

2008

The impostor phenomenon : an exploratory study of the socializing factors that contribute to feelings of fraudulence among high achieving, diverse female undergraduates

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

College is a rite of passage for many young people. There, social and academic identities are developed. Whether the student travels near or far, to a prestigious or a less selective institution, the transition to college marks a time of great change and opportunity. Exactly at this time, many young people experience feelings of inadequacy and intellectual phoniness. Although both men and women experience these feelings, they occur more frequently, and some (Bell, 1990) would argue more potently, among women. For some women, feelings of inadequacy and intellectual phoniness are crippling and severely affect their academic and social functioning. Clance and Imes (1978) named the presence of intense feelings of intellectual inauthenticity among high achieving women the *Impostor Phenomenon* (IP). This study will explore the narratives of female undergraduate college students who feel fraudulent as a way to answer the following research question: what socializing factors contribute to feelings of fraudulence among high achieving, diverse female undergraduates?

The Impostor Phenomenon was first named and studied only 29 years ago, leaving many aspects of the experiences of women who feel like frauds understudied or understudied. Due to their silence and shame around feeling like frauds, many women who experience such feelings believe they are the only ones who feel this way and thus grow increasingly isolated from peers and other supports. The intensity of their feelings

may be compounded by a sense of isolation as they may feel they are alone with their feelings of inadequacy. Bernard, Dollinger and Ramaniah (2002) note the limited research on this subject has focused on four areas: “1) instrument development 2) the relation of the Impostor Phenomenon to other constructs 3) the processes by which imposters and non imposters deal with real or imagined academic outcomes 4) the Impostor Phenomenon concept in relation to such special populations as university faculty, various client groups or individuals preparing for selected professions” (p. 322). Most studies have explored gender differences. However, women are the focus of this qualitative study.

Most of the research to date has relied on surveys and scales of Impostor Phenomenon validity in men and women, often comparing the prevalence of the Impostor Phenomenon across genders. Such quantitative research limits the field of social work’s understanding of the personal, nuanced experiences of women who feel like frauds. A quantitative method of study has also disconnected the voices of women from the research. This researcher believes hearing the voices of women who feel like frauds will add a critical element of authenticity and depth to the research on the Phenomenon.

Through the telling of their stories, this researcher hypothesizes that high achieving, diverse undergraduate college women will report that: 1) Feelings of fraudulence may originate from familial attitudes about success; 2) These feelings are perpetuated by messages from Western culture (and the family as well) that tell the woman her talent is atypical for her family, race, class, or gender; 3) Gender role stereotypes perpetuate feelings of fraudulence; and finally, 4) Academic achievement that

surpasses society's expectations of women of Color contributes to feelings of fraudulence among women of Color.

There are many detrimental consequences associated with feeling like a fraud. For one, these feelings often prevent women from accepting opportunities to advance.

Matthews and Clance's 1985 study found many bright female college students at a prestigious liberal arts college refused offers to engage in honors work for fear that the faculty and/or co-students would discover them as incompetent. The strength of these feelings to stymie the growth of women cannot be overemphasized.

Other implications of the Impostor Phenomenon include the inability to enjoy success; in fact, the woman who feels like a fraud is generally "haunted" by success (Clance, Dingman, Reviere, Stober, 1995, p. 82). Such intense feelings are disempowering; she does not "internalize and manifest strengths, allow deficits, [or] fully pursue or experience fulfillment" (Clance et al., 1995, p. 82). Social workers meeting with women feeling this way will find these women suffering from unnecessarily high levels of stress and anxiety. Therapists need to know that there are a number of high achieving women who feel like frauds. An understanding of the phenomenon from its origins in the socialization of women will help the therapist and client alike.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review will focus on previous research pertaining to the study question: “What socializing factors contribute to feelings of fraudulence among high achieving, diverse female undergraduates?” The first section of this literature review will focus on defining the Impostor Phenomenon (IP) and presenting the previous research that shows that the Impostor Phenomenon is a critical, but hidden, issue for undergraduate college women. Next, studies will be presented that describe the varied explanations of the origins of the Impostor Phenomenon: studies that state these feelings arise due to messages one receives from her family of origin, from society at large based on gender role stereotypes, or from socializing forces acting upon her as a female of a certain class or race. Third, relevant literature that explains how the sense of self is constructed will be presented. Finally, the reader will explore the significance and implications of feeling like a fraud, particularly as it pertains to undergraduate college women.

Defining the Impostor Phenomenon

In 1978, psychotherapists and professors Clance and Imes encountered many women who shared feelings of intense intellectual inauthenticity. These women, who amassed objective evidence of achievement, spoke of feeling “undeserving of success

and recognition” (Clance et al., 1995, p. 79), and attributed their success to luck, extremely hard work, interpersonal skills, or other external factors unrelated to ability. Because these women believed that they had been incorrectly acclaimed and rewarded, they had an intense fear of being discovered to be frauds. Based on their experiences as therapists to women expressing these feelings, Clance and Imes coined the term *Impostor Phenomenon* in 1978 to describe the feelings of intense emotional inauthenticity among high achieving women.

Clinical Symptoms of the Impostor Phenomenon

Clance and Imes (1978) asserted that “women who exhibit the impostor phenomenon do not fall into any one diagnostic category” (p. 242). However, clinical symptoms associated with women who experience the Impostor Phenomenon include “generalized anxiety, lack of self-confidence, depression, and frustration due to their inability to meet their own standards of achievement” (p. 242). Consistent with Clance and Imes’ findings, in a study of 190 male and female undergraduate students, Bernard, Dollinger, and Ramaniah (2002) discovered those individuals who scored high on the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale, a tool developed by psychotherapist and researcher Pauline Rose Clance in 1985, were disposed to feelings of depression and anxiety, leading Bernard et al. to conclude the Impostor Phenomenon “is more than just neuroticism” (p. 329). As Bernard et al. explored the relationship between the big five personality factors, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, neuroticism and conscientiousness, and the IP, they found “high neuroticism and low conscientiousness characterize high IP scorers” (p. 326).

Cozzarelli and Major's (1990) study of the cognitive and affective experiences of co-ed undergraduate impostors and non impostors before and after an exam generally supported the findings of Clance and Imes (1978) and Bernard et al. (2002). Cozzarelli and Major found that impostors experienced greater anxiety than non impostors before an important exam and they expected to perform less well on it than their non-impostor counterparts. Following the exam, the impostors felt "affectively worse and suffered a greater loss in state self esteem than did non impostors after subjective failure on the exam" (p. 401). These findings indicate a need for a greater understanding of the connection between self-esteem and feelings of fraudulence.

Behaviors and Patterns Associated with the Impostor Phenomenon

Research by Clance and Imes (1978) identified behaviors and patterns that maintain and reinforce the Impostor Phenomenon. Clance and Imes described the Impostor Phenomenon as a cyclical pattern that begins when a woman is faced with a new opportunity or challenge. In the case of college students, the onset of the cycle is often the start of a new level of academic training. At the beginning of the cycle, women who feel like frauds behave in one of two ways, according to Clance et al. (1995): she may "get to work immediately and overprepare" or she will "procrastinate and engage in a frenzy of activity at the final hour" (p. 81). If she overprepares and achieves, she learns that she must work harder than others to be successful. If she procrastinates and succeeds, she learns that the external world does not see her accurately. When the woman who feels like a fraud is rewarded for her achievement, the cycle continues as she is wrought with the pain and confusion associated with the way in which the accolades of

others is dissonant with her sense of self as an impostor. This reinforcing cycle tells her that approval is indiscriminate, which negates her sense of self-competence.

Bernard et al.'s (2002) study on the Impostor Phenomenon showed a slightly different cycle for women who suffer from feelings of fraudulence. Their findings indicated that those with impostor feelings were not inclined to exert more effort at the beginning of the cycle, due to the fact that they "place much greater faith in their intelligence than in their effort" (p. 330). Although Bernard et al. concluded the Impostor Phenomenon is a "self preservation strategy designed to minimize the implications of poor performance" (p. 330), this study asserts the Impostor Phenomenon is not a functional strategy women assume.

These cycles, as presented by Bernard et al., (2002) and Clance et al., (1995), may not be representative of the experiences of women of Color. Ewing, Richardson, James-Myers and Russell's (1996) study of 103 male and female African American graduate students found that these students' worldviews were strong predictors of susceptibility to impostor feelings. In the study, Ewing et al. noted the lack of attention most research on the Impostor Phenomenon has paid to race; most of the studies have been "based on theories of White adjustment or have merely compared Black people's scores with Whites' scores on some standard personality inventories that have included few, if any, Blacks in the standardization samples" (p. 55). This same study noted how these methods have ignored an examination of how one's status of being a racial minority affects one's "development and adjustment" (p. 55), a critical issue toward understanding the Impostor Phenomenon.

One note to keep in mind is to consider how one will research diverse individuals “within a framework that is relevant to the people’s cultural experience” (Ewing et al., 1996, p. 55). One must also consider how much the indicators on the preexisting scales simply replicate the experiences of White people. The existing quantitative tools may not fully capture the Impostor Phenomenon indicators of women of Color.

Bell (1989) notes the “conflicts with success” (p. 123) that may be unique to people of Color. Minorities are acutely aware of the factors for success in “the system,” and success, they know, is not simply tied to individual effort: “social class, race, status and opportunity have a great deal to do with actual achievement” (p. 123). Such an awareness among women of Color may add to minority women’s struggle to take credit for their success. They have a unique insight into the conditions of success—conditions they may perceive to exclude them due to their skin color, class, or social status.

Clance (1985) notes that impostor feelings may serve a function for women of Color, especially if their achievements have tagged them atypical for their family or race. In such a case, feeling like a fraud allows these women to “remain humble” and not differentiate themselves from their community (p. 28). Being rejected or separated from one’s community may play a role in the genesis or perpetuation of these feelings in women of Color.

The Origins of the Impostor Phenomenon

Most studies have examined the origins of the Impostor Phenomenon as a phenomenon arising within one’s family of origin (Clance et al., 1995; King & Cooley, 1995; Langford & Clance, 1993). Several studies (Bell, 1990; Bernard et al., 2002;

Clance et al., 1995; Shaw & Edwards, 1997; Smith, Noll, & Bryant, 1999) have approached the Impostor Phenomenon with the notion that it is rooted in interpersonal and social contexts such as through learned messages the family implicitly or explicitly shares, gender role stereotypes imposed by culture at large, and socializing forces acting females based on their social class or race.

The Effect of the Family

In their initial research on the Impostor Phenomenon, Clance and Imes (1978) asserted that the origins of the IP can be traced to impostors' families of origin. To this end, King and Cooley (1995) cited Clance's (1985) study that outlined four key family elements related to achievement that may contribute to the development of the Impostor Phenomenon: 1) As children, impostors believe their talents are atypical for their family, race, or gender; 2) The feedback these children receive from teachers, peers or neighbors is inconsistent with family feedback; 3) Family members do not recognize or praise these children for their accomplishments and talents; and 4) Family members convey to the children that it is very important to be intelligent and successful with little effort (p. 305). King and Cooley's (1995) study of 127 undergraduates supported the hypothesis that a "family environment which emphasizes achievement is associated with higher impostor phenomenon scores" (p. 308). This study was limited by the fact that participants were subjectively rating their families' achievement orientation, indicating a need for a more objective measure to assess family messages about effort related to achievement.

