that "Correlations with the Korean version of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and Impostor Phenomenon Scale (P. R. Clance and S. A. Ames, 1978) provided preliminary validity evidence. Results document the reliability and validity of the Korean version of the NEO PI--R. Results indicate that the Korean version can be considered a parallel form to its English counterpart and that the 5-factor model can generalize well to the Korean culture" (Abstract).

The purpose of the study by Hollingsworth (1995) was to investigate Impostor Phenomenon manifestations in a group of high-achieving nurse specialists called Enterostomal Therapy Nurses. She found that

> ET Nurses do exhibit manifestations of the IP. The level of intensity was not influenced by type of ETNEP attended (traditional or non-traditional), or length of time since graduation. A preponderance of respondees reported their gender as female and their race/ethnicity as White (non-Hispanic); therefore, no conclusions could be drawn as to the relationship between gender or race/ethnicity and the IP. There was a significant relationship, however, between age and manifestations of the IP. Scores on both the Harvey and the Clance instrument increased with age until a peak was reached at 48, and then the scores declined (Abstract).

In yet another dissertation from Georgia State University, Chrisman (1994) shared results "of this study (which was) to compare the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS) to the newly developed Perceived Fraudulence Scale" (Abstract). Findings seem to indicate that

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the CIPS (Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale) and PFS (Perceived Fraudulence Scale) were found to have high internal consistency and to correlate in a similar manner with other measures. The IP was related to, but substantially discriminable from, these constructs. Construct validity evidence for the CIPS was provided through principal components analysis that yielded 3 stable factors: Fate, Discount, and Luck (Abstract).

She also published her findings in a subsequent article (Chrisman, Pieper, Clance, and Holland, 1995) in the *Journal of Personality Assessment*.

In 1995, Beard published his dissertation also done at Georgia State University titled *Boyhood Gender Non-conformity and Narcissism in Gay and Bisexual Men*. His stated purpose was to "investigate the relationship between reported GNB, reports of parents' behavior towards the child, and narcissistic issues in adulthood" (Abstract).

Results did not support a link between reported boyhood GNB and narcissistic issues in adulthood, but did support a link between reported boyhood GNB and low self-esteem as well as an experience of the Imposter Phenomenon. Results also supported an association between reported boyhood GNB and reports of rejection and lack of acceptance from parents. Furthermore, reported parental behavior was demonstrated to be a mediating variable between boyhood GNB and both self-esteem and feelings of impostorhood (Abstract).

In a study on medical professionals, Ellerie (1997) wanted to see if "RN First Assistants (RNFA) experience the impostor phenomenon, an intense, subjective feeling of achievement-related fraudulence" (Abstract). "The results of her study indicated that the RNFA sample did not experience the impostor phenomenon. The demographic data presented some facts that can possibly explain the high degree of competency that RNFAs perceive in their role"(Abstract).

"The purpose of (this) study" (Henning, Ey, and Shaw, 1998), published in *Medical Education*, was to assess the relationship between psychological adjustment, perfectionism and impostor feelings in 477 20-54 (year) old medical, dental, nursing and pharmacy students.

The results showed that a higher than expected percentage of Ss were currently experiencing psychiatric levels of distress. Strong associations were found between current psychological distress, perfectionism and impostor feelings within each programme and these character traits were stronger predictors of psychological adjustment than most of the demographic variables associated previously with distress in health professional students (Abstract).

In order to determine if adults with learning disabilities experience the Impostor Phenomenon (along with other life experiences), Shessel and Reiff (1999) studied and then published their findings in *Learning Disability Quarterly*. This study examined the life experiences of 14 learning-disabled adults (aged 26-60 yrs) identified through current psychometric assessments. "Negative impacts of learning disabilities included difficulties in daily living, the impostor phenomenon, social isolation, and damage to emotional health" (Abstract).

Klein (2000) set out to research the "relationships among the focal stimuli, of anxiety, self-concept, the impostor phenomenon, and the contextual stimuli that may influence students' adaptation to the role of the professional nurse as measured by perceptions of clinical competency in a sample of generic senior baccalaureate nursing students" (Abstract). She found that

neither the hypothesized influence of the contextual stimuli nor the hypothesized combined influence of the focal stimuli and role function behavior, the students' perceptions of competency, were confirmed by the data analysis. However, self-concept alone, and in combination with the impostor phenomenon explained 24.2% of the variance in the students' role function behavior (Abstract).

Barton's (2001) research "examined differences between older and younger generations of female psychologists on the variables of impostor feelings, egalitarian gender-role attitudes, and gender traits" (Abstract). Her findings

did not support the study's hypotheses regarding age. Older women were found to exhibit lower levels of impostor feelings and higher levels of masculinity and androgyny. However, older women were found to be slightly less egalitarian.

Lower levels of impostor feelings were associated with higher levels of both androgyny and masculinity for all participants (Abstract).

In 2002, Selby and Mahoney published a report in *Constructivism in the Human Sciences* in order to report their findings of a study they titled "Psychological and Physiological Correlates of Self-Complexity and Authenticity."

The purpose of this investigation was to examine the consequences of self-focused attention among self-described impostors and non-impostors who exhibited varying degrees of complexity in their self systems. The results of this investigation are consistent with reports that the introduction of a mirror can elicit changes in the physiological sequence here, however, introduced a presumably neutral visual stimulus and neutral verbalizations to serve as controls for the demands of vision and prompted verbalization (Abstract).

Thompson (2003) published her dissertation from Georgia State University, the 11th out of 12 to come from this particular university on the topic of the Impostor Phenomenon. She wanted to "develop and investigate the psychometric properties of a measure (i.e. the Strong Black Woman (SBW) Attitudes Scale). The measure was designed to assess the themes of (1) self-reliance, (2) affect regulation, and (3) caretaking in African American women, which Romero (2000) contended were part of a construct called the SBW" (Abstract).

Mixed results were found with respect to the psychometric adequacy of the scale, with possible modifications to the self-reliance subscale suggested. Support was found for the Hypothesis that higher levels of SBW attitudes would be associated with higher levels of IP in Black women. The Hypothesis that SBW attitudes and internalized racism would be positively correlated in the Black female sample was also supported. The Hypothesis that predicted that androgynous women would be more likely to report increased levels of SBW attitudes was not supported. However, results supported predictions in the literature that Black women are more likely to have an androgynous role orientation than White women. Androgyny was also positively correlated with self-reliance and negatively correlated with affect regulation. The Hypothesis that predicted that Black women would have higher mean scores on the SBW attitudes scale compared to White women was not supported (Abstract).

In 2004 Hellman and Caselman published an article in the *Journal of Personality Assessment* to report their investigation that looked at the

> psychometric properties on the 14-item Harvey Imposter Phenomenon (IP) Scale (Harvey, 1981) among a sample of U.S. adolescents (N=136). Item analyses, internal consistency reliability, and principal components analysis (PCA) were computed to assess the reliability and factor structure of the IP scores (Abstract).

"The results of this study suggest that the indiscriminate use of the Harvey IP Scale is cautioned relative to the insufficient psychometric properties" (Abstract).

In the 12th and final dissertation (as of the summer 2009) published out of Georgia State University, Lassiter (2004) explored the power and gender-role expectations through a historical interpretive analysis of Queen Victoria via a qualitative study.

> The findings give thick description to the internal conflicts and complexities experienced by Queen Victoria regarding gender role expectations and power, including how she may have negotiated these contradictions. The themes describing her experience include emotional/psychological experience, constructions of self, gender-role expectations for women and men, and constructions of power (Abstract).

In another qualitative dissertation exploring the Impostor Phenomenon, Jarnagin (2005)

> describe(d) the meaning of the experience of doctoral course work in nursing for midlife female nursing faculty. Six essential themes emerged: Metamorphosis or the transformation of self, sacrifice including neglect of self-care, support from others, perseverance as persistence despite adversity, juggling multiple roles (including the superwoman ethos of trying to meet unrealistic expectations), and the imposter phenomenon , common in women who excel, of feeling like they are not good enough to be recognized as such (Abstract).

"A Study to Determine the Incidence and Relationship of Demographic variables and Self-esteem to The Impostor Phenomenon among Nurse Educators" is the title of the study done by Mitchell (2005).

> The purpose of this study was to determine if any statistically significant relationships exist between the impostor phenomenon and self-esteem and the relationships of age, gender, rank, years as faculty, tenure and highest degree

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achieved and the impostor phenomenon and self-esteem in nurse educators. There was no significant difference between the impostor phenomenon and self-esteem in nurse educators. There was no significant relationship between the demographic variables and the impostor phenomenon and self-esteem in nurse educators (Abstract).

In a chapter titled "The Impostor Phenomenon and Women in Theology", Joan Range, professor and president of the Women's Commission of the University (Saint Louis University) discusses implications of the IP and the "lived experiences of those women faculty and administrators working within Catholic higher education" (in Hesse-Biber and Leckenby, Eds., 2003, p. 2). She credits Clance (1985) with naming "the feelings that many of us experience who try to function in a predominantly male world and in an exclusively male tradition, that is, theology" (p. 123) and believes that her (Range) particular discipline (theology) "poses special difficulties for someone suffering from IP. She raises and then answers several questions in order to move the discussion of feminist theology forward."

Summary of the Non-Profile Related Studies

As stated previously, I sought to provide a comprehensive look at all literature available at the time of this writing (summer, 2009). The previous 27 studies are important in their own right, but none related directly to the personality profile; neither did they have relevance for my personal narrative. By including them in this look at the literature I have provided future researchers with the *whole* picture of the Impostor Phenomenon. What follows are the most current studies of the Impostor Phenomenon that will bring my look at the literature to a close.

Current Studies in Conclusion

2008 - 2009

I found five studies that were published in either 2008 or 2009: four articles, one dissertation, along with one website (copyrighted 2009). I continued to check for new publications up until the time I submitted my dissertation for publication. A look at the current studies on the Impostor Phenomenon follows.

The primary objective of this study (Lin, 2008) was to explore the presence of the "Imposter Phenomenon," (IP) feeling like an intellectual fraud, among a sample of high-achieving women of color. A secondary objective was to investigate the possible protective function of individual difference variables that might help women of color to defend against IP. Positive and significant correlations were found between IP and age, and IP and CSE (Collective Self-esteem). Younger women were more likely to endorse IP compared to older women. Women with higher CSE were less likely to endorse IP. No other significant correlations were found. Results of a standard multiple regression indicated that the model significantly predicted IP, but that only 8.3% of the variance in IP could be explained by the combined effects of age, CSE, Worldview, and MEI (Multigroup Ethnic Identity). Implications for counseling psychologists are discussed (Abstract).

In an article published in *Social Behavior and Personality*, McGregor, Gee, and Posey (2008) reported on their study that seemed to show

the relation between the IP and depression among college students. Results of a Pearson product-moment correlation yielded a positive correlation between the IP and BDI-II (Beck, Steer, & Brown, 1996) scores. More specifically, the main effect between sex and IP score indicates that women have higher IP scores than men. However, the effect between sex and BDI was not statistically significant (Abstract).

The purpose of this study (Gibson-Beverly and Schwartz, 2008)

was to examine the utility of attachment and entitlement as predictors of the impostor phenomenon in female graduate students. Findings suggested that individuals with high levels of self-reliance/self-assurance entitlement are able to associate positive feedback with stable internal attributes. Those with anxious attachment and narcissistic expectations/self-promotion entitlement, however, were unable to openly accept positive feedback because of perceived deficits in self-worth (Abstract).

In the Fall-Winter 2008 *CUPA-HR Journal*, Parkman and Beard published their article titled "Succession Planning and the Imposter Phenomenon in Higher Education." In this qualitative study

> the authors examine how to reduce the likelihood that an imposter is placed into the succession pipeline, how to reduce imposter behaviors in employees, and describe the skills needed to those who manage an imposter. This article illustrates the impact of the imposter phenomenon on succession planning in high education, describes imposter behavior in detail and offers a number of strategies to address these behaviors (Abstract).

During the final review of the studies presented so far, I found a reference for a website that purports to offer aid to those experiencing the affects of the Impostor Phenomenon. I provide the source here for any who choose to look more thoroughly into it. It has a copyrighted date of 2009 but was mentioned in a 2007 article (Gravois).

A comprehensive look at the research on the Impostor Phenomenon was provided in a way that gave the reader 1) an introductory look at the early and foundational studies (1978 – 1989) , 2) a review of studies arranged so that the reader could get a look at the research spanning from childhood through adult experiences (1990 – 2007), followed by 3) the studies that were not relevant to this present work (1999 – 2007), 4) the most current published studies, and finally(2008 – 2009), and 5) the Personality Profile drawn from the seminal work (Clance, 1985). It is my hope that by presenting the entire body of existing literature I have provided a valuable resource for the researcher of the Impostor Phenomenon that come after me.

The Classic Personality Profile of the "Impostor"

What follows is a full presentation of an "impostor" in profile format which this researcher gleaned from the seminal work (Clance, 1985). After looking at the literature on the "impostor", the profile may feel familiar. After reading the profile, you, the reader,

will be better prepared to understand and perhaps even relate to personal experiences

presented in chapter 4. There I will *show* you what "impostor" experiences looked like

for me.

Personality Profile of the "Impostor Child"

Family issues are at the root of the "impostor's" experiences (Clance, 1985,

p. 32). She has overheard members of the family talking about her and she has listened to

stories about others told in her presence (p. 32). Her earliest memories are a combination

of instructions given on how to behave and feelings of confusion (p. 32); she experiences

a discrepancy between messages from the family about who she is and messages from

others such as teachers, friends, and neighbors (p. 33). Early on she senses that she is a

little different from the rest of the family but doesn't understand this at all (Clance, 1985,

p. 33). Even when she does well, she is not praised by family members for her

accomplishments (p. 34). Although the "impostor child" is ignored at times by her

parents, she experiences routine denial of any of her accomplishments (p. 123).

She feels pressure to learn quickly and to maneuver well in the world at an early

age (Clance, 1985, p. 33) and early on feels shame and humiliation when she makes

"mistakes" that are public (p. 27). These feelings of shame and humiliation are also

experienced as she witnesses her parents' behavior (p. 74). She begins to feels the

pressure to be the very best—the top performer—at whatever she does (p. 26). When she

is complimented it is from persons from outside the family circle (p. 33). Those people

often remark that she is gifted and give her special attention (p. 68). During her

elementary years she is often called on to perform in a leadership role because she is

considered by those in authority to be the very best (p. 68). She is teased at school and at home (p. 74).