Langford and Clance (1993) expanded on the idea that the family environment that emphasizes achievement results in higher Impostor Phenomenon scores. They

examined the ways that the parents' selective validation of certain parts of a child results in that child learning early what parts of herself will and will not be validated and supported (as cited in Clance et al., p. 82). The child focuses on ways to engage in the behaviors validated and supported by the parents, which for some children include the standards of perfection the parents have imparted. The implications of selective validation of the child include the ways in which the child "becomes just as selective in her self regard as her parents are in the positive regard which they show toward her" (Clance et al., 1995, p. 82). Clance et al. also found:

Recognition of parts of self (even positive ones) that are incongruent with the self-concept is threatening and leads to a state of anxiety. Thus, a girl whose family never recognized or celebrated her intelligence does not integrate intelligence into her self-concept. When as a woman she is shown to be intelligent, she is likely to distort the experience to keep it congruent with her sense of self. She may acknowledge the fact of her accomplishment but will misinterpret the method by which it was achieved, perhaps stressing her hard work or the leniency of the instructor rather than emphasizing her ability. (p. 83)

In further exploration of the family's role in a woman's developing sense of self, Clance and Imes (1978) noted that women who feel like frauds often were raised within one of two family scenarios. In the first, the woman who develops feelings of fraudulence has been told she is the "sensitive" one in the family and a sibling or close relative is the smart member of the family. She wants to believe this narrative because it comes from her family, but she also wants to prove herself as capable and competent. School becomes a place where she tries to excel to determine the validity of this narrative. When she meets with success in school, she feels good and subsequently hopes her family will acknowledge and validate her achievements as based on intellect and skills. The family does not validate her achievements in this way and instead persists in

their belief that the identified family member or sibling is of greater intelligence and ability. A pattern emerges where the woman is

Driven to find ways of getting validation for her intellectual competence; on the other hand, she thinks her family may be correct, secretly doubts her intellect, and begins to wonder if she has gained her high marks through sensitivity to teachers' expectations, social skills, and feminine charms. Thus, the impostor phenomenon emerges. (Clance & Imes, 1978, p. 243)

The second type of family scenario is one in which many women who feel like frauds were raised. From an early age, the girl received messages from her parents that she is superior and can do anything with ease. When she enters school and finds that in fact she cannot do everything with ease, she is faced with a crisis that exposes a dissonance between what she has been told by her parents and what she experiences in real life. Clance & Imes (1978) note how the girl then feels "obliged to fulfill the expectations of her family, even though she knows she cannot keep up the act forever" (p. 243). The indiscriminate praise she received as a child leads her to second guess her parents' opinions of her. This amounts to an existential crisis of sorts as she begins to doubt much of what she believes to be true. The female who feels like a fraud begins to doubt herself even more as the standard of being able to do everything perfectly and easily becomes difficult to live out at school. She negates the achievements she amasses because they do not come easily. She assumes that because the achievements come with hard work, she must be unintelligent. Therefore, she believes she is an impostor. The feeling of fooling others arises when she has to cover up the fact that she studies to meet academic accomplishments.

Limitations of the quantitative research published to date include the fact the measures of this phenomenon are weak due to subjectivity. First, the Clance IP Scale,

used in virtually every published study on the Impostor Phenomenon, does not specify for participants that they must rate themselves on *academic* achievement and success. If an individual is considering her achievement in a non-academic setting when she completes the scale, results will be skewed. Second, most studies measured academic achievement and achievement orientation on grade point averages and amount of time spent on academic work. Including additional measures for academic achievement and achievement orientation may be helpful for a quantitative study, especially measures that address scores over an extended period of time (GPA over three years, etc.).

Gender Role, Racial, and Class Stereotypes

Another way in which families of origin affect women's experiences of the Impostor Phenomenon includes "the gender differences in parental messages regarding successes" (King & Cooley, 1995, p. 310). Eccles, Arberton, Buchanan, et al. (1993) found that "parents were more likely to attribute a male child's competence in mathematics to natural talent [...] and a female child's competence in math to her effort" (as cited in King & Cooley, 1995, p. 310). Because children from an early age internalize the implicit and explicit messages they receive from parents, the messages girls received that their achievements were due to exerted effort rather than innate, intellectual talent may have set the stage for feelings of fraudulence later in life.

The fact that girls are conforming to gender stereotyped social expectations by presenting as less intelligent is a phenomenon that has been documented in girls as young as grade four. Based on previous studies, Bell (1989) notes how fourth grade girls are "losing self confidence, becoming extremely self critical, and lowering their effort and

aspirations in order to conform to gender stereotyped social expectations” (p. 119). Bell goes on to note that underachievement grows through the middle school years. The fact that young girls are purposely underachieving has great implications; they are reducing their options and opportunities later in life.

How a female understands the relationship between success and femininity also contributes to feelings of fraudulence, especially if the female believes success conflicts with femininity. Chodorow’s 1974 research explored the “contradictory messages about success girls receive from a competitively-oriented society that on the one hand claims females can be and do anything, but on the other promotes the belief that females should be feminine [e.g., passive and protected from risk]” (p. 121). Approaching the subject of female development from a psychoanalytic perspective, Chodorow posits that female development is intimately bound to a girl’s relationship with her mother. More specifically, Chodorow argues that “a female’s gendered understanding of herself depends on her relationships with and to other people of her same gender” (p. 45). A girl “appropriates, internalizes and organizes” the characteristics she learns through the model of her mother to be uniquely feminine; then these characteristics come to constitute her personality. “Feminine identification is based not on fantasied or externally defined characteristics but on the gradual learning of a way of being familiar in everyday life, and exemplified by the person (or kind of people—women) with whom she has been most involved” (Chodorow, p. 51).

Bell’s (1989) conversations with girls supported Chodorow’s points yet further complicated them; Bell found that successful girls expressed pride about their successes but “did not want to achieve it at the expense of others” (p. 121). The connection

between social isolation and success is an additional factor complicating females' feelings about success.

The fact that many young women of Color are never identified as gifted or high achieving contributes to feelings of fraudulence among this population. Prejudice among educators and the academic system that has set lower expectations for achievement among students of Color has led to a situation where many gifted young girls of Color are not identified as such. Without “encouragement to explore talents [and] access to supportive experiences that nurture potential,” the student’s precociousness may wane or entirely extinguish (Lindstrom & Van Sant, 1986, p. 584). Also, when a high achieving female of Color—or even a female from the dominant culture—is not identified as more advanced than her peers, she is more likely to attribute her successes to external factors unrelated to her personal ability, due to the fact that she has not been validated as advanced or gifted.

Scott-Jones and Clark (1986) note that at the high school level, “Black females have educational and occupational aspirations as high as or higher than those of Black males or White females” (p. 522). This same study showed, however, that at the college level the aspirations of black females drop below those of black males, due to “an adherence to sex role stereotypes in their educational and occupational goals and choices” (p. 522). Scott-Jones and Clark go on to identify a chasm between Black and White females’ motivations for working outside the home. They claim, “Black females tend to be concerned about contributing to the economic support of their families, while the motivations of White females focus on self-fulfillment” (p. 523).

Gender role stereotypes are not the only socializing environmental sources of feelings of fraudulence, argues Bell (1990). She asserts that the “realities of a male-oriented world” (p. 86) enforce women’s feelings of fraudulence because in a male world, “women often *are* impostors” (p. 90). Although Bell references the workforce, her ideas may be transferred to academia. She argues that on a macro level, the system “exploits, disempowers and discriminates against its female workforce” (p. 90). Compounding women’s self doubts are micro level offenses—run-ins with attitudes and behavior of individual men who interrupt and question women’s place in the environment (workplace or otherwise). Through the forces acting upon women at the societal and individual level, it is no wonder, says Bell, that women feel fraudulent and doubt themselves.

The Effect of Society/Socialization

Chodorow (1974) quotes Barry, Bacon and Child’s 1957 study that notes a difference between the socialization of boys and girls. Male socialization was shown to be oriented toward “achievement and self reliance” and female socialization was oriented toward “nurturance and responsibility” (p. 55). In this way, girls are raised to connect and boys are pressured to disconnect and individualize. Chodorow argues that a “quality of embeddedness in social interaction and personal relationships characterize women’s life relative to men’s” insofar as daughters, from a young age, are folded into an “intergenerational world” that often includes time spent with aunts and grandmothers. To address this chasm between genders that narrowly defines the gender role identification, Chodorow calls for fathers to take a larger role in childcare and mothers to have a role in

a sphere outside of the home and child rearing responsibilities. Chodorow believes that such a shift would provide children of both genders an example of a wider range of possibilities for themselves.

Scott-Jones and Clark (1986) eloquently note how academic achievement is dependent on much more than effort and ability. The social environment, they say, plays a large role in enhancing or diminishing the behaviors that lead to achievement. Insofar as the “school is a microcosm of society,” the biases and prejudices of the society make their way into the school environment. Beyond reading and writing, in school children learn ways of interacting and social norms and values. Some (including Scott-Jones and Clark) would argue that in schools, girls first learn that society values males and children of Color learn society values Whites. As members of minority groups “adjust” to this setting, they are forced to live a “bicultural existence” (Scott-Jones & Clark, 1986, p. 524). In order to succeed in school, children of Color are forced to adopt the values and norms of the school. However, at home these children revert to the values and norms of their families.

Tyler, Boykin, Miller, and Hurley (2006) expand on the issue of a “bicultural existence” for students of Color in their quantitative study of home and school experiences of low-income African American students. Through reporting how their teachers prefer them to learn at school and how their parents prefer them to learn at home, Tyler et al. discovered a dissonance between the activities and preferences of low-income students of Color in their homes versus the (predominantly White) set and sanctioned activities in school. The students reported that not only do they themselves prefer learning in a communal and vernistic fashion both at home and at school, but their

parents also support and prefer “communal behaviors over individualistic and competitive behaviors” (Tyler et al., 2006, p. 375).

The study also measured the students’ views of their teachers’ preferences for how the students should learn, and in this area the students reported their White, middle class teachers have significantly higher preferences for individualistic and competitive learning behaviors than communal or vervistic ways. Similarly, students also reported that engaging in communal and vervistic behaviors would get them in more trouble with their teachers and less trouble with their parents (Tyler et al., 2006, p. 375). The study elucidates the dramatic shift children of Color experience when moving between the spheres of home and school, as they are forced to navigate major value differences in two major spheres of their lives: home and school.

Scott-Jones and Clark (1986) reference Pamela Reid’s 1982 study of Black children that found the “socialization practices of Black families is relatively egalitarian” (p. 524). Reid argues that there is a great deal of overlap and similarity among the qualities that Black families desire and accept in their male children and those desired and accepted in their female children. A 1983 study by D.T. Entwisle and D.P. Baker studied parents’ expectations, their child’s expectations and actual grades when it came to achievement in mathematics. Entwisle and Baker found that young boys develop higher expectations for their own performance in arithmetic than young girls, and this was found to be attributed to differential expectations held by their parents. When surveying parents (usually mothers), Entwisle and Baker found higher expectations for boys were correlated to the boys’ own expectations and their actual grades. The research found that as parental expectations for children lower, so do the child’s expectations and so does actual

performance. A main contribution of this study includes its examination of the relationship between expectations and achievement. Through an examination of the ways expectations are positively correlated with future academic achievement (among other things), Entwisle and Baker's study illustrates just how significantly expectations based on a child's gender can influence a child and his or her academic achievement.

When examining class, Entwisle and Baker (1983) found "middle class parents expected boys to get better marks in arithmetic and girls to get better marks in reading" (p. 203). On the other hand, lower class parents expect girls to produce better marks than boys in both reading *and* arithmetic. The authors did not speculate on why this difference of expectations may exist among different social classes, but Reid (1982), considering Black females of the lower class, asserted that "the farmer's daughter's effect" plays a role in high expectations for females within the lower class (p.141). The practice of encouraging high achievement among poor Black girls was based upon a belief that education provides some "protection" to females, insofar as in an educational setting, females are institutionally shielded from harm. Reid also asserts that poor minority families view education as the ticket to capturing some of the few social and economic opportunities available within the culture at large.

Several studies (Grant, 1984; Hauser-Cram, Sirin, & Stipek, 2003; Jensen & Rosenfield 1974) have considered how teachers differentially treat students based on the students' socioeconomic class status. Jensen & Rosenfield (as quoted in Reid, 1982) found that both White and Black middle class children were rated more favorably by their teachers than White and Black lower class children (p. 144). Teachers' perceptions of students are important to consider when examining student academic achievement, as

overwhelming research indicates how teacher expectations powerfully affect academic achievement. In studies by Hauser-Cram et al., 2003 and Grant, 1984, teachers have been shown to expect less from their low-income students. When a student from a low-income background achieves beyond the low expectations set for her class status, she may be particularly prone to feeling like a fake or fraud due to years of implicit “teachings” that have outlined for her the parameters of who she “must be” based on her class status.

According to Clance et al. (1995), the fact that society values different characteristics in males and females contributes to women’s feelings of fraudulence in academia. In this Western society, males are supposed to be competent and unbiased whereas females should embody sensitivity and kindness. However, if a woman is going to be successful and achieve, she will need to embody independence, assertiveness, self-confidence, and directness. Yet these are “the qualities against which a woman must defend if she is to maintain an image of herself as feminine by the societal standards which she likely internalized by an early age” (p. 83). For many women, power is associated with fears of “selfishness, destructiveness, and abandonment of and by others;” as such, perceiving oneself as powerful may be more uncomfortable than simply feeling inadequate (p. 83).

Thus, on an unconscious level the IP allows a woman to deal with her ambivalence about being successful, by allowing her to keep her achievement out of her awareness. She may deny that she is successful or she may attribute her success to more acceptable and traditionally feminine skills: awareness of the feelings of others, helpfulness, sociability, or the ability to communicate easily. In a society which expects men to be instrumental and women to be expressive, it is difficult for a woman to cross domains and succeed without some degree of guilt and confusion. (p. 84)

Beyond the fact that society values different characteristics in males and females, females of Color in particular are faced with questions of how their academic achievement may affect their racial group affiliation status. High achieving females of Color and high achieving females of working class backgrounds in particular may struggle with a core dilemma that “achievement and affiliation are mutually exclusive” (Bell, 1989, p. 120). If achieving success is not a norm in the group, the high achieving female is faced with a crisis of identity—who is she if she is different from her group? Lindstrom and Van Sant (1986) note how peer rejection often experienced by high achieving young people can be particularly intensified by the cultural expectations of the minority group. Peers in racial minority groups often note how the high achieving member is using the way of the dominant culture to get ahead—that is, academic achievement. These peers often pressure to high achieving person not to leave the group through such means and they may “put down [the person who] strives to make the most of such opportunities” (p. 584).

The tie between identity and community for women in economically disadvantaged backgrounds is equally potent and at work among women of Color. A great deal of “emotional turmoil” occurs when a high achieving economically disadvantaged female begins to “climb the ladder of socioeconomic status” (Lindstrom & Van Sant, 1986, p. 584). This turmoil is often characterized by the desire to develop potential and succeed, yet one feels a loss associated with somewhat symbolically “leaving” the cultural community through high academic achievement. Colangelo and Zaffrann (1979) note “the culturally diverse gifted student has to establish an identity as a Black, Mexican-American, Native American, etc. If this identity is not positively

established, [...] cognitive and affective development will be hampered” (p. 5).

Colangelo and Zaffrann do not explore, however, *how* the so-called “culturally diverse gifted student” establishes an identity tied to her racial or ethnic group. Although they note that culturally diverse gifted students are “caught between two cultures,” Colangelo and Zaffrann do not offer insight into how culturally diverse gifted students “can keep a viable identity with their culture and yet be part of the majority culture so that their full potentials are reached” (p. 5).

Working class women, women of Color, and other marginalized populations are aware of the fact that “social class, race, status and opportunity have a great deal to do with academic achievement” and this insight may contribute to their difficulty taking credit for success. These marginalized populations have “perceptive insight into a competitive system that mystifies the conditions for success” (Bell, 1989, p.120). These women are acutely aware that individual effort alone does not equal success, having witnessed the fact that their own individual efforts have been dwarfed or diminished by their membership in a minority racial group or working class status.

Although many researchers who explore the Impostor Phenomenon believe impostor feelings in women are an indication of a fear of success rather than a fear of failure (P.R. Clance, personal communication, October 8, 2007), conflicting messages about failure contribute to women’s feelings of fraudulence. Some research has suggested “girls are more likely to internalize failure while boys are more likely to externalize it” (Bell, 1989, p. 123). Some attribute this occurrence to boys’ wider experience with team sports and more critical feedback from teachers.

After an exhaustive review of the existing literature on the Impostor Phenomenon, including the databases of PsychINFO, Academic Search Premier, PsycARTICLES, Women's Studies International and ERIC, this researcher found that no studies that presented contradictory views on the existence of the Impostor Phenomenon. This may be attributed to the fact that researchers cannot find ways to discredit a phenomenon that has already been proven to exist.

How a Sense of Self is Constructed

A supporting principle of the current study as well as in most of the previous research is that human beings are “embedded in matrices of circumstances and relationships” (McIntosh, 1989, p. 1). These matrices provide a critical background for the construction of self.

Shaw and Edwards' (1997) study of approximately one hundred undergraduates examined the ways males and females describe and present themselves. To assess how they describe themselves, the participants were asked to choose 15 adjectives that best describe them from a list of 108 adjectives. Then the participants were asked to tell a story about themselves—a story that they had told before and was well known by the participants' friends and family—in the fashion they usually tell it. Four undergraduate coders reviewed the audio taped narratives and analyzed them for the presence of adjectives listed on the scale the student had taken earlier in the day. Shaw and Edwards found that males and females describe themselves similarly but present different self-images in their narratives. This finding directly refuted prior studies where women more often reported “communal” traits and men more often report individualistic, “agent”

traits. Shaw and Edwards found that both men and women report individualistic and collectivist traits when describing themselves. However, when it comes to the way men and women present themselves, “males emphasize their ‘masculine’ persona and females highlight their ‘androgynous’ selves” (p. 61).

Scott-Jones and Clark (1986) discussed a study of Black eighth graders in an inner city school that found no sex differences in mathematics and science achievement; however, “boys scored significantly higher than girls on a measure of science self-concept, and [...] were significantly more likely than girls to choose a science related occupation over a non-science related occupation” (p. 521). Simply believing they *could* handle a science related occupation made difference for the boys. The females’ academic self-concept—the one that told them they couldn’t (or shouldn’t) pursue a science related occupation—kept the females from a similar occupational pursuit. This study points to the importance of considering how a female’s self-concept influences the way she sees herself and the choices she makes.

Shaw and Edwards’ (1997) study provides information that informs this study. Particularly applicable is the fact that female participants in this study chose “able” and “bright” to describe themselves on the initial questionnaire, but their narratives did not reflect the same themes. It will be worthwhile to examine the difference between women’s self-image and self-presentation as elicited from the narratives that emerge from the current study. One question Shaw and Edwards’ study raised that this study will explore is what happens when women see themselves one way but present themselves in a different way.

Through Socialization

Clance and Imes (1978) wrote, “the real root of the problem lies in social expectations” (p. 243). In congruent writings on this subject, McIntosh (1985) suggests that feelings of fraudulence among women indicate women have “internalized value systems that said most people are incompetent and illegitimate in the spheres of power and public life and authority” (p. 1). Women receive messages from every side of Western culture that they are not legitimate in places of authority, but “Most of human sensibility is not covered by what authoritative experts tell [women] because their frameworks for thought are often wrong and they are, in fact, fraudulent when they claim to cover all of us” (p. 8).

It is McIntosh’s view that feelings of fraudulence may be felt “when people who were socialized to think they do not belong high in hierarchies rise up into public view in any way” (McIntosh, 1989, p. 3). The hierarchies, McIntosh noted, force women to “adopt isolating roles, titles or modes of discourse” that may feel foreign and uncomfortable (McIntosh, 1989, p. 3). Most women, McIntosh wrote, view themselves within a level network of others, and it is the social construction of organizing individuals into hierarchies that leaves women feeling like frauds.

Smith, Noll and Bryant (1999) agreed that social context is a critical issue to explore when attempting to understand why high achieving women feel like frauds. Smith et al. asked two hundred and seventy five undergraduate students (75% White), to complete the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) seven times, with different instructions each time. This inventory included a list of sixty adjectives on which participants rate on a five point scale how well each item describes them. “The relationship between these

scores to the sample median score was used to classify participants into four categories of sex typing (sex-typed, cross sex-typed, androgynous, undifferentiated)” (p. 504). In the first administration of the scale, students were told to rate how each of the adjectives described her/him (in general) and then in the following six different contexts: “1) being a student at school, 2) being at work, 3) being at home, 4) socializing with same-sex friends, 5) socializing with opposite sex friends, and 6) being in a social setting in which the participant does not know very many people” (p. 504). The findings showed that for both males and females, “gendered self concepts change across various contexts” (p. 508).

A limitation noted in the Smith et al. (1999) study included the fact that the researchers did not examine which parts of the “gender belief system” were being activated in a given context (p. 509). Smith et al. also noted the importance of looking at the ways females are rewarded for “cross sex typed characteristics” in different contexts (p. 510). This study found that self-concepts are not static and consistent across contexts, which prompts an examination of how the environment influences one’s self-perception.

Clance and Imes’ (1978) work on the Impostor Phenomenon involved studying the attribution process of women; they found women “consistently have lower expectancies than men of their ability to perform successfully on a wide variety of tasks” (p. 242).

In line with their lower expectancies, women tend to attribute their successes to temporary causes, such as luck or effort, in contrast to men who are much more likely to attribute their successes to the internal, stable factor of ability. Conversely, women tend to explain failure with lack of ability whereas men more often attribute failure to luck or task difficulty. Given the lower expectancies women have for their own (and other women’s) performances, they have apparently internalized into a self-stereotype the societal sex-role stereotype that

they are not considered competent. Since success for women is contraindicated by societal expectations and their own internalized self-evaluations, it is not surprising that women in our sample need to find explanations for their accomplishments other than their own intelligence—such as fooling other people. (p. 242)

Feeling like a fraud is supported by a society that says women are not as competent as their male counterparts. The self-image of a woman who suffers from feelings of fraudulence is consistent with the societal notion that women are synonymous with lack. Therefore, when a woman does something well, she attributes the success to an external factor—never anything inside herself because she has not been socialized to think this way: “If she were to acknowledge her intelligence she would have to go against the views perpetuated by a whole society” (Clance & Imes, 1978, p. 244).

Scott-Jones and Clark (1989) note how teachers differentially treat White and Black students, attributing the success of White students to “internal factors such as effort or motivation” and the success of Black students to “factors that students cannot control, such as parental encouragement or heredity” (p. 524). As teachers make these judgments and implicitly or explicitly share these views with their female students of Color, these students become increasingly prone to believing such statements—that their achievement is due to something external and out of their control rather than an internal state of ability.

Clance (1995) discusses Surrey’s (1991) on how the socialization of girls to be feminine comes into conflict with later social requirements for “a type of maturity equated with independence and self-sufficiency” (p. 84). To alleviate some of the anxiety between social inconsistencies between what a woman is and what a woman needs to be

in order to function, “a woman may learn to attribute her achievement to sources other than her own skill or intelligence” (p. 84).

Summary

The existing research on the Impostor Phenomenon has been somewhat limited in its scope as it has been primarily quantitative and focused on the ways the Impostor Phenomenon manifests differently in men and women. Additionally, little, if any, attention has been paid to class and race and how these identities and affiliations affect women’s feelings of fraudulence. This qualitative research method will attempt to address the gap in the literature that has not considered the personal stories and nuanced experiences of diverse women.

However, the existing research on the Impostor Phenomenon has been strong in its consideration of the origins of the Impostor Phenomenon. The contributions of studies that have examined the Impostor Phenomenon as an issue originating in one’s family of origin (Bell, 1989, 1990; Clance et al., 1995; Langford & Clance; 1991, King & Cooley; 1995) and the contributions of studies that have examined the Impostor Phenomenon as an issue originating from interpersonal and social contexts (Bernard et al., 2002; Shaw & Edwards, 1997; Smith, Noll, & Bryant, 1999) set the stage for the examination of narratives of women who feel fraudulent. The existing research has posited several possible family environments that particularly engender feelings of fraudulence in women, but it is not yet known if there are other types of family environments which also contribute to women’s feelings of fraudulence. There has also been little research on how women who have been socialized within the family of origin or within interpersonal

or social contexts to feel fraudulent have been successful in silencing the voices that they have been taught to believe.