While it is wonderful for her at the time, later in life (as an adult) she expects to continue to be the best in everything she does (Clance, 1985, p. 68). She does not feel accepted for who she is (p. 69). She believes that in order to be loved she has to live up to what she believes are her family's expectations (p. 69). Although she cannot name her feelings, she often feels shame and humiliation (p. 74). The reasons for these feelings come from recurrent experiences of failing, often insignificant and unnoticed by others, but sometimes more public (p. 74).

At times she receives overtly hostile attention and criticism (Clance, 1985 p. 123). What makes this particularly painful for the "impostor child" is the fact that her siblings are treated in a completely different way (p. 125). The seeds of jealousy and resentment, (among others) are planted very early in the heart of the "impostor child" even though they are unknown to her (p. 125).

Personality Profile of the "Impostor Teen"

What develops inside the "impostor" as she grows up are secret experiences (Clance, 1985, p. 18). She rehearses painful incidents and dwells on things she doesn't understand (p. 25). She worries that she can't live up to other's expectations of her (p. 25). She experiences periods of anxiety and fear when she is called upon to perform because she doubts her own ability and fears failure (p. 25). When things turn out alright, she only feels relief and happiness for a short time, though (p. 26). She has an unspoken need to be the very best—the top performer—at whatever she attempts and believes that

she *should* be able to do anything easily (p. 26). This leaves her feeling overwhelmed most of the time (p. 26).

She secretly yearns to be special, but at the same time she dismisses her real talents, thinking she is stupid if not the very best (Clance, 1985, p. 26). Extreme anxiety, bordering on panic attacks, overtakes her when she even thinks she has made a mistake (p. 27). These feelings are associated with shame and humiliation experienced in childhood (p. 27). When complimented or praised for her accomplishments she discounts and refuses to believe it (p. 27). While desperately wanting to be successful, she fears that increased responsibility may come as a result of it (p. 27).

The "impostor teen" works hard at disguising her imagined deficiencies and weaknesses (Clance, 1985, p. 28), even though she is genuinely introverted (p. 28). While the experiences of success are real and deserved, she questions herself regularly and rarely feels the joy and satisfaction these experiences should bring (p. 28). She feels ashamed of her doubts and fears—keeping them a secret (p. 29).

Dread is an unnamed companion of the "impostor teen" (Clance, 1985, p. 51). She has an intense pressure inside her to prove herself (p. 51)—to make a good impression, to be liked, to be respected (p. 58). Even though she intellectually knows that all people fail at times, she is unable to apply this knowledge to herself (p. 63).

As she matures, she continues to demand of herself that she never look stupid (Clance, 1985, p. 74). This fear (which she can't name and doesn't know how to deal with) overwhelms her, squelches her spontaneity and creativity (p. 74)**,** and drives her to be perfect in all areas of her life (p. 77). She overworks because she wants everything she

does to be brilliant, creative, and productive all the time (p. 77). She has the superwoman complex (p. 77)**.**

When motherhood comes at an early age, she is determined not to repeat her own mother's mistakes (Clance, 1985, p. 80). As a single parent her intense need to be perfect along with intense feelings of responsibility raises her fears of failure and feelings of guilt (p. 81). Her self-doubt grows and she suffers with leaving her children at daycare while she works (p. 82). Conflict is inside her and all around her**.** She feels isolated, lonely, and sometimes even crazy (p. 83). She begins to believe that she is a terrible mother (p. 84) so she tries to back off her need to succeed, tries to expect less of herself (p. 87)**.**

She believes that in order to be loved by her children she must be perfect (Clance, 1985, p. 87). This puts extreme pressure on her. The "impostor single mom"—who may still be a child (in many ways) herself—also has a strong need to protect others (p. 121) in addition to her own children, feeling responsible for the happiness and sense of well being for those around her (p. 121).

Personality Profile of the "Impostor Adult"

Even though she advances in her jobs and succeeds in her classes, she is unable to hear and believe compliments (Clance, 1985, p. 88). She can't/won't accept objective evidence regarding success or intellectual ability (p. 88). The research shows that this is not false modesty (p. 88); it is not being coy (p. 91). Give an "impostor" a compliment and watch her change the subject and turn away in embarrassment (p. 90). She attributes her successes to anything and everything except brains (p. 91).

Internal conflict is familiar to the "impostor" (Clance, 1985, p. 96). While she fears success, she desperately wants it (p. 96). The tacit need to be special is relentlessly

at work in her (p. 96). Strong desire to succeed wars with the strong feelings of

unworthiness, resulting in self-doubt (p. 97).

She is bright, energetic, and hardworking; she is liked, loved, and respected

(Clance, 1985, p. 126). *But . . .* she remembers and focuses on the one percent of the

flawed results (failures in her mind) and discounts the 99 percent of her accomplishments

(p. 119).

The "impostor" is aware of her feelings, is thoughtful, and appears preoccupied.

In a crowd, she is uncomfortable but works hard to hide it (Clance, 1985, p. 120). Even

though she is a classic introvert (p. 120), to appear more outgoing, she aligns herself with

more gregarious people (p. 120) so that her "quietness" isn't as noticeable. She has

developed her self-image from other people's responses to her (p. 121), so she strives to

please others to get a good response.

Some "impostors" procrastinate when faced with a need to perform (Clance,

1985, p. 25), while others respond just the opposite by working extra hard, starting extra

early, and consistently over-preparing (p. 25). When given the opportunity to discuss her

achievements, successes, or talents, she remains silent or verbally denies or disclaims

them (p. 27). She refuses to accept—and thus internalize—the proof(s) that she is

competent, intelligent, and talented (p. 27).

Although she has these secret fears, she makes a great first impression anyway

(Clance, 1985, p. 28) because, over the years, she has constructed a "mask" that depicts a

very nice smile (p. 31), a look of authority, and a certain self-assuredness (p. 31).

Experiences that showcase the "impostor" (Clance, 1985, p. 53) are *first* jobs, *new*

jobs (p. 58), and *new* things (p. 58). Groups of people who seem to experience the

"impostor phenomenon" are first-generation professionals (p. 103), children of exceptional/super successful families (p. 107), and students (p. 110). The "impostor" often settles for less than she is capable of or she decides to discontinue an activity when things become difficult (p. 70) because she just can't bear to fail or because she doesn't want to be less that the very best (p. 70).

There are times when she decides to remain in *a small pond* so that she can be *the big fish* (Clance, 1985, p. 71). She may decide to aim at a lesser goal—much below her actual capabilities—because of the fear of failure (p. 72). Decisions to "settle" may be the result of exhaustion, however (p. 83). The superwoman complex drives the "impostor" to do much more than is necessary, believing that to say no is a failure (p. 84). She really believes that she should be able to do anything and everything without being stressed (p. 84).

The existing literature on the Impostor Phenomenon coupled with the personality profile paints a pretty powerful picture of what some intelligent and high-achieving people experience. Many people I talked to about the "impostor" asked me to send them my dissertation even before it was completed because they were so interested in it. Many of them, I suspect, related to the information personally. I know I did when I first encountered it. After a full discussion of my method of exploration in chapter 3, I move on to my search for personal meaning of the Impostor Phenomenon—both for me and for my readers—in chapter 4.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOLGY

My Qualitative Position

As a qualitative researcher, I have located myself on a continuum between quantitative and qualitative research because of certain philosophical assumptions that I bring to the research project (Creswell, 2009). I wanted to explore and understand the Impostor Phenomenon through an emerging process, inductively "building from particulars to general themes" (Creswell, 2009, p. 4) which allowed me to make interpretations of the meaning of the data I uncovered. As a qualitative researcher, I understand the idea of many realities: those that I found for myself; those of the readers of my study who don't relate to the Impostor Phenomenon; and those of the readers who do. I wrote my story so that it would be understood in different ways by different readers, depending on their own ontological assumptions (Creswell, 2007). As I approached my research project, I saw the "field" as the store of memories that surfaced which provided the context for understanding the Impostor Phenomenon from my present position (Creswell, 2007). I wanted a flexible structure in which to conduct my research and qualitative design provided this for me.

Because philosophical assumptions influence the design and process of my research, they needed to be disclosed. Following Nash's (2004) lead in grounding the Scholarly Personal Narrative approach in "methods and truth criteria that draw substantially from social science, science, philosophy, and the humanities" (p. vii), I positioned myself as a constructivist in the postmodern intellectual tradition. Nash writes

that "each of us is both constructivist and constructed. The stories we construct then turn around and construct us, and we them . . . forever" (p. 36). I sought to understand myself by developing "subjective meanings of (my) experiences—meanings directed toward certain objects or things" (Creswell, 2009, p. 8), namely, the Impostor Phenomenon. I recognized that my background shaped my interpretations (Creswell), and that my experiences would be seen in light of my present understanding.

Other Qualitative Possibilities

Many possibilities for framing my study existed within approaches to qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). These "different forms of qualitative approaches exist and the design of research within each has distinctive features" (p. 13). I could have chosen another one but the result would have been significantly different.

I initially thought that I would write an auto-ethnography of my "impostor" experiences. I began reading books, many of which I purchased, and articles, all of which I printed from on-line sources or copied from handbooks: Atkinson & Coffey (2001) on ethnography; Booker (2004) on story theory; Ellis & Bochner (2000) on auto-ethnography and personal narrative; Ellis (2004) on the methodology of auto-ethnography; Fiske (1990) on ethnosemiotics; Goodall (2000) on writing in the new ethnographic genre; Leavy (2009) on the arts in research; Nash (2004) on Scholarly Personal Narrative; Neumann (1996) on alternative forms of qualitative writing; Schwandt (2001), the dictionary of qualitative inquiry; Scott-Hoy (2008) on passionate researching; and Wolcott (1999) on a way of seeing. The focus in auto-ethnography is shared between the story of self and the setting of culture. Writing my story with this approach would have entailed spending time looking "outward" in a more prolonged and

intense way and, I believe, would have distracted the reader and the writer from the focus on the Impostor Phenomenon construct seen through the eyes of personal experiences.

I could have chosen to do a phenomenological research project on the Impostor Phenomenon using participant description to explore this construct, but I would have had to "set aside (my) own experiences in order to understand those of the participants in the study" (Nieswiadomy, 1993 in Creswell, 2009, p. 13). I wanted to explore my own personal experiences in relationship to the research I was discovering.

I did consider doing a case study because as I shared information on the Impostor Phenomenon, many people responded with similar stories and expressed interest in being involved in my personal exploration. According to Stake (1995, in Creswell, 2009) "cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time" (p. 13). Due to a personal time line, I chose to restrict the inquiry to my own story and to closely link my narrative to the Impostor Phenomenon characteristics that I have experienced.

Scholarly Personal Narrative

So I decided to write my story as a Scholarly Personal Narrative (Nash, 2004). The exploration of my life as an "impostor" in this methodology would be the research text. Nash, professor, author, and journal editor, describes Scholarly Personal Narrative as "an alternative form of intellectual inquiry" (p. 4): writing that "combines story and scholarship"; is "concrete and abstract"; is "both particular and general"; is "down-to-earth and theoretical" (p. 12). He further describes Scholarly Personal Narrative as one that "construct(s) narratives that (are) honest, self-disclosing, and scholarly all at the same time" (p. ix).

Trustworthiness.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) coined the term *trustworthiness* and talk about it as one way to judge the quality of goodness in a qualitative study. They define it as "that quality of an investigation (and its findings) that made it noteworthy to audiences" (in Schwandt, 2001, p. 258). In defining the term, Lincoln and Guba list four criteria that can help to evaluate the trustworthiness of a qualitative research project: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (in Schwandt). Later, Lincoln and Denzin (2000), in writing about *the crisis of legitimation*, discuss the "authority of the text—the claim any text makes to being accurate, true, and complete" (p. 1051).

Ellis (2004) sees validity "in terms of what happens to readers . . . and researchers" (p. 124) and defines it as a work that "seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible" (p. 124).

Richardson (1997) uses the metaphor of a *crystal* to describe the validity of a qualitative study in terms of having "an infinite number of shapes, dimensions, and angles. It acts as a prism and changes shape, but still has structure. What we see depends on our angle of vision" (p. 92). Both Ellis and Richardson would agree, though, that personal narratives are constructed from memories of incidents as they actually happened.

Bochner (in Ellis and Bochner, 2000) would ask the following questions while reading a personal narrative to decide if the story was reliable and telling (p. 748-749):

Is the work honest or dishonest?

Does the author take the measure of herself, her limitations, her confusion,

ambivalence, mixed feelings?

Do you gain a sense of emotional reliability?

Do you sense a passage through emotional epiphany to some communicated truth,

not resolution per se, but some transformation from an old self to a new one?

Does the story enable you to understand and feel the experience it seeks to

convey?

Bochner (in Ellis & Bochner, 2000) also believes that "there is no such thing as

orthodox reliability" (p. 751) in personal narrative writing. "(W)e create our personal

narrative from a situated location, trying to make our present, imagined future, and

remembered past cohere" (p. 751). He does believe that the researcher can do what he

terms "reliability checks" (p. 751) by giving the *others* in our stories "the chance to

comment, add materials, change their minds, and offer their interpretations" (p. 751). On

generalizability, Bochner (in Ellis & Bochner, 2000) asserts that the readers of personal

narratives are always measuring the narrative by their own experiences or the experience

of others that they know in order to see if they align.

Witherell, writing about Nash (2004) says that he

. . . skillfully grounds this approach in methods and truth criteria that
draw substantially from social science, science, philosophy, and the
humanities, all. Locating himself within the constructivist and
postmodern intellectual tradition, Nash explores through his own and
his students' personal narratives the ways that autobiographical
writing and story-telling can reveal the meaning that resides and is
taking new shape inside us, as well as among us as teachers and
learners (2004, p. viii).

Nash (2004) lays out his ideas for "rigor" as: trustworthiness, honesty,

plausibility, situatedness, interpretive self-consciousness, introspectiveness/self-

reflection, and universalizability, and then he adds three more criteria that he borrows from Bruner (1990): coherence, livability, and adequacy (p. 5).

Nash (2004) not only borrows from Brunner (1990) but from Rorty (1989) as well, by "summing up of postmodernism: truth is made, not discovered. This is to say that reality, while certainly existing 'out there', is always and everywhere socially and personally constructed" (in Nash, p. 7). Nash believes that when writers narrate their everyday experiences in a way that makes the readers believe the story, then this kind of writing is 'true'. "Truth, in SPN fashion, is what works best for the narrator and the reader in the never-ending quest to find and construct narratives of meaning, both for self and others" (p. 33). He lists what he refers to as "postmodern truth criteria:

open-endedness

plausibility

vulnerability

narrative creativity

interpretive ingenuity

coherence

generalizability

trustworthiness

caution

personal honesty (p. 41).