The existing literature on the Impostor Phenomenon has presented a variety of perspectives on why high achieving women feel like frauds, how these intense feelings affect their lives, and how women who feel this way can be treated. In order to give mental health clinicians and secondary and post-secondary educators and administrators a clearer understanding of the ways in which feelings of fraudulence are developed through social interaction, more qualitative information is needed. This study will explore what socializing factors contribute to feelings of fraudulence among high achieving, diverse female undergraduates.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study was designed to examine what socializing factors contribute to feelings of fraudulence among high achieving, diverse female undergraduates. The research explored the experience of women who feel like fakes or frauds in the academic environment and who fall between the ages of 18-22, the age range of “traditional” undergraduate college students. The rationale to explore this age range was based on the researcher’s particular interest in examining the unique developmental issues and concerns of the limited age group.

Design, Research Questions, and Hypothesis

This study expanded on previous research on the Impostor Phenomenon by exploring what socializing factors contribute to feelings of fraudulence among high achieving, diverse female undergraduates. Based on this, the following questions were explored in this study:

1. To what extent, if at all, do implicit or explicit messages from a woman’s family of origin contribute to the genesis or perpetuation of feelings of fraudulence?
2. How do women who feel like frauds understand and experience their academic success?

3. To what do women who feel like frauds attribute their academic success?
4. What societal forces, if any, do these women feel contribute to their feeling like fakes or frauds in the academic environment?
5. How do racism, classism and sexism contribute to the genesis or perpetuation of feelings of fraudulence among this sample?

The study used a qualitative design and was conducted in two phases. Phase I included two tools sent to 30 students from the participating colleges who responded to calls for participants for this study. The mailings to these students who responded included a demographic questionnaire consisting of 11 questions and the Clance IP Scale which assessed the potency of the participant's feelings of fraudulence. The questions explored during Phase I of the study were:

1. What is the prevalence of feelings of fraudulence among college women in this sample?
2. What is the current level of the participant's academic achievement as measured by her current grade point average? What has been her past level of academic achievement as measured by her high school grade point average?
3. From what types of families do these women originate? (Number of adult caregivers, number of siblings, socioeconomic status of the family, education level(s) of caregivers, et cetera.)

The following hypotheses for Phase I were put forward:

1. Participants' high school grade point averages (GPA) will be higher than their college GPAs, possibly due to intensifying feelings of fraudulence upon entering college.

2. Participants will originate from diverse families including 2 parent, adoptive, divorced, and stepparent homes. Participants will originate from families of diverse class statuses.

Phase II of the study involved obtaining a sub-sample of women whose score on the Clance IP Scale indicated current feelings of fraudulence that fell within the range of clinically significant scores on the empirically tested measurement tool. Ten subjects were interviewed in depth, using a semi-structured interview.

The main study question was: What socializing factors contribute to feelings of fraudulence among high achieving, diverse female undergraduates? Related questions included:

1. What did women learn from their families and society at large about academic success?
2. When these women academically succeed, what do they feel and think?
3. What are the academic success attribution processes of these women?
4. What role do racism, classism, and sexism play in the genesis or perpetuation of feelings of fraudulence?

The following hypotheses for Phase II were put forward:

1. Feelings of fraudulence may originate from familial attitudes about success.
2. These feelings are perpetuated by messages from Western culture (and the family as well) that tell the woman her talent is atypical for her family, race, class, or gender.
3. Gender role stereotypes perpetuate feelings of fraudulence.

4. Academic achievement that surpasses society's expectations of women of Color contributes to feelings of fraudulence among women of Color.

Selection Criteria

The sample for this study was gathered at two highly selective colleges: one in the Midwest and one in the Northeast. This was a sample of convenience as the researcher had contacts at both institutions to help her recruit research participants. The final thesis represents interviews with 10 students between the ages of 18-22. The selection criteria to participate in Phase I of the research included the following: the student must be female, she must self identify as feeling like a fake or fraud in the academic environment, and she must currently attend one of the two colleges that approved the researcher's proposal for research with human subjects. To qualify for Phase II of the research, the interview, participants must be female between the ages of 18 and 22, she must attend one of the two colleges that approved the researcher's proposal for research with human subjects, and she must have scored a 61 or higher on the Clance IP Scale, this researcher's method for measuring feelings of fraudulence.

Students older than 22 were excluded from this research because the researcher was interested in the particular developmental perspectives and experiences of women in the narrow age group of "traditional" undergraduate students. Literature on males who feel like frauds exists; by excluding males from this study, the researcher was attempting to closely investigate what societal influences particular to the experience of females contribute to feelings of fraudulence among women. The researcher determined that a score of 61 on the Clance IP Scale was the minimum rating for participation in Phase II of her research after

empirical testing by Holmes, Kertay, Adamson, Holland, and Clance (1992), determined that a “cutoff” score of 61 would “reliably separate impostors from non impostors” and minimize the number of false positives and false negatives (p. 57).

Students were recruited for the study through several means including class announcements from professors, fliers advertising the study on campus, and an article in one campus newspaper.

A total of 30 students participated in Phase I of the research, which involved completing and returning the demographic questions and Clance IP Scale. Of those, 3 did not meet selection criteria. Out of the remaining 27 participants, 3 declined an interview and 14 never responded to the researcher’s request for an interview. Finally, participation was strictly voluntary and participants were not penalized in any way for choosing not to participate in any part of the research at any time.

Implementation of the Study

After receiving approval from the Human Subjects Review Boards of the two participating institutions, Smith College and Kalamazoo College, (Appendix A and B), the following process took place to recruit a sample and collect data.

Phase I

The researcher placed an advertisement in the student newspaper at one institution to recruit participants. Newspaper staff then contacted the researcher to write a feature article on the study. Interested students then contacted the researcher via email after seeing the advertisement or article. The researcher also placed fliers on bulletin boards throughout campus to recruit participants. Again, interested students contacted the

researcher via email to participate in Phase I. At the other participating institution, interested students responded to the researcher via email after a professor made an announcement about the study. The researcher was the only person privy to the identities of the potential and actual participants.

Along with the instruments described previously, students received two copies of an informed consent document (Appendices C and D) signed by the researcher. This document described the study's purpose, the risks/benefits of participation, and an assurance of confidentiality. Students were asked to keep one copy of the informed consent document for their records and return the other copy, signed, to the researcher (along with their completed demographic questionnaire and Clance IP Scale) in the provided self addressed stamped envelope. In addition the participants received the phone number, hours, and after hours protocol of seeking services from their campus counseling center if they were distressed from completing any parts of the research documents. At the end of the informed consent letter the student was informed that she might be contacted by the researcher to participate in the next phase of the research. A student who did not want to participate in additional research could indicate that at the end of the letter. Compensation was neither offered by the researcher nor received by the participant for participation in Phase I of the research.

Demographic Questionnaire

By means of the questionnaire (Appendices E and F), the researcher was able to obtain demographic information including: the student's age, year in school, racial identity, sexuality, grade point average in high school and in college, family composition,

and parents' educational backgrounds. This information was useful in exploring the profile of female students who feel like frauds at both participating institutions. The questionnaire was not pilot tested.

In order to measure the degree to which participants felt like frauds, the following instrument was used:

Clance IP Scale

The Clance IP Scale (Appendix G) is an instrument that measures and distinguishes impostors from non-impostors. This measure is based on pre-existing measures used successfully on college populations (Cozzarelli & Major, 1990; Holmes, Kertay, Adamson, Holland & Clance, 1993). In this measurement, participants are asked to rate on a 5-point Likert scale how true the statement is to them. For the purposes of this study, the researcher added a sentence at the beginning of the scale asking participants to answer the questions considering themselves in the academic environment only, as feelings of fraudulence in academia are the focus of the current research. Out of the two existing instruments to measure feelings of fraudulence, the Clance IP Scale has been found to be highly reliable and valid (Cozzarelli & Major; Holmes et al.). Additionally, Holmes et al., has found the Clance IP Scale to be the more sensitive instrument to distinguish between impostors and non- impostors (p. 57). Scoring the scale simply involved summing the numbers that corresponded to the answers the participant circled on the scale.

Phase II

The main study question of this research was: What socializing factors contribute to feelings of fraudulence among high achieving, diverse female undergraduates? The questions explored during the Phase II interviews were:

1. What did women learn from their families and society at large about academic success?
2. When these women academically succeed, what do they feel and think? Why?
3. What are the academic success attribution processes of these women?
4. What role do racism, classism, and sexism play in the genesis or perpetuation of feelings of fraudulence?

After the researcher excluded participants who fell outside of the age range of 18-22 and whose score on the Clance IP Scale was below 61, the researcher identified the potential sub-sample. The researcher sent these individuals a personalized email asking them to participate in an interview. Ten interviews took place. In appreciation for their time, interview participants received a \$5 gift card to a local coffee shop.

The researcher used semi-structured interviews to elaborate on the main questions of the study. The semi-structured interview began with an open-ended inquiry asking the participant to speak about her family. Questions then proceeded into areas that included inquiry into how the participant processes, understands, and attributes her academic success and how, if at all, she feels she has been affected by societal forces such as racism, classism, and sexism. An interview guide (Appendix J) captures the questions asked.

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed in full. The transcriptions were identified by pseudonyms the researcher developed for participants. In addition, the researcher took field notes pre- and post-interview to enrich her understanding of the information provided in the interviews.

Data Analysis

Data collected by the demographic questionnaires was analyzed manually, while data collected during the audio taped interviews was transcribed and then analyzed by the researcher. Transcripts were reviewed to highlight themes under the following areas: how the family may play a role in the genesis or perpetuation of feelings of fraudulence, how the participants process or experience success, and how racism and/or classism contribute to feelings of fraudulence. Transcripts were also analyzed for themes or ideas that had not been targeted by the semi structured interview guide but were nonetheless raised by the participants during the interviews.

The researcher read each transcribed interview multiple times. In each reading, the researcher made notes on the interview itself and on additional sheets of paper. Based off of the notes on the interviews and on the additional papers, the researcher utilized large sheets of paper to chart themes according to topic and across participants; these large-scale representations provided a way to contain the data while also visually representing it as it became clear. Quotes were recorded to illustrate themes and emerging ideas. Participants' quotes and major points were compared to the literature outlined in the literature review to determine areas of similarity and divergence between the participants' comments and the published literature on this subject.

Trustworthiness

The researcher chose two college settings with which she is familiar and where she has been a current and former student. If another researcher was to attempt an identical study at different institutions, it is this researcher's belief that another researcher would uncover similar findings to those that are reflected in this study. However, this researcher's current student status and alumna status at the institutions utilized for this research may inadvertently affected the researcher's reading of and/or rendering of results. To minimize this risk, the researcher discussed findings from the interviews with her research advisor and other trusted professionals in the field of social work.

Feasibility

The study was feasible with the support of the two colleges whose students were interviewed and with the approval of the two colleges' human subjects review boards. Individual professors at both institutions met with the researcher and expressed their interest in and support of the study.

Financial resources were needed to conduct the study. Students who participated in the interview portion of the research were compensated with a \$5 gift card to a local coffee shop as appreciation for their time and input. Other expenses included postage, envelopes, printing paper and ink, electronic recording devices, transcription services (for one interview), and gasoline to and from interviews with participants. The researcher covered these expenses independently. A final non-financial resource needed for implementation of the study was a space in which the interviews could take place, and libraries of the participating institutions and local coffee shops fulfilled that need.

Ethical Issues

It is possible that the researcher's biases may have affected the data and the interpretations of the data. The researcher is an alumna of one of the institutions whose students were questioned for this research, and she is a current student (albeit graduate student) of the other institution whose students were questioned for this research. The researcher's dual role at both institutions was mentioned at the beginning of both informed consent documents. This information may have affected the information the participants shared with the researcher. The researcher's feelings about these two institutions and the students enrolled at the institutions may also have affected her interpretations of the data.

In addition, the researcher was aware that some of the questions had the potential to be distressing for the women who feel like frauds. Each participant was given a document that listed the phone number and location of her campus counseling center, including how to seek help outside of regular business hours. The counseling services of both colleges were informed about the study and both expressed willingness to support the participants with any services they needed. The counseling centers briefed their respective staff members about the study. To minimize distress during the interview, the researcher informed the participants they could skip any question or refuse to continue the interview at any time.

This study represented the comments and experiences of a small sample. As a result of its size, generalizations cannot be made from this study. Also, results from these 10 women cannot be generalized to the entire population of women who feel like frauds.

Also, this study is not representative of all people, or even of all women, who feel like frauds. This study was further limited by the fact that participants only came from 2 different colleges, and both colleges have highly selective admission criteria.

Protection of Human Subjects

This study was conducted with great care for the well-being of participants.

Potential Risk to Participants

Phase I of the study included an informed consent letter each participant read and signed, providing information about the topic of the study and the type of participation one would engage in if she chose to continue in the study. The informed consent letter emphasized that participation in the study was voluntary and one's choice to participate in the study would in no way affect the potential participant's relationship to or standing within her institution. Additionally, this letter informed students of their rights not to answer questions at any time and to request their data or interview not be utilized for the final thesis. None of the participants asked to have their data withdrawn. Also in Phase I, the risk of participants' distress was addressed by making participation in the study optional and by providing contact information for and directions on how to seek counseling services on their campus.

In Phase II, participants were reminded verbally and via the consent form that their participation in the study was voluntary, they could choose to skip questions asked, and they could choose to end the interview at any time. In the same fashion as Phase I, students were provided with information about how to seek services at their college counseling center.

Data Security

In order to ensure participant confidentiality, demographic information, researcher notes, transcripts, and audio files are kept separate from informed consent documents and are identified by number codes rather than names. Any identifying information (such as names of individuals, specific places of employment, cities of residence, and more) were removed or disguised during transcription for use in the final thesis. In accordance with Federal research guidelines, all information gathered during the research (notes, tapes, documents, et cetera) will be maintained in locked cabinets for a three-year period, then destroyed. A professional transcriptionist transcribed one interview, and she signed a confidentiality form (Appendix K) ensuring her commitment to confidentiality.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This study investigates what socializing factors contribute to feelings of fraudulence among high achieving, diverse female undergraduates. This chapter will report the findings of interviews conducted with 10 undergraduate women. The findings will be presented in five major sections: how these female participants understand or experience their academic success, what role, if any, the family plays in the genesis or perpetuation of feelings of fraudulence, how heterosexual dating and relationship dynamics contribute to feelings of fraudulence, how sexism, racism and/or classism contribute to feelings of fraudulence, and finally how the system of academia plays a role in women's feelings of fraudulence.

Internalizing and Understanding Their Success

Definition of Success: Working Hard or Being Happy?

Kayla, 21, speculated on how she would feel if she worked hard in a class that was difficult for her and then achieved a good grade: "I would think I don't deserve the good grade because if I understood it, I wouldn't have to work so hard. If I was good at it I wouldn't have to work so hard. If I deserve a good grade, it shouldn't be much work." Claire, 22, echoed this sentiment and pondered whether she could be smart if her achievement is due to the fact she works hard:

I'm not just a genius! I work *really hard*. I guess I was always afraid that like, well, I only get good grades because I work hard and I'm really a stupid person because I have to work so hard to do well. I believe that a lot. [...] Especially after coming to this school, I feel like I'm not really that smart. I just work really hard.

When asked about what their parents have taught them about success, a surprising majority of the participants, 6, said their parents imparted that being happy is a critical part of success. However, it seemed that parents were pleased when their daughter was both academically successful *and* happy. Renee, 22, explains how this occurs in her family:

A lot of my parents' philosophy was "do what makes you happy." My mom, of course, had high standards [for me]. She wanted me to be the best. She didn't outwardly say anything but it definitely made her happy when I did well. She bragged about it [to friends].

Struggling to Trust Professors' Measures of Success

One unexpected finding was the number of participants, 7, who spoke of their distrust for outside measures of success, particularly the grading system in academia. Although grades are traditionally viewed as how one measures success in academia, these participants spoke of a disconnect between the standard to which they hold themselves and the standard to which their professors hold them. When two different standards exist, says Tessa, 22, the professor's determination of the participant's grade becomes "meaningless":

There's no like solid ground in terms of evaluation—you're kind of looking around, comparing yourself to other people, and I just feel like I can never trust what my professors say. Half the stuff people say in class is not helpful or analytical at all and the prof says, "Interesting comment." And I'm like, "IT WASN'T AN INTERESTING COMMENT!" [...] I don't see in my work what I'm hearing from them and I feel lied to, almost.

Jeanette, 22, recalled an assignment where the professor asked the students to cite three sources in their papers. When she received an A on her paper despite the fact she only cited one source, Jeanette felt “disappointed” because she thought the professor lowered his standards: “If I can get an A with a thing I think is really good and I can get an A with a thing I think is really bad, it becomes meaningless what the A is.”

Unstable Personal Identity Due To Impermanent Success

In the same vein of their spoken distrust of others’ measures of success, 6 participants noted the ways in which their personal identity is affected by their shifting perceptions of success. Jeanette, 22, spoke of how her academic success defines her identity; when she does not succeed, she feels she loses her identity: “Academics is the one thing or one of the few things I’m successful in. So then to do a bad job... if that’s my judge of myself, then to do badly on that is... well, I don’t have that anymore.”

Across the board, the participants (like Bette, 22, below) spoke of an unstable personal identity due to the fact that their paradigm of success is a fluid and finicky state:

My idea of being successful is always changing. Once I’ve achieved that successful thing it’s no longer a success—something like that. Or it feels like there’s always one more step of what I need to do for me to be successful.

Susanna, 22, speaks of success as an unstable concept which makes it difficult for her, she says, to have an identity:

I feel like seeing myself as successful is like—it’s not a very stable concept. I’m not ever like, *Well, in general I’m successful*. There are days where I’m like, *I’ve accomplished things in my life and in general*. But it’s not something that stays. I have a hard time seeing myself outside of the day to day, was I successful today? Or outside of school. Am I a successful person? Depending on what day you catch me, I can say it either way. I feel I don’t necessarily have a stable identity—more so something porous that different reactions from teachers can flow in and

out of. I guess it's much easier for me to say, *Am I successful in sports?* Yes, I feel like I feel I am successful in sports. But am I successful at [school name]? Not as successful as a lot of people I see. So it's hard—it's hard to have an identity.

Madison, 22, speaks about how the unstable state of success affects her view of herself:

Am I successful? It depends on the day. Sometimes I look at myself and think I am really successful. I mean, I've done really well at [school name], I've done some amazing things... But then there are other days when, like, my best friend has a 4 point. There are times when I look at that and I'm like, *I'm not really doing everything I should be doing.* Maybe I didn't push myself as much as I could have. It all kind of depends on what mood I'm in.

Success Attributed to Opportunities or Privilege

Four participants cited opportunity or privilege as the reason or reasons for their success. Although Jeanette, 22, feels separate from the wealth and lineage of Ivy League graduates in her family, she noted she is aware she benefits from her family history of education and affluence:

I saw a college and I was like, *I'm going to college.* It was never like, *Can I get in, do I belong?...* I knew I was going to college. I didn't even pick a safety school. It was like, *I'll apply where I want to go because of course I'll get in.* And that's a privilege coming from a wealthy family and a white family.

Carly, 22, expressed a very similar sentiment when it comes to how her race and class have affected her life:

A lot of why I'm here, even though I may be smart enough to be here—the reason why I specifically am here is not because of me personally but because of the privilege of who I am: of being white and middle class, coming from an upper class history.

When Tessa, 22, spoke about whether or not she views herself as successful, she noted that she has “done a lot” because she had the “opportunities” available to her due to

her “demographic.” Madison, 22, said her academic success is also due to the opportunities she has had:

That’s one of the things I learned on study abroad—how privileged I am... I went to private school K-8... it was cool in my family to sit around and read books... and I received encouragement from people around me. Pieces have been laid out for me that have allowed me to get where I am.

How Messages from the Family Contribute to Feeling Like a Fraud

Almost all of the participants’ primary caregiver/parent had earned at least a bachelor’s degree (9 out of 10) while 5 out of 10 had achieved a master’s degree or higher. Eight participants, across parental education levels, spoke of a pressure to academically succeed that stemmed from messages they received from their families. Five out of 10 participants noted their parents always emphasized high academic performance in the family. Additionally, for Claire, 22, and Susanna, 22, strong females identify their families. For Susanna, the two major caregivers in her life—her mother and maternal aunt—have been high achieving females:

My mom and my aunt are both really, really educated. My mom is a tenured professor. She has her Master’s and her doctorate. My aunt is second under command at [major university library]. It’s females that make our family go. [...] Most kids are like, “Cool—I got into college.” But I will go to grad school because that’s what women in my family do.

Not only did some participants feel they had to perform well in school, but Bette, 22, felt everything revolved around her academic achievement; meeting her family’s high standards was paramount:

I think the grades to my parents were more important than what I actually learned. It was never a said thing; it was always an implied sort of thing. Everything revolved around grades. If I wanted to hang out with my friends, it was only if I got an A on some test or something. [...] There was a certain standard that all the

kids in our family had to fulfill. There was an incentive to not feel really bad about yourself in our family. As long as you were doing well, all was ok.

Four participants characterized their families as competitive; some participants felt that environment helped them reach their goals, while others found the competition stressful. Madison (22) spoke about competition among all 4 siblings in her family, but in contrast to her oldest sister who is “independent and on top of things,” Madison’s *academic* achievement reigns supreme in what one might characterize as a family competition hierarchy:

In our family being academic is really tied into being successful. And like [my sister] is successful in that she’s independent and is on top of things, but at the same time I think she thinks I’m more successful just because I go to this very prestigious school, I’ve traveled all over, and I’ve been accepted into Teach for America. She and I sort of compete for the top level in the family.

All participants noted the fact that, from childhood until current day, compliments from their parents have primarily centered on academic achievement. However, 7 noted that parental compliments only occurred for “big things,” as “good grades were normal.”

Madison, 22, put it like this:

I don’t remember being complimented a ton when I was younger. A lot of times when I brought home like a good report card, [my parents] were like, “Wow, good job.” I wouldn’t get complimented on little random everyday things like doing my homework. That was expected. So they didn’t compliment me on that.

Bette, 22, noted that her participation in dance gave her parents something on which to compliment her because it was a “different” activity for the family:

They complimented me on dance because they didn’t have anything else. Like, if I got a good grade or something, that would just be a normal type of thing, so I didn’t get complimented for that.

The Child that Achieves in the Family: Higher Expectations

All of the participants had at least one sibling. Nine of the 10 participants, an overwhelming majority, noted they are the sibling of the family who achieves academically and at least one of their siblings does not. For the 9 participants who experienced this issue, all but 1 of the participants' underperforming sibling is male. Not only are they the achievers in the family, but the participants spoke of different expectations for them and their lower performing siblings. Thea, 19, comments on this phenomenon occurring in her family:

My parents expect me to do more on my own than my brother. With my brother, my mom always stays right by him when he's doing his homework because she has that expectation that he's going to need help. Whereas with me, it's like, *You know what you have to do. Get it done.*

Higher expectations for the participant than her sibling(s) was a refrain heard in many of the interviews, such as here with Madison, 22:

The expectations for my brother are lower. In some ways, with him, the family is like, *We just want you to finish college.* No one would ever say that to me!

Tessa, 22, the one participant whose underperforming sibling was female, had this to say about differential treatment:

My mom will praise my sister for something that she did, like if she got an 80% on a test. I mean, I don't think my mom ever would have said that was bad [if I received that grade], but I don't know if I would have been praised for that.