Nash (2004) believes that writers of Scholarly Personal Narrative have a "nagging need to tell some kind of truth. And the best way to tell a truth is to tell a story" (p. 55). If the reader hears the writer's truth within the context of the personal narrative, Nash believes that it is possible for that reader to locate its counterpart in his or her own life. He exhorts Scholarly Personal Narrative writers to always try to be honest: "Say what

you mean, and believe what you say" (p. 63); "Have a complete willingness to be honest

with yourself and your readers" (p. 116).

There is, in Nash's (2004) mind, a distinction between *ethical truth* and *narrative*

truth. He defines *ethical truth* as: honest, veracious, not lying, not deliberately intending

to deceive; trying to render as accurate an account of the facts as you understand them"

(p. 137). Truthful Scholarly Personal Narrative writers strive to be

> as honest as possible about what one remembers, feels, knows, and senses about
> events and people, both from the past and in the present. This is *ethical truth*, and
> it has everything to do with an author's motives, intentions, and attempts to be
> accurate (p. 137).

Nash (2004) then summarizes his thoughts on *narrative truth* as "something quite

different from *ethical truth*, although there are points of intersection" (p. 139). "My

narrative truth informs, and re-forms, my ethical truth, as it does for every Scholarly

Personal Narrative writer I know" (p. 140). In narrative truth one is

> actually re-creating (her) past. I am informing and re-forming it. This is what
> Baker (1998) meant when he said that he was about to 'invent' his life. He was
> about to live his life twice, once in the past and once in the present. And he knew
> that his present life would alter his past life both spiritually and historically (Nash,
> p. 141).

> Truth, in my opinion, is what happens when you decide to write for the reasons
> that Aronie (1998, p. 202-204) writes: We write to tell the truth. We write to
> know who we are. We write to find our voices. We write to save the world. We
> write to save ourselves. We write so that when we look back and see that moment
> when we were totally clear, completely brilliant, and astoundingly wise, there is
> proof—proof right here on the (blank, blank—my substitute) page. And we can
> read our words and say, 'I wrote that.' And if we did it once—we can do it again
> (in Nash, p. 141).

Nash (2004) makes another distinction, this time between *distortion* and

interpretation. "The former is calculated to deceive; the latter is inevitable because no

fact ever comes to us as an immaculate perception" (p. 138). When Nash reads a

personal narrative, he looks for internal coherence and trusts the writer "intuitively and intellectually" (p. 138). He would allow for

> certain kinds of literary license . . . in Scholarly Personal Narrative writing in order to sustain narrative interest and maintain artistic economy: facts can be rearranged chronologically; scenes and characters can be composited; time can be compressed; and some details can be left out (p. 138).

He recommends that Scholarly Personal Narrative writers use terms such as, 'I imagine,' or 'to the best of my recollection'" (p. 138) in some areas of the narrative.

Goodness.

Taking a postmodern perspective, Nash (2004) writes that Scholarly Personal Narrative is not better or worse than traditional research norms, just different and that different approaches to research are good. He defines goodness as pliability, fluidity, and adaptability in approaching research. Further, he writes of Scholarly Personal Narrative goodness:

> It is good if it produces tangible benefits for others. It is good if it is personally honest and revealing, engaging, and probing. It is good if it is made accessible to everyone, particularly the non-specialist. It is good if it is directed to the satisfaction of human needs, either for the near or for the far term. It can also be good for its own sake, particularly when it serves to enlighten, entertain, or inspire. (I)t is good if it is willing to continually examine and critique its own basic assumptions about what counts as defensible truth, knowledge, and value (p. 5).

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework.

The theoretical framework for Scholarly Personal Narrative comes mainly from the works of Jerome Bruner, Richard Rorty, and Ruth Behar.

Bruner, "a rigorous social scientist and winner of the International Balzan prize" (Nash, 2004, p. 19), took a "narrative turn in his thinking" (p. 18) and now believes that "the truth that matters is not empirical truth but . . . the *narrative* truth" (p. 18). He sees

the "self" as a storyteller—one who constructs narratives about a life. Nash agrees with Bruner in the position that social scientists should begin with stories that people tell about themselves and others in the search for larger meanings of human behavior. Rejecting the "concept of mind as 'information processor', and believing the new concept of '*mind as a creator of narrative meanings*'" (in Nash, p. 19), Bruner validates the "intellectual value of Scholarly Personal Narrative" according to Nash (p. 19).

Rorty, philosopher and writer, influenced Nash's framing of reality more than any other thinker (Nash, 2004). As staunch postmodernists, they both believe that "truth is made, not discovered" (p.7). Rather than viewing reality as existing somewhere "out there" (p. 7), they would say that it is "always and everywhere socially and personally constructed" (p. 7). Scholarly Personal Narrative, then, is thought of in terms of constructing and telling stories of what is *out there* to others as well as to ourselves as a means of making sense of it all (Nash). Ives writes that "We do not write about things as they are or were or will be. We write about these things as *we* are" (in Nash, p. 8). Finding meaning *within*, for Nash, is more important that finding "truth" *without* (p. 162).

Nash (2004) references Rorty's (1999) personal essay titled *Trotsky and the Wild Orchids* as "an excellent example of an Scholarly Personal Narrative that combines story and scholarship. . . . It narrates fascinating elements of the author's personal story even while it elucidates his postmodern ideas in a fresh way" (Nash, p. 12). I found it. I read it. And I took Nash's advice to "go on from there to find a way to do the same. But always in your own special style and according to the contingencies of your own story" (p. 12).

Another scholar that has influenced Nash is Ruth Behar. Behar (1996) has experimented with alternative methods of qualitative research which she calls "vulnerable anthropology" and "self-reflexive, shadow biography" (in Nash, 2004, p. 18). As a professor of anthropology at the University of Michigan, she has distinguished herself as a scholar through writing personal narratives. In her ethnographic studies she places herself "as much the subject as the subjects she is studying" (p. 49). Nash recommends her book *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart,* which I found and read. He credits Behar for providing him, in a single sentence, his "entire philosophy of education and life" (p. 51). She believes that the researcher must be "willing to view [your discipline] from the perspective of an anthropologist who has come to know others by knowing herself and who has come to know herself by knowing others" (in Nash, p. 51). Nash describes Behar as "philosophical, political, autobiographical, anthropological, and spiritual all at once. She is able to write for a general audience as well as a specialized one. She writes both from the heart and the head. She is a genuine public intellectual" (p. 50).

Research Question Revisited

Does writing my story from the perspective of an "impostor" help me and my readers to discover and understand the basis for and impact of the Impostor Phenomenon in our lives?

Current Literature on the Impostor Phenomenon

The literature search on the Impostor Phenomenon resulted in a 30-year span of studies retrieved from the following data bases for the key words (impostor phenomenon, imposter phenomenon, impostor syndrome, imposter syndrome): EBSCO Academic

Search Premier, ERIC, PsycINFO, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, WorldCAT,

Digital Dissertations and Theses, and the Web of Science. To date, I have retrieved

abstracts for 60 dissertations between 1978 through 2008. (I did not include Master's

Thesis in this review.) After reviewing the dissertation abstracts, I obtained all or

sections from many of them. I also found and retrieved abstracts for 54 peer-reviewed

articles, printing full texts for over 30 of them. I located five books that had information

on this topic and purchased what I consider to be the seminal work, *The Impostor*

Phenomenon: Overcoming the Fear that Haunts Your Success (Clance, 1985). She also

published this text in 1986 under another title and with another publisher.

Dr. Pauline R. Clance, the psychotherapist and professor who found, during the

course of her clinical work with women, that many of them had externalized their

successes and internalized their failures—leaving them anxious and fearful. She named

and then continued to study the Impostor Phenomenon, authoring and co-authoring

numerous articles and books and advising students whose dissertations focused on

various aspect of this topic.

This comprehensive search of the literature yielded a total of 114 abstracts of

dissertations and peer-reviewed articles which I then assembled chronologically in a 3-

ring binder. After reviewing each one several times, I sorted them into the following five

topics that made sense to me:

1) Constructs: Those studies that dealt with the construct itself, comparing or contrasting

it with other self-psychological constructs such as depression, anxiety, fear of failure, etc.

2) Attributes: Those studies that researched demographic information on "impostors."

3) Discipline/Vocation Connections: Those studies that focused on either academic or vocational connections to the Impostor Phenomenon.

4) Measurements: Those studies that dealt with the scales used to measure Impostor Phenomenon characteristics and the level of intensity.

5) Help for the Impostor Phenomenon Sufferer: Those studies that focused on what is commonly referred to as "recovery" from the Impostor Phenomenon.

Researcher Perspective

Scholarly Personal Narrative puts the self of the scholar front and center, according to Nash (2004). But putting myself front and center has not always been comfortable for me. I did, however, experience a deep excitement about overcoming my hesitation in expressing what I really thought and how I really felt within the context of my "impostor" experiences.

My perspective as a female-American with European heritage from a working-class family who has roots spreading from Texas through California and on to Wyoming and Colorado influenced my story. As a high school dropout and first generation college-graduate-turned scholar, I went through a process of discovering and rediscovering myself through self-interrogation and making narrative sense of my personal "impostor" experiences. "The ultimate intellectual responsibility of the Scholarly Personal Narrative writer is to find a way to use the personal insights gained in order to draw larger conclusions for readers; possibly even to challenge and reconstruct older political or educational narratives" (Nash, 2004, p. 18).

As a Scholarly Personal Narrative researcher, I am developing a voice that is increasingly unique in tone and style in order to tell my story, recognizing that I am

always an "insider." As such, I am "caught up personally in every word, sentence, and paragraph" (Nash, 2004, p. 24). Gornick writes that "(w)hat happened to the writer is not what matters; what matters is the large sense that the writer is able to make of what happened" (in Nash, p. 27). I found this concept both exciting and challenging.

The Scholarly Personal Narrative researcher is admonished to be honest, empathetic, and to tell her story as only she can, remembering, feeling, knowing, and sensing anew the events from the past and in the present (Nash, 2004). This goes to the heart of the researcher's motives, intentions, and attempts to be accurate (Nash). This form of self-awareness, self-interrogation, and self-revealing has been challenging, if not painful.

"How can I prove that what I have to say about my experience is true?" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 743). In response to this question, I purposed to remember well and then recreated personal experiences through vignettes that captured the essences of the point I was making and through essays via exposition, extrapolation, and interpolation that brought to the reader the context of my experiences.

A vignette "is a short piece of writing intended to convey an image of, or cast illumination on, a scene, a character or a situation. Characteristics of the vignette are exactness of phrase construction and a poignant tone" (Writer's Encyclopedia, 1996, p. 476). I choose this form of expression because, according to Schwandt (2001), "universal principles become understandable only in light of specific cases" (p. xxxi). Not that I believe the Impostor Phenomenon is universal, in the strictness sense, but that, if Clance (1985) is correct that up to 70 percent of my readers may have experienced

"impostor" feelings at some time in their lives—or know someone who has—then the vignette will serve its purpose.

Expository writing in essay form seeks to subjectively reveal the writer's own thoughts and feelings in a short, literary, and nonfiction composition. This kind of communication is "well-polished writings that tend to suggest much more than they actually say" (Writer's Encyclopedia, 1996, p. 128). Exposition is used to communicate information through explanation so that the reader gains details about an event. It can include dialogue, narration, and action.

Extrapolation is another approach used in writing Scholarly Personal Narrative. The writer uses extrapolation "to infer or estimate by extending or projecting known information" (www.Dictionary.com). This proved especially helpful to me as I sought to see past my initial recall.

Interpolation is also a useful approach for writers using Scholarly Personal Narrative. It is very freeing to be able to insert or introduce a topic between other elements or parts of the story in order to help the reader really gain a full understanding. My use of the m-dash allowed me to smoothly incorporate this technique.

I attempted to follow Nash's (2004) Scholarly Personal Narrative writing guidelines as much as possible (p. 55 – 70):

Guideline 1: Establish Clear Constructs, Hooks, and Questions

Guideline 2: Move from the Particular to the General and Back Again *Often*

Guideline 3: Try to Draw Larger Implications from Your Personal Stories

Guideline 4: Draw from Your Vast Store of Formal Background Knowledge

Guideline 5: Always Try to Tell a Good Story

Guideline 6: Show Some Passion

Guideline 7: Tell Your Story in an Open-ended Way

Guideline 8: Remember That Writing Is Both a Craft and an Art

Guideline 9: Use Citations Whenever Appropriate

Guideline 10: Love and Respect Eloquent (i.e., Clear) Language.

And I also kept in mind Jensen's (2004) first *five* rules of writing:

Don't bore the reader!

When possible I checked with others that I mentioned in my narrative in order to give them the opportunity to talk with me about what I remembered. In writing about personal experiences that reflected "impostor" characteristics, I spent much more time recalling and recreating inner dialog, emotions, and feelings than on specific outward actions that could be verified. The event that triggered an "impostor" reaction could be verified, however, and I did that where possible. Most of the memories that surfaced were from my early childhood, showing the roots of the Impostor Phenomenon.

Statement of the Problem

The problem is two-fold as I see it. The first part of the problem is in the research on the Impostor Phenomenon that I found. Most of the studies compared and/or contrasted the Impostor Phenomenon with other psychological constructs, or they tested the validity of the measurement instruments. At the time this research project went to press I had not found a single research study that described the Impostor Phenomenon from the "inside"—one written by the one who experiences its effects. I wrote my stories (as vignettes) hoping to introduce and then enlighten the reader about the concept of the "impostor" by illustrating the research I found through personal narrative.

The second is that the Impostor Phenomenon is not a well-known or well understood construct. As a professor and practicing psychotherapist at Georgia State University, Clance (1985) recognized the Impostor Phenomenon symptoms among her students, other faculty, and among the staff. She believes that up to 70 percent of the population may suffer the Impostor Phenomenon at some level in some circumstances. The purpose of my research is to explore this psychological construct in terms of personal experiences, thus extending the literature base for future researchers.

Contributions to the Field of Study

I believe that my non-traditional approach to the literature review is innovative and enlightening.

I also think that by creating the personality profile as a sub-document (see Appendix A), it will be used by researchers in the future to focus studies on areas needing further inquiry.

I hope that my research adds a dimension not now available in the published literature on the Impostor Phenomenon, and that it could prove helpful to faculty who see these characteristics in their students . . . or in themselves.

It is also my hope that by writing a Scholarly Personal Narrative I have provided evidence that this methodology "can reach, and even surpass, a professional school's highest scholarly standards" as Nash (2004, p. 3) asserts it can, and to provide "validity of an alternative form of intellectual inquiry" (p. 4).

To that end I took several steps to help others by bringing awareness of Scholarly Personal Narrative to the School of Education at Colorado State University. The same day that I defended my dissertation proposal, I presented a workshop on Scholarly

Personal Narrative as research method. I prepared two power point presentations—one abbreviated and one more in depth—to use with or without a panel of students who were also considering this methodology. Then another graduate student and I set up a blog on ning.com to host and support writers interested in sharing their experiences with SPN. Currently we are attempting to raise funds to host Dr. Nash as a Guest Scholar in a campus-wide qualitative research methods symposium so that more students and faculty can become better informed about Scholarly Personal Narrative. There is a growing number of students who are considering SPN as their methodology for dissertation work at Colorado State University.

Limitations/Delimitations

Limitation in qualitative research generally speaks to weaknesses and assumptions within a study. By telling *my* story as an "impostor", I am limiting the readers' opportunity to get an insider view of every single characteristic of the Impostor Phenomenon because not every "impostor" has all of them, and the ones they do have, vary in intensity. Another possible limitation is that of generalizability. My experiences of the Impostor Phenomenon are highly personal in nature, making it challenging for me to create "transfers of meaning for others" (Nash. 2004, p. 85). The readers will make their own meanings as they either relate their own personal lives or the lives of others that they know to my stories.

Delimitations are self-imposed restrictions that the researcher places on the extent of the study. I sketched out the areas of my life that could have been included in a personal narrative—intellectual, emotional, relational, sexual, spiritual, professional, educational, and physical—and decided that I would focus on the *intellectual* and

emotional only, bringing in other areas as they seem appropriate to the overall goal of self-understanding of the Impostor Phenomenon.

<center>*Data Collection*</center>

I applied for and received exempt status, as of January 14, 2009, from the Research Integrity & Compliance Review Office (IRB) at Colorado State University. The IRB ID number is 037-09H. Under the exempt status I was not required to submit an application for annual continuing review. I understood from the IRB requirements that when I portrayed others in my narrative, I would give them pseudonyms and alter the circumstances in order to provide anonymity. No consent forms were necessary as no interviews or surveys were conducted.

In the course of my research, I found that others dealt with this issue of anonymity in different ways. Clance (1985) uses pseudonyms in her seminal work on the Impostor Phenomenon because she discusses cases of clients that she has counseled in the course of her practice of psychotherapy. Harvey (1985) also used pseudonyms in her book. Ellis (2004), to protect the privacy of others within a personal narrative account, recommends using composites, changing identifying features, or collapsing events (p. 126).

Nash also has concern for the *others* included in the personal narrative. Consideration of the "privacy and dignity of persons not present" (2004, p. 132) should be emphasized to students in order to minimize issues. Ethical issues such as "informed consent", "conscious distortion", "lying", "self-deception", "settling old scores", "selective memory", and "exploitation" are just a few among many that Nash lists as topics for discussion with students (p. 132) in his writing classes. His framework for writing narratives about his own life allows him to treat others that he writes about

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respectfully and still write honestly. That seems to me to be an excellent professional posture to take as a writer of personal narrative.

What guided me as I collected and organized my data was the premise that Nash (2004) asserts; namely, that "Scholarly Personal Narrative writers intentionally organize their essays around themes, issues, constructs, and concepts that carry larger, more universalizable meanings for readers" (p. 30). In order to be as systematic and as thorough as possible, I have begun collecting data in log form.

In preparation for writing chapter 4 I logged authors that I have read and specific quotes that have made an impact on me—also in relationship to my Impostor Phenomenon experiences. Authors (and works) included in this log are: Tolstoy (*Anna Karenina*); hooks (*Teaching to Transgress, Teaching Community*) Jensen (*Walking on Water*); Lamott (*Bird by Bird*); Pearl S. Buck; French (*A Woman's Room*); Hugo (*Les Miserables*); Bauer (*The Well-Educated Mind; The Well-Trained Mind*); Henry James (no specific work); Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas (speech—"The Second Door to Freedom", 1994); Tompkins (*A Life in School*); and Nash (*Liberating Scholarly Writing*).

I gathered and listed personal documents such as: personal resumes from earlier years; transcripts from all institutions I have attended; a decade-by-decade health history; various personality tests I have taken over the years; notes and poems that students have written along with early drafts of autobiographical writings done over the years.

I identified 90 characteristics of a classic "impostor" and sorted them in three categories: 24 characteristics for the "impostor child"; 49 characteristics for the "impostor teen"; and 17 for the "impostor adult." You will find the Personality Profile of a classic "impostor" in Appendix A. I also created a log of memories that had "impostor"

implications. Those memories continued to surface as I continued to reflect and reconsider my life in light of my research. I attempted to sort them to match the three profile categories of "child", "teen", and "adult", but found that most of them focused on my early life.

Data Analysis

Research Question Analyzed.

I purposed to explore my experiences by way of "retrospective reconstruction" (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 146) of memories of the events that have shaped my life "as a context of discovery" (p. 156). I emphasized exploration as a way to generate *new ideas* and discussions as a way to share my new knowledge. I also explored and shared what I found regarding the repeated interaction of *existing ideas*, former findings, and former observations around the memories to find new observations and *new ideas* (Coffey & Atkinson).

Nash (2004) links the concepts of *idea* with *scholarship* (bold for emphasis is mine):

You are a scholar if you are willing to play with ideas.

You are a scholar if you can build on the ideas of others.

You are a scholar to the extent that you can tell a good, instructive story.

You are a scholar if you can capture the narrative quality of your human experience in
    language that inspires others.

You are a scholar if you can present your story in such a way that, in some important
    senses, it rings true to human life.

You are a scholar if you can help your readers to reexamine their own truth stories in

   light of the truths that you are struggling to discern in your own complicated life

   story.

You are a scholar if you have a passion for language and writing.

You are a scholar if you are driven to understand what makes yourself and others tick.

You are a scholar if you can feel and think at the same time.

You are a scholar if you are willing to allow your students, and your readers,

   to enter your heart as well as your head.

You are a scholar if you can help your readers and students to realize that their lives

   signify, that they matter more than they will ever know (p. 130).

   I used insight, intuition, impression (Kelle, 1995 in Coffey and Atkinson, 1996) along with inference and interpretation (Coffey and Atkinson) as a means of data analysis of Impostor Phenomenon experiences that have helped to shape me.

Research Question Answered.

   Does writing my story from the perspective of an "impostor" help me and my readers to discover and understand the basis for and impact of the Impostor Phenomenon in our lives?

   I don't believe that I had my part of the answer to this research question until I had written my story as an "impostor." "(My) past is real, but it is not static. Can (I) change the past? No. But (I) can change how it is remembered because" I am growing, changing, and learning in the research process (Ives, 2002 in Nash, 2004, p. 130). Readers will have to answer that question for themselves after reading this study.

Summary

Nash (2004) believes—and I agree—that Scholarly Personal Narrative research "is important in its own right, according to its own lights. The ultimate intellectual responsibility of the Scholarly Personal Narrative scholar is to find a way to use the personal insights gained in order to draw larger conclusions for readers" (p. 18). If I did construct a scholarly personal narrative, then my story is composed "in such a way that other lives will be touched and maybe even enriched" (p. 21). Scholarly Personal Narrative narrates and also proposes; is self-revealing and also "evokes self-examination from readers" (p. 29). Nash believes that this kind of research and writing—in whatever "unique shape and style of communicating to readers" (p. 29)—has a core purpose to significantly impact both reader and writer, "both the individual and the community" (p. 29).

In chapter 4 I share some of the personal experiences of my life that shed light on the documented research of the Impostor Phenomenon. Although it may seem to the reader that I have skipped a rock across the surface of my life—barely skimming the surface of the whole story—what follows are the memories that are the most profound in relationship to the Impostor Phenomenon.

In chapter 5 I turned from focusing on the shadow side of the "impostor" experiences to the shiny side, extending, perhaps, what is currently known in order to help the conversation along that would address the question as to why and how so-called "impostors" reach success or high levels of achievement.

CHAPTER 4: My Story as an "Impostor"

Introduction

Happy families are all alike;
every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.
                                        (Tolstoy, 1876/1993)

The opening line from Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (see above) has come back to me many times since I first read it years ago. As a child I longed for the security and nurturing that I thought my friends had—whether they actually did or not. Both my parents were alcoholics and ended up divorcing when I was 8: My mom moved away and my dad married one woman after another, trying to find someone to raise me and my little sister, I think. I witnessed domestic violence, felt the pain of abandonment, and experienced loss that children shouldn't have to. I literally cried myself through those early years.

I do not know if childhood memories for all "impostors" are like mine, but I suspect that they are similar in nature: random, painful, and quotidian. These memories are of family interactions as well as school and social experiences mostly during my early years. I found it interesting that Bakhtin (1984) says that "just as the body is formed initially in the mother's womb, a person's consciousness awakens wrapped in another's consciousness" (p. xx in Goodall, 2000, p. 140). Bakhtin explains that

> everything that pertains to me enters my consciousness, beginning with my name, from the external world through the mouths of others (my mother, and so forth), with their intonation, in their emotional and value-assigning tonality. I realize

myself initially through others; from them I receive words, forms, and tonalities for the formation of my initial ideas of myself (in Goodall, p. 140).

For years all five of us (daddy, mother, Ellen, Rose, and I) lived with our maternal grandparents in a small town in the middle of Wyoming in what seemed to me at the time to be a big white house on the corner of Adams and 6th Street. It was surrounded on three sides by a white-picket fence, then a row of trees, and in the front, by an irrigation ditch. Years later, whenever anyone in the family spoke about that house, it was always referred to simply as "601"—the house number.

During those early years—from pre-kindergarten through the third grade—we three little girls were kept busy with either summer recreational programs or after-school functions of all kinds. Here is one of my summer memories.

_____

Leadership Lessons

I don't know why I chose to take baton lessons that summer. There were lots of choices in our little town's blossoming recreational program: all kinds of sports, arts and crafts, and cheerleading, among others. There were only a few of us twirlers in the beginners' group, even though there were probably close to 50 overall, so we each received a lot of individual attention.

Throughout the summer program each age-group of twirlers worked on a specific routine that would be performed as we all marched in the Labor Day parade—quite the event in our community. Even though I was not in the oldest group, and even though I

was a beginner and only six, I was chosen to lead the whole troupe in the parade. I remember being very excited and scared at the same time. I remember that I got a new pair of majorette boots—they were white.

The day came for the parade. I was placed out front and reminded of the plan: *march for six blocks and then stop; perform the routine in that intersection; march another two blocks and do the routine in that intersection—repeating the sequence to the end of the parade.* I remember looking up into the face of the Director of Recreation and listening intently to her every word, shaking my head to the rhythm of my pounding heart. She was the mother of one of my friends, but I was afraid of her. She was a tall woman with short curly hair and a loud booming voice. Many evenings her voice could be heard echoing around the neighborhood, calling in her kids.

Our troupe was somewhere in the middle section of the floats and between two bands, one of which provided cadence for marching and the other, music for the routine. All went well until we came to the first intersection where we were to stop our marching and perform our much-rehearsed routine. I turned around and gave the signal to halt—which we all did—but when I turned back around I panicked. The band in front of us kept on moving forward, leaving us behind. Everyone was staring at us! The music support from behind wasn't loud enough—panic and horror! So I quickly turned toward the troupe and gave the command to start marching again—even stepping up the pace in order to close the gap between the rest of the parade and us! I did not stop every second block as I had been instructed to—I just kept marching—keeping up and not causing anyone any trouble. Or so I thought.

When we came to the end of the parade route and turned the corner where we were to assemble, I was met with an angry outburst—directed solely at me. The questions came at me in rapid-fire: *Why didn't you stop? Why did you just keep going? What good was all our hard work if we didn't get to show it off? Tell me what the heck you thought you were doing?*

I'm sure there were lots of other kids around—maybe even some adults—but I didn't see anyone. My head was up; my eyes met hers; but there was a grayness encircling me that felt like a wall. That numbness looked red on my face and there was a ringing in my ears. I wanted to run but I stood there . . . rigid . . . quiet . . . until I could. And then I did. I don't remember how long I ran, or even to where. My memory stops there. Funny, the things you remember.

_____

I didn't choose to remember the above incident—it is just the one that I have—forever in my mind—somewhere tucked away in the place called shame and humiliation. There seems to be a little cluster of them there. We retrieve certain facts from our long-term memory for no apparent reason—triggered by a need . . . or a smell . . . or a word. Remembering involves "recollecting, re-membering, re-discovering, along with the active process of memorializing and constructing" our own history (Plummer in Atkinson et al., 2001, p. 401). Oh, but what we do then with those memories. That is the bigger issue. We can choose to dwell on them; we can dismiss them; or we can reframe them, creating a new organized structure with new purpose and fresh direction. I think I have

done all three of them over the years but have learned that the first two don't really get you anywhere. The third one, however, can change everything. More of that in chapter 5. First, though, another memory.

————————

Captain Bossy

It's a little difficult to put myself back into a third-grade mind set and write this as if it were happening currently. But I can tell you that my memories are sharp and the details fine-tuned from replaying it repeatedly over the years. It's one of those scenes that would be a fascinating psychological study if you could re-gather the main characters and have each tell the incident from their point of view. But all I can tell . . . is my own. I remember it this way.

I was sitting in a circle in our classroom along with seven or eight other advanced third-grade readers. Our teacher, Mrs. Svilar, was leading a discussion on a section of our reading book. For me, it was an ordinary day. Nothing to portend what was coming.

"Well, who do you think is like *that* in our class?" she asked, looking smugly around the little circle. We all looked up at her as she stood, towering over us. She was pencil-thin-and-straight with a long nose and small eyes. Her lips always seemed to be pursed.

"Do we have a *Captain Bossy* among us?" she repeated, pushing a little harder for a response.

Now third graders are still of the age and mindset to want to please their teachers, so we were all trying really hard to come up with someone who might satisfy her. I was

looking around at everyone in the reading group just as they were doing. The remaining students in the class—outside of our reading circle—had picked up the scent of something coming. Silence fell upon all of us.

Then our reading group began looking beyond "us" to "others" out there who could be *the one*. I looked down at the book in my lap and began to flip back the pages, trying to remember what the story had to do with this. *Had I not been paying attention*? *Captain Bossy*?