Success, Intelligence, and Dating Men

Although the interview guide did not contain any questions that asked the participants how being intelligent or being perceived as such affects their relationships with men, 5 heterosexual participants raised this issue on their own.

Tessa, 22, discussed how she feels that women are expected to be smart to attract a smart man and “for no other reason.” Interacting with men, she says, is difficult for her: “Even though I’m attracted to [men], I just constantly feel I’m not being taken seriously by [them].” Susanna, 22, echoed this sentiment and added to it, noting that intimidating a man with her intelligence is a reality that she and other women her age face in the dating scene:

[If you’re] at a bar talking to a guy and he finds out you go to [school name], all of a sudden it’s like, *Oh—you’re really smart, aren’t you?* [Then] it’s not so much that he’s interested in you and wants to get to know you. It’s a, *You’re really smart, huh? Are you going to make fun of me? Are you going to be more intelligent than me?* I think there’s not a lot of room in the dating scene for intelligent women at this point.

One participant disagreed. Claire, 22, said smart women can “have it all,” especially women of her generation: “[In the past, women were taught that] if you’re high achieving, no man is going to want you. I feel that’s different [now]. I can do what I want in my life and also be married.” Marriage was a goal mentioned by several participants, such as Claire: “If I went to Harvard for grad school and had some amazing job but I didn’t have a family, I don’t think I would consider my life to be successful.”

Madison, 22, wondered how the time and energy she spends on academic endeavors affects her relationships with men and how her achievement may stand in the way of one of her long term goals: marriage.

I’ve done successful things [by society’s standards], but I haven’t dated anyone. There’s that aspect of me that hasn’t been successful. People say it’s because of me doing all these other things. I’ve had people tell me that you can’t like, catch up with me. *You can’t be found in the library, Madison.*

Madison also considers two major societal pressures she feels: the push toward academic achievement and the push toward marriage. From her earliest years, Madison

recalls how getting married and having kids was a “a higher measure of success than succeeding academically.” Furthermore, when she talks to her parents about her hopes for a Ph.D., she feels their “unspoken” concern that she may earn the degree but never marry.

Carly, 22, said she tries to “make it a rule” not to downplay her intelligence with men, but she acknowledges that has affected her chances of dating men: “I can be a really smart girl, but I’m not going to get the guy because I’m not going to act like my IQ just dropped 10 points.” Then Carly considers what relationship, if any, exists between her intellect and her success in the dating arena:

What bothers me is that I can think critically about American history but I’ve only had these 2 relationships... Why am I not...? [...] I haven’t been in a relationship that was equitable [...] and I’ve wondered why a lot of the time. Do I put people off in some way?

Feeling Like a Fraud as Intricately Tied to Being Female

Although this study did not include interviews of men who feel like frauds, many of the women interviewed agreed with Jeanette, 22, who shared that feeling like a fraud is intricately tied to being a woman:

I feel like a lot of these issues [feeling like a fraud] come from or date back to when I started having my period and became like, a sexual being in the eyes of society. How come I started doubting myself at that age when these things happened? These feelings *have* to be connected to being a woman in a way.

The Effects of Unrealistic Expectations of Women

Every participant noted that two major contributing factors to feeling like a fraud include unrealistic expectations of women and stereotypes of women. Whether, as Carly said, “as a woman, you have to fit very precise, very perfect standards,” or, “a woman

can only take up a certain amount of space,” the participants agreed with Jeanette whose comments suggested there are large scale forces acting upon women in particular:

Women feel like frauds because society tells them that they are. Even if they believe in themselves, they know they have to struggle to prove it to others and they may even have to struggle to prove it to themselves.

Other participants like Kayla, 21, quoted below, noted the fact that men and women have distinct and different places in society: “People have their gendered place and anybody who is outside of that construct is somehow abnormal. And men are supposed to be equal with women [...] but that’s not the case. It’s not.” Consequently, when women move “up” and “out” of their place, they may be left feeling like Kayla:

I’m very opinionated and strong and it comes out a lot. When I was younger I would hide that a lot because I didn’t want it to be intimidating. I didn’t want to steal the show. And I think a lot of that had to do with, you know, space. Societal space. And like, men in society just have more space. A lot of times, no matter how much you disagree or agree with it, it’s something that’s just engrained. It’s just engrained in your head that you don’t deserve that. You don’t deserve that kind of recognition and your place is behind and not in front.

The Effects of Female Stereotypes

Carly cited the fact that the media is one of the sources that imparts examples and standards for women to meet. When women deviate from the “average” stereotype portrayed by the media—“decently smart, fairly attractive”—a “caricature” exists that the media will use to “other” the smart woman. No one wants to be the smart girl nobody likes, many of the participants said. Tessa, 22, considered how smart and attractive may be mutually exclusive for women:

I learned very early on I could either be smart or pretty. People always yell at me when I say that. Of course someone can be pretty and smart but you can only play one role at a time. [...] When I go into a bar, I feel I make that choice when I walk in. It’s like, *Well, I’m going to be pretty tonight?* Because some guy is

going to say something I could argue with or respond to but that would make me all these things that aren't attractive.

Tessa goes on to expand on the idea of the social forces that contribute to women feeling like frauds. She notes that while sexism is not as overt as it used to be, powerful notions still exist of what women are supposed to be:

Everything is a social construction. I wonder about the social forces that create this dynamic are kind of like being self-conscious about being a woman who is intelligent academically because those things aren't really supposed to go together. Women my age, my generation, are expected to be smart [but sometimes in school it feels like] "oh now you can cook *and* read" kind of thing. It's like, "you're a great writer... *for a girl.*" And I know that doesn't exist so much anymore (or so people say) but I think it does—it's just more subtle.

Kayla, 21, identifies how socially constructed roles for women make it difficult to fill that role and meet her own goals:

I think societally speaking, women tend to degrade themselves because it's not seen as feminine to be a successful person with drive and focus. Someone who has that [drive and focus] is not feminine in that "having a family" way. And to pursue purely academic things? It's just not a woman's role. I disagree greatly with that but I'd be lying if I didn't say that was something going on with people. I would love to have a family and get married someday. But it's a lot to want all of those things... to be expected, you know, to want certain things... learning how to juggle that all.

Finally, Susanna, 22, wonders how being intelligent limits women in a society that does not have much space for intelligent women:

There's a very strict stereotype [for smart women]. There's not space for other things besides intelligent if you're an intelligent woman. I think that active denial of intelligence might have something to do with that—not knowing who you can be if you're intelligent—if there's room to be anything else—or if anyone will listen to you be anything else.

When Susanna continues thinking about societal space for intelligent women, she reaches the conclusion that intelligence among women can be "dangerous" in a society that still lacks space for more than a few intelligent women:

CEO positions for women are miniscule [...] it's not anything like equal. So we're stuck [...] where's there's nowhere for us to go as intelligent women if that's what we decide to be and proud about it. There's nowhere for us in the working world. Or, if there are only 10 positions and 50 of us [intelligent women]... if there are less jobs for you because you're intelligent, then being intelligent becomes a really, really, really dangerous thing to be.

The Role of Racism and Classism Among Women Who Feel Like Frauds

Isolation in Academic Pursuits

Kayla, 21, one of the women of Color, is also a first generation college student. Bette, 22, another woman of Color (but not a first generation college student), and Kayla spoke of the fact that they received little to no help from their parents in their academic pursuits. From Kayla: "My mother didn't feel like she had much to offer me in that way [when it came to academics]. Her perceived weakness in academics prevented her from helping me. She wouldn't help me because she was afraid she would mess up my work." Bette spoke of the same phenomenon occurring in her family; she added that her parents supported her decision to become an English major but they "didn't have much to contribute to it—they can't and don't contribute to the conversation if I'm talking about something I'm doing." Jeanette, 22, spoke about the fact that she does not speak to her college educated parents about her American Studies major, as "it's alienating to them [...] They're confused [by what I study] and I study topics they find slightly threatening to their identities [...] So I don't bring it up much."

First Generation Families: Added Pressure

Two women of Color participants (Bette and Renee) are first generation American and one (Jeanette) is second generation American. Two of these three

participants explicitly spoke about expectations or pressure to succeed academically due to a family history of overcoming adversity. From Bette:

Being a first generation American has added a lot of pressure, definitely, to me. I feel pressure more from what I think their expectations are and stuff. I think about how both of my parents had a really hard time growing up [...] They both had really hard childhoods and they still manage to succeed. And so I feel like I've been pretty fortunate in my upbringing and stuff. It's like the least I can do, I guess. They expect me to do well because it's a way to show appreciation for everything they've given me. It's like, *We've given you so many opportunities—if you don't take advantage of them or make the most of them you're just being really selfish and not being grateful.*

Another participant, Thea, 19, who is third generation American, noted that education was a large part of her family's immigration story; even during a difficult adjustment to the United States, the children of the family went to secondary school and college, "and that was a big deal." Thea also wondered if the pressure she feels to have a "practical" major may be related to her family's emphasis on learning skills that will be attractive to employers.

Without a Home Base: Being Unaccepted By or Needing To Prove Membership Within the Racial Community

Three of the women of Color speculated on whether or not their feelings of being "out of place" in academia may be related to feeling "out of place" within their own racial group. From Bette:

I've never felt accepted into the Chinese American world. Sometimes I feel I'm not Chinese enough. I still remember the time I went to go join the Chinese American Association [here at school]. I remember one girl kind of made fun of me because I couldn't really speak Chinese. It's weird to feel separated from the general culture who thinks you're Chinese but then the Chinese people don't really accept you. Maybe that's one reason I feel kind of strange being at [this school] sometimes.

Kayla, who is biracial and bisexual, spoke of “judgment” she has received from others who want to put her in a category in which she feels she does not belong. She wonders how being pigeonholed by others may have affected her sense of self:

I don't look Latina so a lot of times I've felt like I had to prove I am because people don't believe me. Being biracial and bisexual—with these identities—I have these things that are not 'normal.' People would put me in a box and I would say, *Wait—no. I'm not. I'm not part of that. I'm not this cookie cutter shape you made me. I am something greater than that—more complex than that.* I started to think if I'm being misread in those ways, how else am I being misunderstood? How am I misunderstanding myself based on the constructs I've been forced to accept?

Covering The Slack and Fitting In: Dealing With Being Lower Middle Class

Carly and Madison, the two participants from a lower middle class background, recalled how growing up poorer than their peers affected them. From Madison:

We didn't have as much money as a lot of my friends had. In many ways I felt I needed to cover that slack. I think that's part of the reason why being successful is so important to me. I have this huge fear that one day I will wake up and all of our money will be gone. I'm trying to lay out a path so I will be able to recover if that ever happens.

Despite the fact they did not have the financial resources of their neighbors, both Carly and Madison were raised in affluent towns. Their remarks about growing up in an environment of wealth suggest these women felt out of place even within their neighborhoods. Being smart and successful was one way to “fit in.” From Madison:

Growing up in an affluent town where all my parents' friends are doctors or work at the major university in town, I had to do some other things in order to fit in. So if I was academically smart, that made me feel like I was more on equal ground even if I wasn't on equal ground money wise.

Carly spoke of feeling resentful that her family stood out among the “ostentatious” displays of wealth that she says now characterizes the town in which she

grew up. Similar to the comments from Madison, Carly's way of fitting in was to academically achieve: "The whole attitude of the town was that whatever you have, you have to show off. It's like I had to be perfect because my parents had me to show off." Carly, a writer for her town newspaper during her high school years, recalled how uncomfortable she would feel when others in the town "noticed" her through her writing. The attention didn't "settle" well:

I would feel like, *Oh my God, they're noticing me! I just want to get out of here.* I just knew [the town] was a place where I didn't belong... [In that town, I vacillated between] sucking it up and working really hard to fit in and trying as hard as I could to stay out of sight.

One might wonder how this tension between fitting in and staying out of sight parallels Carly's process in academia.