"Well, let me help you out here, then," she said as she stood taller. Half turning to include the whole class, she proceeded to describe one incident after another where . . . *some child . . . in her class* . . . had done *this* and *this* and *this*. I didn't recognize the offenses so I just sat there waiting, like everyone else, for the pronouncement.

When it came, I was dumbfounded—if a young child can be dumbfounded. It was me. I had no idea what I had done, when, or where. I fell into a numbness and smallness I had not known before.

Mrs. Svilar instructed my classmates to call me *Captain Bossy* until further notice, and I spent the next four days in a kind of cultural hell that I couldn't escape from. Too embarrassed to tell anyone at home—*who would I have told and what would they have done*—and too horrified to fight back, even verbally. So I endured it by getting to school almost late, spending recesses and after lunch in a bathroom stall, and running home as fast as I could after school—by myself.

On the fifth day, in that same little reading circle, Mrs. Svilar announced that perhaps Captain Bossy had learned her lesson and they could dispense with the title. And

they did. Everyone seemed to just go on with their little lives as if nothing much had

happened at all . . . but I never was the same after that. Never.

_____

Even though "the concept of need is controversial" (Bolman & Deal, 2003,

p. 115), Maslow (1954) offers "one of the most influential theories about" it (p. 117).

This existential psychologist "grouped human needs into five basic categories, arrayed in

a hierarchy" (p. 117), ranging from physiological needs—seen as deficiency needs—to

self-actualization—seen as a growth need. His theory is still widely accepted and

"enormously influential" (p. 118) in many circles even though "attempts to validate it

have proven inclusive" (Alderfer, 1972; Lawler and Shuttle, 1973; Schneider and

Alderfer, 1973 in Bolman & Deal, p. 117).

It seems to me that while my most basic physiological needs were met—the need

for food, liquid, and sleep—my need for safety, love and belonging, and self-esteem were

many times in question. Personal insecurities and anxieties were nourished at home and

at school during those early years.

_____

Blackberry Kitten

Not long after we moved from our grandparents house into our own across town, I remember going next door to see a new batch of kittens in our neighbor's garage. I was probably about 7 years old or so. This was *before* Mother left. And we three girls were still together. *Why do I use my mother's departure as a kind of pivot point—before mother left or after mother left—to locate my memories*?

Our neighbors, the Fairchilds, were an older retired couple and their house was peaceful and quiet. I remember wanting to stay there the few times I went inside. Her face was kind and his voice was soft. They both seemed to have had the same expression on their faces whenever we kids were around—I think it was . . . pity. Mostly, though, we just met one of them in the garage so that we could play with the five Siamese kittens in the box near the door. One of them was black with a white face, I recall. I named it Blackberry and loved it as if it were my own. We didn't have pets at our house. We didn't have peace or quiet, either.

—————

Familiar Humiliation

I was around 11 years old when this happened. To some it might not seem traumatic, but for me, it was. Here's the back-story. My mom and dad got divorced a couple of years back and my little sister and I were left at "the house"—that's what we always called it—first with a housekeeper, then with the first of a series of step-mothers.

Our older sister had been court-ordered back to live with our grandparents at "601" after our mother left the state. It wasn't so much the distance to that house—only a mile or so—but it was the surprise of the separation and the reasons behind it that were hard for my little sister and me to comprehend at that age. We just knew our big sister was "gone" and we missed her terribly!

But . . . then . . . we loved our "new mother"—and why wouldn't we? She was young—just seven years older than me—and fun. She opened up a whole new world for us and gave us the attention that we had up to that point done without. We roller-skated regularly as a family in a new indoor rink at the edge of town; we stayed for weeks at a time on her uncle's ranch not far from our town and rode horses till our hearts were overflowing and our legs were too sore to walk! Then she had a baby that I fell in love with—fanning the spark of motherhood already in me.

I have come across a word in the research that defined my new role. At that early age of 10 . . . I was *parentrified*. I began taking the place of or assuming the role of a parent long, long before I was ready in any sense of the word. It seemed to me that I was born a mother. I had loved babies since the first little doll that drank and wet was placed in my arms. I probably was around three or four. That little rubber doll was black and had pink lips and blue eyes. Funny what you remember from so far back. *How did I end up with a black baby doll*? *We lived in Wyoming*! *It was the late 1950's*! I remember remembering that black doll as I worked among the black kids in my school in Seattle. But that is another story.

My little brother became my world. I loved him dearly and cared for him tenaciously. I was the one who discovered his first tooth. It "clicked" on a little cup that I

was holding. He took his first step to me. I took him with me in his stroller wherever my new "mother" would let me. Which brings me back to the story at hand.

One Saturday morning in late summer I set out to see my big sister at "601", taking the little guy with me. My grandparents' house was, as I said, probably about a mile from ours but it was no small jaunt for my little legs and his little stroller. I unlatched the gate to the white picket fence that surrounded their corner lot, lifted him out of the stroller, and stepped into the enclosed front porch of the house. My grandmother met me there with a look of horror on her face. "Get that little bastard out of my house!" she yelled. Stunned and then heartbroken, I wheeled around and left as fast as I could, holding back sobs as I retraced my steps. A kind of numbness entered into my heart that day—a numbness that grew and changed over the years, mixing itself with shame and humiliation—and becoming familiar and even comforting in its familiarity.

_____

(T)here are so much easier ways to destroy a woman.
You don't have to rape or kill her;
you don't even have to beat her.
You can just marry her.
(French, 1977)

When I read this line in Marilyn French's novel many years ago, I dropped my head into my hands and wept—right there in the Student Center cafeteria—in front of everyone! That is what it felt like to me. After an emotionally blighted childhood, I found myself pregnant at sixteen, then married, and later abandoned with three little ones to raise on my own. It started like this.

_____

The telephone rang and she immediately answered it. She had been waiting for this call for hours and her heart was pounding.

"Hello. Yes, this is she," she whispered.

As she spoke she turned her back to the rest of the house and stared at her reflection in the mirror she faced. She was small for sixteen, not yet fully developed in many ways and still had braces on her teeth; she stood five foot one and weighed barely ninety. Her dark blond hair was pulled back and up in a barrette and her almond green eyes stared at her own reflection. She was holding her breath as she listened.

"Okay. What's the next thing?" She exhaled partially and swallowed. "Next week, yes. I will." Then she hung up.

* * *

It had been a week since that call and she had been throwing up every morning. It was not easy to conceal such a thing when there were several females sharing a bathroom. She continued trying to hide it because she just couldn't really face it.

But here she sat—with her best friend for support—in the doctor's office waiting room about to go in. Petrified!

Once inside and settled, Dr. Calperson leaned back in his chair with her chart in his hand and said smugly, "You know, girls", addressing them as if they were *both* in trouble, "this would not have happened if you could just keep your knees together."

I felt the color rise quickly in my face, surge back through my body, and then crash onto the floor like a wave in heavy surf. I wanted to disappear. I was speechless and stunned. I couldn't even turn my head to see my friend's reaction.

And, really, I don't remember anything after that. I don't know what else was said or how we got out of there; but I walked out with the knowledge that I was definitely pregnant and that I definitely hated that doctor.

I was able to finish my sophomore year of high school but never went back, and no one from the school ever contacted me. I replaced Latin Club, FTA, Honor Society, Marching Band, Cheerleading, and Student Council with diapers, formula, sleepless nights, and unpaid bills. The next six years were worse than the first sixteen in many ways, but I dearly loved my three little preschoolers and buried myself in their care. I didn't surface again until I took the GED test.

———————

Taking Steps

There was no easing into womanhood for me. It seemed that one minute I was a 16 year-old high school student and the next minute I was a single mother of three. I had forfeited my education and had been abandoned by my husband and my friends. So, here I was—a 22-years-old woman, sitting on a park bench watching two of my little ones play in the sand box while I study for the high school equivalence exam next week.

The baby is asleep and I am thankful for that! The sun feels good on my bare legs and arms. June in Wyoming is pleasant. I was trying to concentrate on this list of

vocabulary words—*inundate*, *deluge*, *unequivocal*—but my mind keeps drifting off. I am tired of the little grey house in the little grey town and need a change desperately.

I need to pass this test! *I cannot end up like so many other teen moms—living in a trailer park, surviving on food stamps.*

_____

I did manage to leave that little town in Wyoming and relocate to a college town in northern Colorado where I landed a job on campus and then became a full-time student. I was still trying to find my way and take care of my children at the same time. Here's another memory I have.

_____

School Costumes

The two older kids needed costumes for a school play. They needed them tomorrow. *Had I known before this and it just didn't register?* I had no money . . . and no time!

"We'll think of something," I remember telling them and wondering what in the world that something would be. They were only 11 months apart and were not in the same grade, but they were in the same play at their school. How could I even get off work to go and be there for them? *What good was my silent vow to "not be like my mother" now*?

I was a single mom working two jobs and going to school myself. Stacks of books waited for me on the card table that I used as a desk in my bedroom—eight of them were required reading for an Adolescent Lit class and the rest would be read for the four other classes I was taking that semester. At one of my jobs—a fill-in server at a local college hang-out—I had been offered a $20 tip by three guys I was waiting on to "just slow down." That was funny.

I awoke after a fitful sleep, still without a solution to this wall I had encountered, and no idea how to get past it and move one. Both of them were to be little animals that crawled across the stage. *What did I have in the apartment that I could use to create "little animals"?* It was very quiet as we quickly ate our cereal and gathered up our stuff for the day. We still had about 20 minutes before we had to leave the house, and I was vacillating between just not caring (because I couldn't seem to fix it) and wanting desperately to come up with something appropriate!

I finally pulled out two black garbage bags from under the sink, cut holes for their head and arms, and drove them to school where later I would watch in quiet humiliation their struggle to get across the stage.

The whole scene left me with a kind of sick feeling—knowing that both teachers and parents alike knew that I had let them down—and knowing that the kids were embarrassed, as well. I could feel it.

It's been a very long time since that day . . . but I remember it so vividly. Each time it comes to mind I want to change the ending. But I can't.

—————————

Every time I came across Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of human needs and McClelland's (1985) theory of human motivation in my course work and research, I relate to them both in ways not many of my fellow students could. I had lived them. I was interested and relieved to learn that heredity and environment each have a part to play in determining human potential and predispositions but that learning "profoundly modifies and sometimes reverses the original instructions" (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 116). And, really, "we are never just what we are . . . but we become what we are" through decisions that we make (Bennett, 1993, p. 186). Somewhere along the line I had acquired an insatiable desire for knowledge—that to this day remains; that desire directed my course and determined many of my decisions.

My educational journey has been "a long and winding road" (Beattles, 1969). But my needs both energized and guided my behavior at different times, and I felt the strength that comes with choices (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 117). A cursory glance at my undergraduate transcripts tells part of the story of the 17 years in-and-out of college. I have no such documentation, however, for the untold part . . . but they were times of joy and times of struggle: another child, another divorce. Iteration two of single-parenting.

_____

I detest a lie only a little bit more than I detest divorce. That fact forces me to a depth of honesty that I long to avoid—but can't.

As I have told you earlier, I was only eight at the time of my parent's divorce; my little sister was six; my big sister was 10. It happened this way:

The three of us—often referred to by family members as "the girls"—sat silently around the small kitchen table, going through the motions of eating our supper—I remember the tomato soup and saltine crackers. We had been called in from the elementary school playground that bordered our property to the back, where we spent a good bit of our time since moving to the new house on 15th Street. As I remember, late August in Wyoming is a hot and desolate place; the school grounds were a quiet desert, complete with heat waves and wind gusts. An unfriendly refuge for the neighborhood children.

There was an unfamiliar and awkward tension in the air when we walked in the back door. I remember some shuffling around, washing our hands, getting settled. Just us girls—around the table. A conversation which had been ongoing in the other room until we came in, quickly resumed and then escalated. Arguments were not uncommon between our parents. This one was different.

"Go ahead and get your damn divorce, if that's what you want," our mother hissed at our dad.

My memory stops there but the reverberations of that day continue to the present.

* * *

Everyone knows that divorce devastates families in all kinds of ways: relationships crumble, bank accounts dwindle, grades fall, and children are left, more often than not, to figure a new way forward if they can. I vowed early on to never let what happened to me . . . happen to my kids. So much for vows. If I had been divorced just once . . . then perhaps . . . I could rationalize it away. But twice? It is a hard thing for me to admit: two failures.

Not long ago—during a reflective time for this project—I challenged myself to describe my childhood in just two words. It took me about three seconds to come up with them: *sad* . . . and . . . *lonely*. Then, later that week, I called my little sister and presented her with that same challenge. It took her *five* seconds. Same two words: *sad* . . . and . . . *lonely*. No hesitation.

Several months later when our older sister was in town from Florida for a visit, I turned around in the car to face her directly and asked her to come up with *her* two words to describe her childhood experiences. She became quiet and then said she didn't really know—she needed time to think about it. Maybe it was . . . or perhaps. . . . *Not the same experience*. *Not the same outcome*.

I have not had the courage . . . because right now I am afraid to know . . . how my own children would describe in two words *their* childhood. Maybe someday I will ask them. But not now.

_____

"Why can't you just be normal?" That question was posed to me by my dad during a phone conversation. I was trying to explain to him what I was doing in Seattle. I had relocated there after I completed my student teaching and graduated Colorado State University with—*must I say it?*—another husband. Since it had taken me 17 years to finally get the bachelor's degree, my dad thought that I should have just stayed put, as he phrased it, and settle in to a nice job teaching high school English somewhere. For him, I guess, that would have been "normal." And I understand that. It wasn't a vicious comment—my dad was not a vicious man. He was reserved to the point of stoic, only opening up after a couple of drinks.

"Why can't you just be normal?" *Why can't I*? *What is normal*? I tried to explain myself to him back then.

"Daddy," I say into the telephone, wishing we were face-to-face so that he could see my earnestness. "Will you just listen a minute? I don't *try* to be different. It's just when I saw those kids on the street—have you ever seen that? Kids living on the street? It's mind boggling! There's so many of them. And when I checked into it a little more, I found out that most had been expelled permanently . . . ."

"Well—that's what they get, isn't it? For screwing off?" he interrupted.

"Sure, you could see it that way, but . . . "

"So what are you trying to do, Andi, save the world?"

"No, just the few that come to our school." I wanted to tell him the Starfish Story I always used when speaking publically about the school—picking up the beached starfish and throwing them back—one by one . . . but I went on.

"Don't you see that when they no longer have the choice . . . then they want it—they want what they think they can no longer have! Isn't that wild?" My heart was pounding, my mouth was dry, and my mind was rushing around all the things I wanted to say to him.

"Look, I started this process a couple of years ago by opening up a GED program for older street people. Do you remember me telling you about the dinner I went to at that mission two years ago?

"Yea, kind of. What about it?"

"It was a little strange now that I look back on it. I wonder what those people thought initially. Here I was—some little *school teacher* going around with her little *clip board* signing up *street people* for school! But, you know, we had a full classroom that first day. It was pretty cool, really!"

"I thought you said you were working with kids." he prodded.

"That first year I spent at the mission in the GED program was preparation for what I really wanted to do. But I had a lot to learn about inner city life. You know what I mean? Didn't see street people in Riverton, Wyoming, did we?" I went on.

"It took me that whole first year to get the non-profit paperwork finished, some volunteers trained and ready to go, some more money raised, and a building secured before I could open Seattle Street School. But the kids had already heard about it and were checking us out before we were even ready!"

"Okay, well, you seem to be doing alright so let's talk again soon. Love ya, Andi."

"Love you, too, Daddy. Bye."

I had so much more to tell him. I wanted to let him know that the school was getting lots of publicity—from radio and television stations and from civic groups who were inviting me to share the story. *Funny how strangers seem to be more interested in what was going on than my own family.* So I told them whenever I had the chance:

We provided one-on-one instruction for any student who was accepted into the school that was between the ages of 12 – 25. Before beginning classes, each student was personally interviewed by me and was tested for approximate grade-level competency in each of our four core content areas (math, science, language, and history). Then we selected a team of volunteers to work with each student individually in each content area, following a curriculum plan specifically designed for him or her. We provided everything needed from school supplies to lunch.

It didn't take long to discover that our daily 8:00 – 3:00 schedule did not work for our students. It seemed that they were a nocturnal group so that was a little early for them. We watched this for awhile and then determined that 10:00 – 2:00 was better. We also discovered that making a long-term attendance commitment was pointless . . . so we adjusted our school year to 6-week sessions with a week off in between. We took the whole month of August off and then hit it again. The kids seemed to be able to deal with this arrangement.

So much of what we did that second year of the Street School worked better. We had raised enough additional funds to hire lead teachers in our core subjects. Part of their

responsibility was to recruit and train their own volunteers so that we could continue to provide individualized instruction. They were also responsible for testing and creating curriculum plans appropriate to each student's needs and then overseeing the volunteers.

The staff motto was "Whatever it takes." And for some of us, it took almost everything we had. But still we pressed on! It was during the beginning of our third year that I started work on my master's degree. I went to week-end classes for two years while administering the Street School. I remember telling one of the board members that all I really needed was just a little time to think. I had no time to think . . . and I needed some desperately!

The kids had so many issues that they needed help with but all I felt equipped to do was educate them. I came to understand what Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas (1994) meant when he described education as the second door to freedom. I also came to realize that they needed so much more.

They needed hope. So I began to share my story of being a high school dropout; of being abandoned to raise my little children by myself; of taking 17 years to complete my college degree because sometimes I had to work two or three jobs at a time. If I could do it, so could they. Then I began to share how we were able to raise money from people all around the area—just to help them find a different life. And our staff spent hours together seeking ways to restore hope in their lives so that they would keep moving forward.

They also needed motivation. So we hired an outreach director and a student care coordinator who went out into the community and found others to join us in helping them. We found jobs for some, housing for others, health care for many, and even homes

for a few. We required 80 percent mastery on assignments and then celebrated

accomplishments every Friday. We made it a point to really listen to their stories, to

encourage more responsible behavior, and to demonstrate our care for them at every turn.

Restoring hope and instilling motivation became our battle cry at Seattle Street School.

My dad died during year four of the school. He never got to hear about how some

of our students graduated, got jobs, moved off the streets. He didn't know that I finished

the master's degree and then receive the *Service Above Self* award from the Downtown

Seattle Rotary Club. He didn't live long enough to hear about the National Association of

Street School that I was dreaming about—which now has 50 members and is

headquartered in Denver and led by my mentor and the founder of the Denver Street

School. He would be proud, I think, that the Street School is now in its 20th year.

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Award/Reward

I am sitting just to the left of the podium where several speakers have already

addressed the crowd of just under 500. It is early spring in Seattle, 1994, and raining.

The award luncheon is a highly-attended annual event for this group and the award is a

special one. I attempt to eat a little but my stomach is tight and my heart is pounding. I

don't have a copy of the program in front of me so I stay alert and ready. I watch the

wait-staff sweep across the room like a light wave, removing the used dishes and

replacing them with new ones. The microphone squawks and I jump, glancing quickly

down at the one large table where there were familiar faces. The hotel ballroom is full of

these round tables filled with business men in suits and ties. I don't see women among them except for the servers. I linger on the face of one of our students who has come as a representative for our school. His name is Davin. He is our first graduate.

"May I have your attention, please," says the man who has just stepped up to the podium. He looks down and briefly smiles at me. "My name is Randoff Jennings, chairman for special events. I've been asked to introduce our 1994 Rabbi Raphael H. Levine 'Service Above Self" award winner." As he explained the award and the process of selecting the winner, I collect my thoughts and review my notes. I take a deep breath. My heart is settling, my mind focusing.

"I asked our winner to write a brief bio so that I could introduce her and I would like to share what she wrote."

I listen—wishing I had written more eloquently, less personally. *What are people thinking? How do they feel about high school dropouts, really? Will they guess that I was pregnant and that's why I dropped out of school? Will they . . .*

." . . she completed her student teaching at Poudre High School in Fort Collins, Colorado and received her B.A. from Colorado State University just before relocating here to Seattle with her new husband and blended family. About that time . . .

I take another deep breath. I look at Davin. He knows my story and I know his. He's sits at the table just below the podium—a little to the right, head up, eyes on the speaker, listening intently. I can see two of my teachers, one on either side of him but not the board members who have come. I want Davin to look at me so that I can reassure him—encourage him. I don't think he has ever been in a place like this. I glance around the Sheraton's main ballroom and . . .

"She ended her letter with an apology for living what she called "an inconsequential life" up to the time she founded Seattle Street School. "I find it anything but that, Andrea," he says, turning to me. I stand. He reaches out to welcome me to the podium and says into the microphone, "I would like to introduce to you our 1994 recipient of the 'Service above Self' award, Ms. Andrea Taylor, founder and executive director of Seattle Street School."

The applause is too long. I need to breathe. I look down and see Davin—he smiles. I struggle to hold back tears.

"Thank you very much." I glance at my notes, collect my emotions, and speak quietly but confidently into the microphone. The five years of raising money for my non-profit has provided ample opportunity for public speaking. This is, I think, the largest group I have spoken to face-to-face. Radio and television really don't provide the same preparation. I finish my acceptance speech saying, "Thank you very much, Seattle Rotary, for this very prestigious award. I will treasure it."
Then looking directly at Davin, I say,

"*You* are our reward, Davin. You *are* our reward."

I look up as the crowd begins to applaud. I say "thank you" again, smile, and turn to step down from the podium. People all over the room begin to stand and to continue clapping. I'm embarrassed, and don't know what to do. I search for help from those sitting nearby, but they are standing and clapping, too. I step toward my chair—not knowing if I should sit or stand—and just continue repeating the "thank you's" that nobody hears and wiping the tears that I hope nobody sees.

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Unexpected Emotions

To take a break from my reading, I sit down on the cold tile of my office in married student housing, pull out the bottom drawer of the file cabinet nearest the door, and begin rummaging through some of my personal files that I had managed to preserve over the years of moving around. The wind is howling outside and clouds are causing a shadowed darkness to fall over this part of the campus.

We had moved back to Colorado from the Seattle area when my health failed. In the thirteen years since that time I had made a slow but steady recovery what was diagnosed as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and was ready to make another life-changing decision: get a Ph.D.

* * *

The dissertation is underway and taking shape in my mind—in fact I think of little else these days. Writing a personal narrative takes courage, the experts say, and I am living proof that they are right. Eagerness and apprehension live side-by-side in the current place of possibility. Sleeplessness sometimes joins them and I can hardly hold back the emotions that come in the night, so deeply are they connected to my memories. It is as if they are one. Am I calling forth the emotions and then the events follow? Or do the little scenes that surface bring with them those oh, so familiar feelings. And even though the circumstances differ, the feelings seem to all be the same. Strange.

I don't know exactly what I am searching for—going through this drawer—but I need to gather documents that will help me formulate a timeline of my life. That may

seem elementary to some, but many things have happened over the years and I forget in which order they occurred. I know myself well enough that to do anything with details I must first have a grasp of the whole. Old employment applications along with the file that I keep listing birthdates, marriages, and deaths will help me, I feel confident.

I find a few things of importance to me and feel moderately satisfied at the progress when I come upon a file labeled "Inheritance, 1986." I open it and find the State of Colorado Certificate of Death—number 24054, whatever that means—for my mother. It's a telling document but up to this moment I hadn't given it much more than a quick glance and a resting place in my bottom drawer.

She died on September 4, 1986. I remember that I was working on my English undergraduate degree—just about to finish up—and had to miss the first week of class. I don't think I ever caught up that semester. Starting strong is everything, in my world. I was listed as a senior—finally—and had a GPA of 3.375. Not bad considering I had been working on it for 16 years on-and-off while raising my children mostly on my own during that time. I was taking a full load—Intro to American Literature, Intro to British Literature, Principles of Literary Criticism, Chaucer, Reading in the Content Area, doing a 1-credit Practicum at a local high school, while trying desperately to get through a Fundamental Algebra math module. I was also managing a low-income apartment complex at the time. I think there were 22 units—which meant there were 22 issues on a rotating basis placed at my door. I remember wishing I had more to give to those in need but if the truth is to be told—and I am purposing to be truthful here—I was struggling to survive my own life.

The name on the Death Certificate is Mickee Helen King. Funny. Not long ago, while digging through a box of old photo and miscellaneous stuff, I found her seventh-grade report card from a school in Denton, Texas. Her name was Helen Louise Stamps, then. The Date of Birth says January 31, 1923. But I know for a fact that she lied about her age when she went into the military. I think she lied about a lot of things.

The official immediate cause of death on the Certificate of Death is hand written by a doctor whose signature I can't read. It lists "Carcinoma of lung" as the immediate cause with COPD (Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease) as the other significant condition. I could add a few others—unofficial, of course—but won't.

I flipped through the rest of the papers in the folder until I saw a type-written note addressed "TO THE GIRLS" dated October 17, 1984. It had curtly scripted instructions numbered 1-3 and then a couple of sentences:

1. Donate all organs to whom it can help - the rest would be cremated anyway.

2. NO FUNERAL OR SERVICES (this was underlined)

3. K. Rose Young to be the Executrix of Estate.

All insurance has been assigned and all it leaves is the material things. Which isn't anything. Just divide what you want and give away the rest. It was signed, "Your Mother" in a beautiful cursive scroll written in blue ink and dated 11-23-1984.

It was her signature that stopped me. I was holding the original paper—which she had held, re-read, and then signed. Her signature seemed to touch me in a way I was not expecting.

Some years ago I came to terms with my relationship with my Mother. I didn't really ever know her as some daughters do, I'm sure. The memories of her during my early years are the ones that surfaced, which surprised me.

I do remember, also, that when we were little she made us Jell-o. Not just any Jell-o, though; it was lime Jell-o with whip cream, crushed pineapple, cottage cheese, and walnuts. I think we had it fairly often and not for any special occasion, as I recall. When my children were young, in an act of honoring her, I began making it for them. It has developed into a family tradition—gracing our table at Thanksgiving and Christmas. Now my children are making it for theirs. I never eat it without thinking of her.

I had found a place of forgiveness in my heart for her. I had no idea what she had experienced in her early life—she never talked about it; I did not know why she found it vital to drink. When she was drunk, she cried. When she was sober, she was angry. Then she left. Later she died. Poor thing. I wish I could comfort her and tell her again that I love her anyway. Such a small thing—Jell-o. Such a big thing—forgiveness.

I put the papers back in the file, the file back in the drawer, and I go back to my reading. I need to keep focused—moving forward—making progress, leaving the past . . . in the past.

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Conclusion

Chapter 4 is full of lacunae—literary, educational, familial—which, I understand, may not be comfortable for the reader. It is not particularly comfortable for me, either, being a whole-to-parts learner. I long to lay the whole thing out—fill in the gaps—and

explain every little detail . . . but I can't do that within the scope of a dissertation. I am offering the vignettes as representative events—personal experiences—that mirror the research that I found on the "impostor."

The term *lacuna* is really a picture of my life, too: I have gaps in my memory, gaps in my story, and gaps in my education. I have, all my life, worked hard to try and fill in my gaps. The dissertation, in many ways, has helped me fill in a few of them. Chapter 5 helped me to fill in a little more by sharing some of *the other side* of the "impostor" that I have found. And I do expect to have opportunities in the future to fill in more of the gaps and to provide those readers with a fuller picture of life.

CHAPTER 5: REFRAMING THE "IMPOSTOR"

We see what we believe;
we observe what we narrate;
we transform what we reframe.
(Nash, 2004, p. 45)

Introduction

It was there all the time—this uneasiness, this *something*. I had been researching and writing about the "impostor" for almost a year but *it* hadn't surfaced in my consciousness. There were hints of *it* in the research, though, that I just passed by until the proposal defense meeting with my committee. We were near the end—just reviewing some of the adjustments that needed to be made when one of the members changed course.

Dr. B spoke quietly: "Could you consider reframing the "impostor" by suggesting the positive side? Because constructs are often many-sided, don't you think? It seems you have uncovered the shadow side of the "impostor" but to find the shiny side—that would add a whole *other* dimension to your study."

The room went silent for a moment—each of us waiting for some response. *Paradigm shifting, mind racing, ideas exploding, heart pounding, excitement building: there IT was.*

Now, much like E.F. Hutton, when Dr. B speaks, everyone listens. His 40 plus years of teaching and researching command respect; but it is his way of attuning and attending to students that sets him apart in our college.

I spoke up. "Awesome idea! Yes, I will see what I can uncover." *Structure changing, research continuing, position adjusting*! *Wow*!

I turned to my advisor and the chair of my committee, Dr. T., in time to catch a quick smile as he leaned back in his chair. I thought he would like this novel idea and he did. He led a brief discussion on the nature of emergence in qualitative research and then polled the other members for their comments on Dr. B.'s suggestion. As he talked, I glanced back and forth between Dr. D.'s expression and Dr. F.'s to see if I could tell how they felt about it. They were both smiling, too. I guess I had my answer.