The System of Academia as the Locus of Discomfort

A surprising half of the women interviewed identified that the system of academia, the environment and its rules and mores, may have something to do with their feelings of fraudulence. Whether they noted how academia is a "reward based system" or a "hierarchy" in which they felt out of place, participants like Susanna, 22, below, called out the system for its faults:

All colleges—even women's colleges—run on a patriarchal system and it's that system which makes us feel like frauds. There has to be a best, which means there has to be a worst, right? Best and worst, even if it's all women—someone's gotta be the worst, you know? That's the struggle—the struggle is always I'm not the worst but I feel like the worst so what does that mean? I would still have fraudulent feelings at an all female school if it was based on a grading system where there is a top and a bottom. [...] In that system, there never really has been space for women or other races but they had to put up with us because we are—we have wombs, and that's what they need us for. I guess that's it, if it's broken way down. So I guess, if there was never a spot for us, now that we're making a

spot for ourselves, it makes sense that even that spot would feel a little bit not like our skin. My comfort doesn't translate into this system and its language. That means I'll always feel a bit like a fraud because I am. I am a fraud. I sort of worry if women start feeling comfortable in [academia]... I'll stick to being a fraud, thanks.

Susanna continues by examining her place in the hierarchy of the academic world:

As a girl I have always been taught to be quiet and perfect—don't be loud about it, stuff like that. Which I guess in turn makes me think women shouldn't be smart, shouldn't be successful, shouldn't be in certain places, maybe not the highest echelons of the academic world. So when I'm up there, when I'm trying for that, I feel like my success is not ok.

When talking about whether or not she belongs at her prestigious college, Jeanette spoke of the education system as what doesn't belong: "It's not like *I* don't belong here. It's like *this* doesn't belong. This education system in society is an unfair and immoral system that is based on a racist and sexist history and I'm benefiting from it. I just don't feel happy or comfortable about it."

The system of academia also feels exclusionary to Thea, 19, whose belief in God, she says, makes her feel out of place within the academic environment:

In an academic arena, it's just that religion is... it's almost taboo. It's like, *Don't talk about it because they believe in science*. It's hard because I can't share that big part of myself [in school]. If I were to tell my professors that I believe in God and I'm a Christian they would probably go, *Well, she's an idiot, so...*

Summary

The data presented in this chapter reflect the experiences and feelings of the 10 women interviewed for this research. Differences existed in age, race, class, family composition and numerous other characteristics among the participants. Despite these differences, the participants interviewed were consistent in reporting that in various ways,

they have been socialized to feel like frauds. Whether it has been through implicit or explicit messages they have received from their families or society at large through its notions about gender, class, or race, these women have internalized notions of themselves that are inconsistent with objective evidence of their intelligence and worth.

The findings of this research indicate that it is important to first consider how women who feel like frauds understand and experience their academic success. When defining success, 7 participants of this study noted that success is working hard and “being academic”; the other 3 participants spoke of achieving happiness as the primary definition of success. Asked if they consider themselves successful, most of the participants were reluctant to give a definitive yes or no answer due to their worldview of the complexity of success. Because they have to work hard in order to academically achieve, five participants said they are not successful or smart. Four participants attributed their success to opportunities or privilege.

When considering how the participants understand or internalize their academic success, this research found that the majority of participants, 9 out of 10, connect their personal overall success to how well and how often they achieve academically. Because their view of themselves is tied to their academic achievement, most of the participants spoke of having an unstable identity. Whether they cited an inflated grading system (2 participants) or nepotism (2 participants) as contributing factors to their success, many participants cited a lack of solid ground on which they feel their success stands.

This research also found that implicit and explicit messages from families of origin played a role in the participants’ feelings of fraudulence. Eight participants, regardless of their parents’ education levels, spoke of a pressure to succeed academically

that stemmed from messages they received from their families. Six participants characterized their families as competitive. All participants noted the fact that historically to the present day, compliments from their parents have primarily centered around academic achievement. Seven participants noted the fact that they are the child who academically achieves in their family and at least one of their siblings consistently underperforms academically. Nine of the 10 participants spoke of their parents holding different, higher expectations for them than the other kids in the family.

Third, half of the participants identified that heterosexual dating and relationship dynamics play a role in their feelings of fraudulence. Many of the women spoke of two desires: to get married and to achieve academically. These women questioned if high academic achievement compromised their ability to realize their goal of marriage.

Every participant identified that expectations and stereotypes associated with being female and the public status of women in this society are two major contributing factors in the genesis and perpetuation of their feelings of fraudulence.

Next, all of the women of Color and women from lower middle class backgrounds spoke of how racism and classism have affected their feelings about themselves in academia. Among the 5 women of Color participants, 2 are first generation American and 1 is second generation. Their family history of immigration and the family's associated success in the face of great difficulty, they said, added to the pressure they received from their family to succeed. Two of the women of Color spoke of feeling unaccepted by or uncomfortable within their own racial minority community; they noted how that dynamic contributes to their feeling "out of place" in academia when they lack a place within their racial community. Feeling misread or misunderstood by the dominant culture is another

factor contributing to feelings of fraudulence identified by the women of Color interviewed for this research.

The 2 participants of lower middle class backgrounds each spoke of different factors they believe contribute to their feelings of fraudulence as connected to their economic level. For one woman, achieving academically allowed her to “fit in” when her class status threatened to push her out of the dominant culture. The other participant from a lower middle class upbringing noted the way in which her academic achievement provided something for her parents to “show off” when they did not have the financial resources to parade among the affluence surrounding them.

Finally, half of the participants articulated how, in different ways, the system of academia contributes to their feelings of fraudulence.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate what socializing factors contribute to feelings of fraudulence among high achieving, diverse female undergraduates. Five major findings of this study include: 1) The identities of the participants are closely tied to their academic success; 2) Familial messages about academic success play a role in feelings of fraudulence; 3) Heterosexual dating and relationship dynamics contribute to feelings of fraudulence among the heterosexual participants; 4) Sexism, racism, and classism contribute to feelings of fraudulence; and 5) Aspects of the system of academia contribute to feelings of fraudulence. This chapter examines the relationship of the findings to previous research and literature.

Included in this chapter is a discussion of the following themes: 1) The existing literature does not adequately cover the ways in which the identities of undergraduate women are tied to academic achievement. Further, the existing research has not adequately explored the attribution finding of this study, which is that half of the participants attributed their academic success to opportunities and/or privilege; 2) This study supported parts of existing literature on the ways in which families influence feelings of fraudulence. However, findings from this research indicate a “new” type of family dynamic—one where the woman who feels like a fraud is the high achieving sibling of the family; 3) In the heterosexual dating scene, being an intelligent woman

challenges women's hopes to marry. Existing literature and this study elucidate how competing interests to achieve and marry are met with difficulty and contribute to feelings of fraudulence; 4) This study supported much, but not all, of the existing literature on the ways in which sexism contributes to feelings of fraudulence. Interestingly, findings from this study did not support any of the findings of previous studies that considered how racism and classism contribute to feelings of fraudulence; Finally, 5) Much of the existing research on the ways in which the system of academia contributes to feelings of fraudulence is supported by this study. However, more research is needed that examines how feeling like a fraud may be related to feeling guilty about or uncomfortable with benefiting from exclusionary societal forces, including but not limited to racism and classism. This chapter will conclude with implications for clinical social work practice and suggestions for further research on this issue.

This study found that the frequency and degree of the participants' academic achievement had a major impact on their identities and sense of self. Shaw and Edwards (1997) and Scott-Jones and Clark (1986) explored the issue of academic self-concept among boys and girls and found one's academic self-concept influences one's actions and view of self. Similar to the literature from Shaw and Edwards and Scott-Jones and Clark, participants of this study spoke of academic success being an "impermanent" state and that impermanence leads to an unstable personal identity.

Cozzarelli and Major's (1990) research indicated a need to understand the connection between self-esteem and feelings of fraudulence. However, the findings of this study indicated that one may want to take a broader look at what is influencing the self-esteem of women who feel like frauds, as a dizzying number of socializing forces

exist that contribute to these feelings. Tessa asserted that approaching why women feel like frauds from a stance of examining women's self-esteem ignores larger societal forces at work, particularly male hegemony.

Research by Clance & Imes (1978) indicated that women who feel like frauds attribute their ability to perform successfully in a variety of tasks to "temporary causes" such as luck or chance. This study refuted those findings. When asked, half of the participants of this study attributed their success to opportunities they have had due to their economic or social status and the privilege that accompanies their economic and social position. None of the participants identified that luck or chance contribute to their success, but several questioned whether nepotism or an inflated grading system inherent to academia play a role in their academic achievement. This finding is particularly interesting, as little consideration has been paid to women who feel like frauds but attribute their success to opportunities or privilege. The overwhelming majority of existing research on the attribution processes of women who feel like frauds indicates that women attribute their success to luck, chance, or other temporary causes.

This researcher found few studies that have considered how the identities of many college females are bound to the frequency and degree of their academic achievement. As the years of 18 to 22 is a period of time when identity development continues to take place, the connection between identity and academic achievement seems like a prime issue to study. Also, when exploring how the identities of college women are closely tied to their academic achievement, it seems prudent to consider that it is "normal" for 18- to 22-year-olds to base a portion, or possibly much, of their identity on how well and how often they achieve academically. At this age, many women, especially high achieving

women, have not been known for other characteristics. One might argue that fact is problematic in itself.

One must also consider how the demands of being a student at a prestigious institution, such as the participants of this research, affects women's academic self-concepts. Many of the women who attend prestigious colleges were the highest achievers at their high schools; upon entering college, many of these same women are faced with a lower academic, or even social, status. Although that phenomenon was not discussed by any of the participants of this research, it is an issue to consider among this age and specialized population.

This study found that familial messages about academic success play a role in the genesis and perpetuation of feelings of fraudulence. Clance's (1985) research on four key family elements that may contribute to feelings of fraudulence was partially supported by this study. Many of this study's participants experienced a family dynamic outlined by Clance—a family in which adult caregivers conveyed to the child that it is important to be intelligent and successful with little effort. Other participants of this study noted that rarely or never did family members praise them for their academic accomplishments. However, this research directly disputes the first family element Clance cites as a possible contributor to feelings of fraudulence. None of this study's participants spoke of feeling like their academic abilities were atypical for their family, race, or gender. In fact, 4 of the 10 participants of this study noted how academic achievement is a cornerstone, identifying characteristic of their families. Interestingly, maintaining that tradition may be one major source of stress or factor contributing to women's feelings of fraudulence.

This study also partially supported findings from Clance & Imes (1978) in that 4 of 10 participants noted how familial messages about academic achievement have contributed to their feelings of fraudulence. Carly in particular spoke of frequently receiving messages from her family that she was an outstanding academic achiever and could do everything with ease. Claire, Susanna and Bette also found themselves questioning their intelligence due to the fact they have to work hard or study to achieve. When a woman has been told by her family that she need not work hard to achieve, Clance and Imes say impostor feelings surface when she finds she must. Comments from Carly, Claire, Susanna, and Bette supported this idea.

This study supported the results from King & Cooley (1995) that found a family environment that emphasizes achievement is associated with higher IP scores. Eight of the participants of this study spoke about “pressure” to academically succeed that originated from their families. However, almost an equal number of participants, 6, noted how their families also emphasized that success entails personal happiness. Further, most of this study’s participants noted that most of the compliments they have received from their families have centered on their academic achievements, which lends further credence to King and Cooley’s conclusion.

One dramatic new finding, heretofore not elucidated in existing literature, surfaced in this study. Nine of the 10 participants of this study identified that they are the sibling within their immediate family who is academically high achieving and one or more of the participants’ siblings is academically low achieving. Associated with this occurrence, the participants noted that their family holds much higher expectations for them than their lower achieving sibling(s). One wonders how the experience of being the

one “achiever” among the siblings in her family affects a young woman’s burgeoning sense of self and her ability to internalize her academic success.