* * *

My initial introduction and subsequent understanding of the Impostor Phenomenon, which I will call Phase One, brought with it a series of painful memories, extended conversations with my sisters, and restless and sleepless nights. During those months of reliving the childhood trauma, I found myself wanting to be alone with my memories: tearful at times, preoccupied, but determined to work through it. Remembering was an exploratory mission of discovery for me, however painful. But coming out of that defense meeting I turned a corner and with as much enthusiasm as I had attacked the research during Phase One, I surged into the literature that would help me get to the "other side of the impostor." What I found helped me to gain further insight—which I will call Phase Two.

When I created the personality profile of the "impostor" I did not include the section on what one needed to do in order to "recover." The whole idea of "recovery" just never set well with me. I am who I am and feel no compulsion to recover from myself. What I found during Phase Two, however, was the idea not of a *recovering impostor* but of a *flourishing one*. This chapter is about that.

A Look at Flourishing

I love the word *flourishing*. It has its roots in the Latin word [*florere]* meaning *to bloom*, which by all accounts, I was late in doing. I was much more acquainted with its antonyms: *wither*, *die*, *shrivel*, and *fail*. And these words would seem to be better suited to accompany the idea of an "impostor" than synonyms of flourishing: *growing*, *thriving*, *prospering*, or *succeeding*. But I am going to be brave by combining the two and exploring the "flourishing impostor." For surely we humans are more than the product of our early childhood experiences—surely we have more than just flaws and failure.

When I took Clance's (1985) Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIP), I scored 97 out of 100: I am a self-reported classic case. And yet . . . there is another side to me.

Years ago, before I knew anything of the "impostor," I took a self-assessment to discover what kind of personality I had (Lion/Beaver/Otter/Golden Retriever). It was in a relaxed and fun-filled setting and I remember rather enjoying the process. Since I am a keeper-of-all-things kind of person, I still have that test. And the findings are interesting in light of my recent discoveries of the Impostor Phenomenon. You could say that they show . . . some of *the other side*.

I am first and foremost . . . a Beaver: I am very organized and think that there is a right way to do everything and that I should be able to do it exactly that way. A Beaver

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is very creative and has the desire to solve the unresolved. I'm like that. Words that describe a Beaver are: consistent, reserved, practical, factual, conscientious, detailed, inquisitive, persistent, and sensitive. The Beaver enjoys instruction—I thrive on it!

I am also very much . . . a Lion: I like authority, and I'm good at making decisions; I'm very goal-oriented. I enjoy challenges, difficult assignments, and opportunity for advancement, but Lions can be overly aggressive and competitive. I have to watch myself. A Lion is a risk-taker and self-starter who enjoys challenge, variety, and change. That's me!

When I read Brighouse and Woods' (1990) description of "energy creators" I saw a little bit of myself there, also. Energy creators . . .

> are enthusiastic and always positive; use critical thinking, creativity, and imagination; stimulate and spark others; practice leadership at all levels; are able and willing to scrutinize their practice and willing to make their practice accessible to others; and wish to improve on their previous best" (in Fullan, 2005, p. 37).

I think the question I have answered to my own satisfaction from my own personal experiences, but that many readers may still have is: How does one move on from a blighted childhood to flourishing adulthood? As I collected my memories and recollected my thoughts I came to understand some things in a new way.

First of all, I realized that I had experienced a personal tipping point—a small incident (that) rippled outward—the moment that everything seemed to change direction and pick up momentum, not only for me, but for my children, and for theirs (Gladwell, 2000). Here's how it happened.

_____

Tipping Point

I had been looking for *one job* where I could earn enough money to support my children; having two just didn't work well for a single mom. *Could this one be it*?

I sat in the outer waiting area, trying to breathe deeply and keep my nervous stomach from growling too loud. I fidgeted in my chair, rummaged in my purse, and tucked my hair behind my ears—all unconsciously. Every 20 seconds or so, I looked at the clock.

I finally was called into the office of the Assistant Director of the Student Center and sat across the desk from him in one of the overstuffed chairs that formed a kind of conversation area around it. The room had a soft glow to it from the lamp nearby. After a few introductory interchanges and a brief overview of my short resume, Mr. Davidson stood. My heart sank as the prospects faded. *The interview was over?* He moved from behind his desk and sat down again in the chair next to mine.

"Tell me a little bit more about yourself, Andrea," he said. My hopes revived but my mind stumbled. *What do I tell him*? *What does he want to know*?

"Well . . . I'm really interested in this position. I'm a quick learner and I will work really hard," I began. "I've only been in Fort Collins for a few months and I'm searching for a position where I can grow. I heard that if you work full time here you get to take one free class a quarter. Is that right?" Without waiting for his response, I continued: I didn't finish high school but have a GED and would really like to go on, if I can."

He was listening and thinking at the same time, I could tell. *What more could I say*? I didn't have a long list of experiences that could help me here.

"You did very well on the initial testing that we do for civil service jobs, Andrea," he replied. "I have a couple more interviews to do before I make my decision, but we'll get back to you by the end of the week."

I got the job—working in the Activity Area of our Student Center at the university—where I would spend the next several years working and taking classes. At one point Mr. Davidson recommended that I seek financial aid to pursue my degree full time and set up the necessary meetings for me. I went through another battery of tests and must have done well . . . because I was offered a full scholarship that included tuition, fees, books, and supplies for the time necessary to complete a bachelor's degree. I then applied for financial aid to help with living expenses. Even though it took me 17 years on-and-off to finally get it done, it was one of the greatest days of my life when I finally walked across that stage and was awarded my degree.

Not long after I started working, I learned that Mr. Davidson had recently married a woman with two small children. Then I knew. He not only saw something in me that I didn't see in myself at the time . . . but he had a heart to make a difference in the lives of others. Thank you, Mr. Davidson . . . wherever you are!

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Flourishing and Motivation

In my researching of Phase 2, I found that flourishing is a component of being a high achiever, and high achievers tend to have a more positive and optimistic attitude than do under-achievers. They tend to focus on opportunities and solutions and are

willing to share readily their findings. Many overachievers even credit their hardships and difficulties for helping them to grow. They habitually turn their problems into opportunities and gain confidence in the process. They end up performing with excellence in whatever they do (Love, 2006).

Flourishing and success also seem to be connected. I found a list of 15 characteristics of successful people—echoing other lists found in the literature—published in our college newspaper, The Collegian, on April 27th (Straker, 2009):

1) Successful people . . . lead disciplined lives.

2) Successful people . . . write their goals, make them clear, and focus on them.

3) Successful people . . . are positive thinkers and are highly motivated.

4) Successful people . . . learn quickly from their mistakes.

5) Successful people . . . plan and strategize for the things they want to achieve.

6) Successful people . . . carefully choose who they associate with.

7) Successful people . . . are lifelong learners.

8) Successful people . . . Look for opportunities to serve others.

9) Successful people . . . are of exemplary character.

10) Successful people . . . respect and value the opinions and values of others.

11) Successful people . . . practice what they preach.

12) Successful people . . . are always flexible and open to change.

13) Successful people . . . are willing to make sacrifices to achieve what they want.

14) Successful people . . . leave a legacy for others that follow them.

15) Successful people . . . are team players.

I will just say that many of the attributes of successful people listed above can be seen in my life. Many . . . but not all. I have to admit, though, that it is much harder for me to share my strengths than my weakness. I am, however, willing to state confidently that I believe I am flourishing.

The questions I am attempting to answer, though, are why am I flourishing, and how? Especially in the face of earlier research that suggests that a child who has experienced a lack of maternal warmth has early behavior issues, such as aggression and delayed conscience development; and that this lack of warmth from both parents lead to a lowering of self esteem during puberty (Sears, Macoby, and Levin, 1957, in McClelland, Franz, and Weinberger, 1991). What has happened along the way that has caused me to move from *perishing* to *flourishing*?

McClelland (1953) believes that some people just have an intense need to achieve that is distinguishable from other needs. He sees achievement as an outcome of choice, effort, and persistence, and believes that the need to achieve results from a need for autonomy and self-determination. People who have this intense need to achieve tend to make things happen because they are always thinking about how to do things better.

Flourishing and Positive Psychology

I kept running into Maslow's theory and did again while researching positive psychology, a term adopted by Seligman in 1998 when he was president of the American Psychological Association. In his presidential address "he argued that psychology had become one-sided, and urged his colleagues to give as much attention to human strengths—such as optimism, courage, and perseverance—as to mental illnesses and disorders" (Ruark, 2009, no page #). Some of his critics accused him of just reworking

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Maslow's ideas of 'self-actualization', but he distanced himself from them by basing his research on empirical studies in order to describe, not prescribe, "what contributes to human flourishing" (defined as "feeling well and functioning well"), according to Ruark.

Flourishing and Happiness

Flourishing people are happy people—"they form stronger social relationships, enjoy better health, are more creative and effective at work, and are more involved as citizens" (Ruark, 2009, no page #). According to Ruark, Lyubomirsky believes that those who count their blessings, perform acts of kindness, express thanks, and write optimistically about themselves have taken control of their own lives and tend to be happier than those who don't (no page #). "Happiness, as Aristotle long ago pointed out, resides in activity, both physical and mental. It resides in doing things that one can take pride in doing well, and hence that one can enjoy doing" (Bennett, 1993, p. 347). It can be defined as "a heartfelt joy that is consistent, persistent, and lasting" that comes from being grateful instead of greedy, envious, foolish, or entitled (Scott, 2006, p. 96). Gratefulness and appreciation may be just another way to say *happiness*!

Flourishing and Appreciative Inquiry

Flourishing seems to encompass both feelings and functioning—a sense of well-being that translates into action. There seems to be a sense of purpose—having come to some kind of answer to the question of meaning. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a theory of organizational strategy developed in 1987 by Cooperrider and Srivastva that has been applied to a broad spectrum of fields. It is appropriate to include a discussion of it in this paper because it defines and describes my personal experience towards flourishing.

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I had another memory solidly tucked away in my mind but had to dig deep into boxes and files to find the actual paper. As you will see on the next page, it is dated April 27, 1984. That spring semester I was taking Reading in the Content Area with Dr. McB., my undergraduate advisor and mentor. As emerging teachers, we were to create an assignment that our future students would do and then do it ourselves so that we would experience it firsthand. I had been drafting sections of my autobiography over the years and used a page of it for this assignment. It is what Dr. McB. wrote on my paper back then that is of importance now:

A MOMENT, A WORD
Andrea Besel
April 27, 1984

It seemed she was a child one moment and the next moment she was an
adult, or at least expected to be one. There ~~were~~ *was* no "easing in to it"
for her. Now, at 21½ years old, three little children later (ages 4 years,
3 years, and a 6 month old) she finds herself sitting on a park bench,
mid-June, flooded with ideas called: I wonder how it would have been if . . .
the High school days that never were, the friends long since deserted. The
list of words she held in her hand had caused her mind to wonder off
to those days that never were. These words, still remembered in part –
inundate, deluge, unequivocal – represent the longing she had for more.
More of what, she wasn't even sure, but perhaps a desire to know more,
to contact the outside world, to somehow ignite the little spark that
burned silently in her. This all was somehow linked to that little
list of words. She pondered the meaning of "unequivocal" as she watched
a series of somersaults and heard the birds giggling along with the
baby's giggle. She was quiet, peaceful, and isolated but not without
hope. This list of words would grow; the missing links would be
supplied "line upon line, precept upon precept"; the years missed
would become years regained; that little spark would continue to
smolder until it broke out into a full-fledged fire.

An interesting choice. Do you mean wonder or wander? Wonder intriguing.

Certainly, you create expectations in the Reader. Would you want your students to create a more completed moment?

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Appreciative Inquiry focuses on the positive aspect of our lives and leverages them to correct the negative. The very fact that I remember this incident and still had the paper is proof of its power. Obviously, I had used the wrong word (*wonder* for *wander*) when I originally wrote this piece and didn't catch it before handing it in for this assignment. Dr. McB. could have done so many other things with this mistake . . . but he chose to *leverage* it, giving me the opportunity to save face . . . and to become acutely aware of the use of correct and precise language—which I am to this day—to my benefit. What a blessing from him to me!

Appreciative Inquiry theory "is not mindless happy talk" (Cooperrider and Whitney, 1999, p. 7). The researchers do not suggest that you can ignore a problem; they recommend that you approach it from *the other side w*ith intentionality to discover the person's exceptionality. "AI is not so much about new knowledge but new knowing" (p. 11). I did not know why I remembered this incident. Now I do. As I collected my memories and recollected my thoughts I came to understand something else in a new way.

<div align="center">*Hints in the Research*</div>

There were several times that I stopped a moment and wondered over some of the research, trying to figure out how it all fit together. Early on, while reading the seminal work on the "impostor", I came across this: "They usually are bright, energetic, hardworking people . . . they are the types of people who are liked, loved, and respected" (Clance, 1985, p. 126). With this in mind, Wilson (1992) writes that

> In the existing imposter phenomenon literature there is a virtual absence of empirical studies examining models which offer explanations of how the imposter maintains high levels of success and achievement while simultaneously

experiencing what would appear to be debilitating levels of anxiety and expectations of failure on evaluation tasks (Abstract).

I had made a note beside this statement: "Interesting!" Then I came across Fruhen's (2002) research which reported positive implication of the IP such as "increased motivation, thoughtfulness, conscientious and humility in their work" from interviews of thirteen professional women (Abstract). And then more recently, I found an article by Gravois (2007) in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that described an incident that occurred during a lecture at Columbia University. Valerie Young—who was called "a traveling expert" by Gravois—was presenting to an overflow crowd of graduate students when some began to speak up. After a few back-and-forth exchanges among them,

> a graduate student in the back row—a husky-voiced woman with a few piercings—brought an end to the squirm-inducing exchange. 'Yes,' she said, 'It is possible that there is someone in this room who really is an impostor. But look at how many of us there are.' Then she surveyed the audience of overachievers and said, 'We couldn't have all gotten here for crap reasons'. (p. 1).

> *No we couldn't. No matter where we over-achievers are at this present moment in time. No*!

When I compiled the characteristics of the classic "impostor" into the personality profile (see Appendix A) I always had a "*but . . .*" struggling to get close enough to the surface to be heard. It was my more optimistic and assertive self that yearned to discover "alternatives when options seem severely constrained" (Bolman & Deal. 2003, p. 433). It was that self that needed to find "hope and faith amid fear and despair" (p 434). And it was my intellectual self that needed to see the many ways to interpret this multi-sided construct. Allowing for multiple viewpoints on this concept excited me a lot because I wanted to move past where everyone else had stopped.

I have to admit that in the beginning of Phase Two—when I set out to find *the other side* of the "impostor"—I was a little nervous. What if I did not find the theoretical foundation for it? What if all I had were my own experiences? My own ruminations? Could I actually provide a critical look at the "impostor" from a different perspective? Would I be accused of contributing to a kind of mindlessness, displaying a lack of imagination? I wanted to get to the place where I would just say what I wanted to say and know that it was true . . . because it was true to me. As Ueland (1938/1987) wrote:

> I believe now in speaking from myself, as I want you to do when you write. Don't keep marshaling thoughts like: 'I must prove it'. If it is true to you, it is true. Another truth may take its place later. What comes truly from me is true, whether anybody believes it or not. It is *my* truth (p. 174-175).

I liked that!

But I also liked the fact that I *did* find support in the literature. And I *did* want to reframe the "impostor" in a scholarly, yet creative way. I *did* want to "follow unchartered paths, expecting surprise, knowing events will sometimes outrun them, and pushing ahead even though the ultimate destination is only dimly foreseeable" (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 432). Reframing provides the artistic researcher some choices—some personal freedoms—"to find new patterns and new possibilities" (p. 431) even to act inconsistently, at times. Bolman and Deal believe that artists can reframe the world so that "others can see new possibilities" (p. 18), especially if they can interpret and express their own experiences in ways that can be "felt, understood, and appreciated by others" (p. 18).

I felt the tension that comes along with risk-taking, but I also felt the excitement involved in reframing the "impostor." "Impostors" are not supposed to be risk-takers, according to the literature. It was one of those "buts . . ." that came up when I first read

that characteristic. I have always been a risk-taker. As Csikszentmihalyi (1990) says in his book, *Flow*, risk-taking involves "stretching our talents and affirming our gifts in the cauldron of challenge" (p. 47). Godin (2006) echoes that sentiment when he talks about "zooming" (p. 25). "'Zooming' is about stretching your limits without threatening your foundation. It's about handling new ideas, new opportunities, and new challenges without triggering the change avoidance reflex" (p. 25). When you are "zooming" you are "doing the same thing as usual, only different" (p. 25).

New possibilities have always drawn me to them. I have come to understand that as I have responded to that draw, I have moved closer to the top of Maslow's hierarchy towards "self-actualization"—which I call maturity. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) believes that it takes effort, focus, and perseverance to get to the place where we can see our goals clearly and then with purpose "soar" (p. 39).

The following is a poem I wrote during the first semester of my doctoral program (spring, 2007). It was part of an assignment in another student's presentation, but it has special significance to me.

PURPOSE

I AM . . . purpose.
I WONDER . . .why not!
I LISTEN . . . with my heart.
I SEE . . . with my ears.
I WISH . . . often.
I WILL . . . –MY CHOICE! Yes!
I FEEL . . . strongly.
I WORRY . . . not!
I CRY . . . less.
I UNDERSTAND . . . some.
I SAY . . . after consideration.
I DREAM . . . big.
I HOPE . . . long.
I AM . . . purpose.

Cameron (1992) says that

> The process of identifying a self inevitably involves loss as well as gain. We discover our boundaries . . . we lose our misconceptions. As we eliminate ambiguity, we lose illusion as well. We arrive at clarity, and clarity creates change (p. 61).

I wrote the following vignette several months ago to illustrate this point.

_____

Things Unexpected

As an injured or neglected person progresses through Maslow's hierarchy of human needs, something begins to happen. Things unexpected. Things wonderful. von Oech (1986) talks about the four roles involved in the creative process and it is at the point of Maslow's self-actualization that they can spontaneously appear. For me, it was the artist. I began to imagine possibilities and to act on them. I had not sensed any creativity in me during my turbulent childhood, into adolescence, or well in to my adult life. Then one day it happened. I began to paint—simple, focused watercolor.

This demonstration of deep heart-healing has brought about a wonderful new dimension to my life. I have met new friends. I have ventured out into new territory— hanging my paintings in public places, selling them to people across the country! I never dared to dream of such changes!

_____

Conclusion

The first four chapters of this dissertation covered all of the down side—the dark side of the "impostor." I did not encounter any problems finding the negative descriptions—much has been written about them; or remembering painful experiences— many are documented here. But it has been a joy to turn, in contrast, to the shiny side— "the optimistic, responsible, authentic, life-affirming, inspiring and creative side" (Nash, 2009, p. 7). Both sides are me, however; I now see myself as a "flourishing impostor" (or is it an "impostoring flourisher"?).

I have come to understand that in the midst of my early life experiences and the suffering that was involved, I had begun to see that "there is still more to life than meets the rational eye" which William James called the "More" (Nash, 2009, p. 8) and the ancient Hebrews called YAHUAH. Instead of a life of desolation which I could have so easily lived, I began to experience a life of flourishing.

In his exposition of existentialism's reframing of the term "meaning", Nash (2009) exhorts his students (and through this dissertation, my readers) "to live courageously, purposely, and actively in the face of all of life's perplexities" (p. 14). I am trying to do just that by "build(ing) on (my) personal strengths and qualities that result in resilience, joy, and self-confidence" (p. 20).

I believe that Schwandt (2001) may be right when he wrote that "universal principles become understandable only in light of specific cases (p. xxxi). And while the picture that researchers paint in the published literature of an "impostor" may not rise to the level of "universally accepted" status, that picture is surely brought more clearly into focus by personal experiences shared in narrative form. My "seemingly everyday

experiences contain and carry messages of identity, difference and Otherness" (Austin & Hickey, 2007, no page #).

And I agree with Ellis (2004) when she says that "stories are the way humans make sense of their worlds" (p. 32). "But they are always about more than your own experience" (p. 37). It will be for the reader to decide if I have been successful—in the sense that you, the reader, have been informed, enlightened, and enriched by my stories, my process and reflection on them, and their connections to the Impostor Phenomenon.

I also hope that I have successfully accomplished Jensen's (2004) first five rules of writing by *not boring the reader*. Because I believe that what I do must reach further than the thing just done, I would like for you to let me know how I did on both counts.

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APPENDIX A

Personality Profile of an "Impostor"

The "Impostor Child"

1) Family issues are at the root of the "impostor's" experiences (Clance, 1985, p. 32).

2) She has overheard members of the family talking about her and she has listened to stories about others told in her presence (p. 32).

3) Her earliest memories are a combination of instructions given on how to behave and feelings of confusion (p. 32).

4) She experiences a discrepancy between messages from the family about who she is and messages from others such as teachers, friends, and neighbors (p. 33).

5) Early on she senses that she is a little different from the rest of the family but doesn't understand this at all (Clance, 1985, p. 33).

6) She feels pressure to learn quickly and to maneuver well in the world at an early age (p. 33)

7) and early on feels shame and humiliation when she makes "mistakes" that are public (p. 27).

8) She begins to feels the pressure to be the very best—the top performer—at whatever she does (p. 26).

9) But even when she does well, she is not praised by family members for her accomplishments (p. 34).

10) When she is complimented it is from persons from outside the family circle (p. 33).

11) Those people often remark that she is gifted and give her special attention (p. 68).

12) During her elementary years she is often called on to perform in a leadership role because she is considered by those in authority to be the very best (Clance, 1985, p. 68).

13) While it is wonderful for her at the time, later in life (as an adult) she expects to continue to be the best in everything she does (p. 68).

14) She does not feel accepted for who she is (p. 69).

15) She believes that in order to be loved she has to live up to what she believes are her family's expectations (p. 69).

16)   Although she cannot name her feelings, she often feels shame and humiliation (Clance, 1985, p. 74).

17) The reasons for these feelings come from recurrent experiences of failing, often insignificant and unnoticed by others, but sometimes more public (p. 74).

18) She is teased at school and at home (p. 74).

19) These feelings of shame and humiliation are also experienced as she witnesses her parents' behavior (p. 74).

20) Although the "impostor child" is ignored at times by her parents (p. 123),

21) she experiences routine denial of any of her accomplishments (p. 123).

22) At times she receives overtly hostile attention and criticism (p. 123).

23) What makes this particularly painful for the "impostor child" is the fact that her siblings are treated in a completely different way (Clance, 1985 p. 125).

24) The seeds of jealousy and resentment are planted very early in the heart of the "impostor child" even though they are unknown to her (p. 125).

The "Impostor Teen"

1) What develops inside the "impostor" as she grows up are secret experiences (Clance, 1985, p. 18).

2) She rehearses painful incidents and dwells on things she doesn't understand (p. 25).

3) She worries that she can't live up to other's expectations of her (p. 25).

4) She experiences periods of anxiety and fear when she is called upon to perform because she doubts her own ability and fears failure (p. 25).

5) When things turn out alright, she only feels relief and happiness for a short time, though (p. 26).

6) She has an unspoken need to be the very best—the top performer—at whatever she attempts and believes that she *should* be able to do anything easily (p. 26).

7) This leaves her feeling overwhelmed most of the time (p. 26).

8) She secretly yearns to be special, but at the same time she dismisses her real talents, thinking she is stupid if not the very best (Clance, 1985, p. 26).

9) Extreme anxiety, bordering on panic attacks, overtakes her when she even thinks she has made a mistake (p. 27).

10) These feelings are associated with shame and humiliation experienced in childhood (p. 27).

11) When complimented or praised for her accomplishments she discounts and refuses to believe it (p. 27).

12) While desperately wanting to be successful, she fears that increased responsibility may come as a result of it (p. 27).

13) The "impostor teen" works hard at disguising her imagined deficiencies and

weaknesses (p. 28),

14) even though she is genuinely introverted (p. 28).

15) While the experiences of success are real and deserved, she questions herself

regularly and rarely feels the joy and satisfaction these experiences should bring

(p. 28).

16) She feels ashamed of her doubts and fears—keeping them a secret (p. 29).

17) *Dread* is an unnamed companion of the "impostor teen" (Clance, 1985, p. 51).

18) She has an intense pressure inside her to prove herself (p. 51)—to make a good

impression, to be liked, to be respected (p. 58).

19) Even though she intellectually knows that all people fail at times, she is unable to

apply this knowledge to herself (p. 63).

20) As she matures, she continues to demand of herself that she never look stupid (p. 74).

21) This fear (which she can't name and doesn't know how to deal with) overwhelms her,

squelches her spontaneity and creativity (p. 74)**,**

22) and drives her to be perfect in all areas of her life (p. 77).

23) She overworks (p. 77) because she wants everything she does to be brilliant, creative,

and productive all the time (p. 77).

24) She has the superwoman complex already (p. 77)**.**

25) When motherhood comes at an early age, she is determined not to repeat her own

mother's mistakes (Clance, 1985, p. 80).

26) As a single parent her intense need to be perfect along with intense feelings of

responsibility raises her fears of failure and feelings of guilt (p. 81).

27) Her self-doubt grows (p. 82)

28) and she suffers with leaving her children at daycare while she works (p. 82).

29) Conflict is inside her and all around her**.**

30) She feels isolated, lonely, and sometimes even crazy (p. 83).

31) She begins to believe that she is a terrible mother (p. 84) so she tries to back off her need to succeed, tries to expect less of herself (p. 87)**.**

32) Even with her children, she believes that in order to be loved (by them) she must be perfect (p. 87).

33) This puts extreme pressure on her.

34) The "impostor single mom" also has a strong need to protect others (p. 121) in addition to her own children, feeling responsible for the happiness and sense of well being for those around her (p. 121).

35) Even though she advances in her jobs and succeeds in her classes, she is unable to hear and believe compliments (Clance, 1985, p. 88).

36) She can't/won't accept objective evidence regarding success or intellectual ability (p. 88).

37) The research shows that this is not false modesty (p. 88); it is not being coy (p. 91).

38) Give an "impostor" a compliment and watch her change the subject and turn away in embarrassment (p. 90).

39) She attributes her successes to anything and everything except brains (p. 91).

40) Internal conflict is familiar to the "impostor" (p. 96).

41) While she fears success, she desperately wants it (p. 96).

42) The tacit need to be special is relentlessly at work in her (p. 96).

43) Strong desire to succeed wars against the strong feelings of unworthiness (p. 97), resulting in self-doubt (p. 97).

44) She is bright, energetic, and hardworking; she is liked, loved, and respected (Clance, 1985, p. 126).

45) But she remembers and focuses on the one percent of the flawed results (failures in her mind) and discounts the 99 percent of her accomplishments (p. 119).

46) She is a classic introvert (Clance, 1985, p. 120).

47) The "impostor" is aware of her feelings, is thoughtful, and appears preoccupied. In a crowd, she is uncomfortable but works hard to hide it (p. 120).

48) To appear more outgoing, she aligns herself with more gregarious people (p. 120) so that her "quietness" isn't as noticeable.

49) She has developed her self-image from other people's responses to her so she strives to please others to get a good response (p. 121).

The "Impostor Adult"

1) Some "impostors" procrastinate when faced with a need to perform while others respond just the opposite by working extra hard, starting extra early, and over-preparing consistently (Clance, 1985, p. 25).

2) When given the opportunity to discuss her achievements, successes, or talents, she remains silent or verbally denies or disclaims them (p. 27).

3) She refuses to accept—and thus internalize—the proof(s) that she is competent, intelligent, and talented (p. 27).

4) Although she has these secret fears, she makes a great first impression anyway (p. 28)

5) because over the years she has constructed a "mask" that depicts a very nice smile (p. 31), a look of authority, and a certain self-assuredness (p. 31).

6) Experiences that *showcase* the "impostor" (p. 53) are *first* jobs, *new* jobs (p. 58), and *new* things (p. 58).

7) Groups of people who seem to experience the "impostor phenomenon" are first-generation professionals (p. 103),

8) children of exceptional/super successful families (p. 107),

9) and students (p. 110).

10) "Impostors" often settle for less than they are capable of.

11) The "impostor" may decide to discontinue an activity when things become difficult (Clance, 1985, p. 70)

12) because she just can't bear to fail or because she doesn't want to be less that the very best (p. 70).

13) There are times when she decides to remain in *a small pond* so that she can be *the big fish* (p. 71).

14) She may decide to aim at a lesser goal—much below her actual capabilities—because of the fear of failure (p. 72).

15) Decisions to "settle" may be the result of exhaustion, however (Clance, 1985, p. 83).

16) The "superwoman complex" drives the "impostor" to do much more than is necessary, believing that to say no is a failure (p. 84).

17) She really believes that she should be able to do anything and everything without being stressed (p. 84).