Next, this study found that heterosexual dating and relationship dynamics contribute to feelings of fraudulence among heterosexual participants. Such a finding is consistent with writings from Bell (1989), Chodorow (1974) and Clance et al. (1995). Six of the 8 heterosexual participants of this study spoke about marriage as a personal goal for their future. The tension between the desire to achieve and the desire to marry a man was articulated by many of the women in this research. Clance et al. put forth that feeling like a fraud and attributing achievement to sources other than one’s own skill is a way to alleviate the tension between who one is (bright, accomplished) and who one needs to be (passive? average?) in order to “function”—or, in this case, marry. Six participants spoke about the fact they have had very few romantic relationships and/or have frequently “lost out” on a love interest when he picked a less academically inclined female as a mate. Echoing sentiments from Bell’s study, participants felt pride for their academic achievements but feared the “social isolation” that often accompanies women’s success.

Next, it is the view of this researcher that the existing literature on the impostor phenomenon is lacking in its consideration of the ways in which racism and classism contribute to feelings of fraudulence; one aim of this study was to address this hole in existing literature. In this study’s findings the researcher found sexism, racism, and classism contribute to feelings of fraudulence, but of these three “isms,” the relationship between sexism and the impostor phenomenon has been most widely considered. Researchers (Bell, 1989) have considered the experience of “minorities,” noting how

“minorities [...] are aware of the factors of success in the system. [They know] success is not tied to individual effort—class, race, status, and opportunities play a role. [It is this knowing that may contribute to] their struggle to take credit for their success” (p. 123). The findings of this research support and expand upon Bell’s statement. In this study, the women of Color participants were not alone in naming social forces as factors for success in academia. Over three quarters of this study’s participants (which included White women) either named or alluded to the fact that sexism, racism, and classism contribute to their feelings about themselves, their social positions, and intellectual ability within the academic environment. Further research on women who feel like frauds should consider how one’s awareness of privilege and oppression contribute to feelings of fraudulence, particularly in the academic environment.

Findings from this study supported the research from Chodorow (1974), Clance and Imes (1978), and McIntosh (1985). As Chodorow did, this study’s participants voiced the tension between success and femininity, citing the ways in which intelligence and attractiveness may be mutually exclusive and how societal space may not exist for intelligent women to be anything other than intelligent. This study’s participants spoke from their own personal experiences on this subject, noting that their success with dating stands in stark contrast to their academic achievements. The women in this study did not hesitate to wonder aloud if their academic achievements have affected their romantic prospects; many believed, albeit with sadness, that the former has negatively affected the latter.

McIntosh (1985) considered the ways in which feelings of fraudulence among high achieving women indicate that women have internalized misogynistic value systems

that have taught women they are incompetent or illegitimate in spheres of power and public life. Many of the participants of this study spoke to this point. These participants expressed the power of social messages they have received: “We feel like frauds because society tells us we are.” This is the point of Clance and Imes (1978). Participants of this study identified that intense pressure exists to fit standards; being female and intelligent bucks many widely societal notions of females. Further, the participants named the fact that as women, they have “gendered places” they are not supposed to leave. “Ascending” into high academic achievement threatens a felt social system.

Interestingly, this research did not support Clance’s (1985) consideration of how feelings of fraudulence among women of Color may function as a way for women of Color to stay “humble” and “not differentiate.” None of the participants of this study, including the women of Color, identified or suggested that feeling like a fraud was in any way functional for them. Any commonality among the women of Color on this subject centered around their comments about how isolating their achievements can be and how difficult it is to feel high expectations from one’s own family, a family that has consistently achieved in the face of great adversity (a phenomenon particularly found among first generation American families).

Considering now more of the existing literature on feelings of fraudulence among women of Color, Lindstrom & Van Sant (1986) is another study whose findings were unsupported by this research. Lindstrom & Van Sant found that pressure among peers in minority groups leads high achieving members of the minority groups to adopt feelings of fraudulence as a functional tool to “fit in.” None of the participants of this study spoke about such a phenomenon holding true for them. What is of great interest to this writer is

how many of the studies of people of Color and the Impostor Phenomenon have characterized that one “takes on” feeling like a fraud as a functional tool. In contrast, women of Color participants of this study discussed several possible heretofore unstudied factors contributing to their feelings of fraudulence, such as: isolation in academic pursuits (no help from parents), the added pressure of membership in a first generation American family and the associated expectation to succeed in line with the family’s history of overcoming adversity, and the challenges associated with being unaccepted by one’s racial community. They considered how feeling out of place in academia may mimic these their experiences within their own racial communities.

This study also did not support the findings of Lindstrom and Van Sant’s (1986) consideration of how individuals from low-income backgrounds may struggle with the ways in which academic achievement may “elevate” them out of their economic group. None of this study’s participants from lower middle class backgrounds spoke to this point, but results may have been different if the participants came from less affluent backgrounds than lower middle class. Regardless, these participants noted the ways in which academic success was actually very functional for them: it allowed them to “cover the slack” when the family fell on difficult financial times, it allowed them to feel protected from a future of economic want, and it helped them to “fit in” among peers who were wealthy *and* intelligent. However, these participants noted the ways in which their family’s economic status contributed to their feelings of being “out of place” in the neighborhood community. These feelings were replicated in the academic environment.

Congruent with previous literature (Bell, 1990; McIntosh, 1985, 1989; Scott-Jones & Clark, 1986) participants of this study identified how aspects of the system of

academia contribute to their feelings of fraudulence. Although Bell wrote about working environments that are frequently dominated by men, Bell's research noted the ways in which the system "exploits, disempowers, and discriminates against women" (p. 90). Participants of this study identified that academia works similarly. Tessa, for example, noted that "all women probably feel like frauds in academia" in part due to gender-based notions of what women should be (pretty, but not smart) that are supported and implicitly passed on in academia. Scott-Jones and Clark addressed this, identifying how the biases and prejudices of society make their way into schools. It is in schools where kids learn the society's norms, values, and ways of interacting. Further, it is in schools, Scott-Jones & Clark say, "women first learn society values men and kids of Color learn society values Whites" (p. 523).

Beyond being an implicit socializing force of sexism and racism, participants of this study identified how the system of academia is a hierarchy in which women have been socialized to believe they do not belong. This was one of the major points of McIntosh, 1985. Susanna articulated this when she spoke about being "taught" to be "quiet and perfect" as a woman, which led her to think women should not be in certain places—"not the highest echelons of the academic world." The academic system where there is a "best and worst," a "top and a bottom," contributes to her discomfort in the system. Susanna says her non-hierarchical "way of being doesn't translate into this [academic] system and its language. That means I'll always feel a but like a fraud [in it] because I am." McIntosh (1989) wrote about how hierarchical systems, such as academia, force women to adopt isolating "modes of discourse." McIntosh found women prefer placing themselves within a "level network" of others and it is "the social

construction of organizing people into hierarchies” that leaves many women feeling like frauds. This study supported McIntosh’s claims.

Beyond their discomfort with the hierarchical nature of the academic system, participants like Jeanette and Thea discussed aspects of academia that contribute to their feeling like fakes or frauds, and these aspects are under considered in existing literature. Jeanette noted the ways in which she benefits from an education system that is based on an “unfair and immoral system” where White privilege, racism and classism assist some people and prevent others from entering the system. Because she is aware of these forces at work and she feels she is benefiting from them, she says, “I feel in the biggest sense a fraud. I won through a rigged race.” Existing research does not consider how the social consciousness of women who feel like frauds may underpin much of their fraudulent feelings.

Finally, Thea noted the ways in which academia feels exclusionary to her, especially when it comes to the system’s dismissal of her closely-held religious beliefs. Research is lacking in this area as well; no studies have been found that discuss the impact of specific exclusionary characteristics of higher education.

Limitations of the Study

It is important to note the limitations of this research. Due to the fact this study was completed at two small, highly selective colleges with a small sample, it is not generalizable to the general population. The sample included a narrow age range as well. One may discover different findings interviewing participants of a different age range or participants from institutions other than the two this researcher utilized. Next, the

students interviewed here do not represent all undergraduate college students, nor do they represent the diverse experiences and views of the undergraduate students at their respective colleges. The sample is also comprised exclusively of women, so results cannot be generalized to men. Also, as this was a non-clinical sample, results cannot be generalized to clinical settings.

Other limitations pertain to the specific instrument used to measure the degree to which potential participants feel like frauds. Although the Clance IP Scale has been empirically tested and found to be the more sensitive instrument among the two tools available for measuring this phenomenon, it cannot be entirely fail-safe. It may not also fully capture the experiences of women of Color or women from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Further, the sample of ten women limits generalizability. As such, the results collected from the interviews reflect the viewpoints and experiences of only these ten women. Another limitation to a qualitative study is researcher bias. This researcher began this work with preexisting notions about this phenomenon and these notions may have shaped the analysis and presentation of the findings.

Despite these limitations, this study considered socializing factors that contribute to feelings of fraudulence among high achieving, diverse female undergraduates that have been neglected in some of the previous research. Findings from this study have made new contributions to the research on feeling like a fraud.

Recommendations for Future Research

Thoughtful, in-depth consideration of the unique experiences of women of Color and working class women who feel like frauds seems an appropriate and needed next step for research. Very few studies to date have explored how racism and classism contribute to feelings of fraudulence among minority populations, and this study was simply a start to such an effort. Further supporting the need for additional research on this issue is the fact that this study did not support the findings of other studies that considered the effects of racism and classism on the Impostor Phenomenon.

Future research should also consider how a woman's discomfort with the way in which she benefits from exclusionary social forces contribute to feelings of fraudulence. Women in this study expressed an awareness of the ways in which their position at a prestigious college has been assisted by a history (and arguably, a current existence of) racist, sexist, classist practices. One part of feeling like a fraud includes feeling out of place, and if many of the women who feel like frauds feel this way in part due to their sadness or shame about how they arrived at their social position, more research needs to consider this concern.

Also, this study uncovered an interesting new finding that warrants additional attention in future research. The fact that none of this study's participants attributed their success to temporary factors such as luck or chance refutes the findings of the majority, if not all, of the existing studies on this phenomenon. Understanding the Impostor Phenomenon would be enriched by further exploration of attribution processes of women, an exploration that includes a consideration of how women make sense of their privilege and early social and economic opportunities.

Next, although the existing literature has been thoughtful in its consideration of the ways in which messages from families contribute to feelings of fraudulence, this study offered a “new” family scenario that has not been identified in any of the existing literature—a family in which the woman who feels like a fraud is the high achiever in the family and one or more of her siblings is low achieving. Pressures or dynamics unique to this scenario may be interesting to consider further.

Although this study focused on the way women are socialized to feel like frauds, obviously not every high achieving woman feels like a fraud. A study that considers this phenomenon from its opposite—women who do *not* feel like frauds—may provide interesting counter material that challenges many of the points and findings of this study. If women are socialized to feel like frauds, how is it that not every woman feels like one? When do women feel deeply authentic and genuine? Does this occur in academia? How have women successfully combated these feelings? All of these questions would add interesting information to the limited canon of research on this issue.

Implications for Clinical Practice

This study has important implications for clinical practice. First, many women who feel like frauds never seek mental health treatment due to the pervasive silence around this issue, especially in academia. Few high achieving women are aware that other high achieving women also feel like frauds. The isolation alone is difficult for women, but feeling like a fraud compounded with isolation becomes debilitating for many women. The symptomology with which IP women may present may initially seem depressive or anxious: problems with sleeping, social problems, deteriorating grades,

crying spells, and an impaired ability to engage in activities of daily life may be just a few of the presenting concerns. In fact, two of the participants of this study spoke of receiving diagnoses of learning disorders when feeling like a fraud became crippling. Misdiagnoses could lead to unnecessary medication trials and a host of other clinically inappropriate interventions.

College mental health providers and faculty and staff members of colleges and universities can alleviate much of the isolation associated with these feelings by engaging in dialogues around this issue. Awareness that others feel similarly—especially if “others” include women she respects and admires—is a giant first step toward challenging these feelings.

Finally, college mental health providers must also be aware that feeling like a fraud is a real, prevalent issue for high achieving women. Further, service providers must be aware that prevalence of these feelings may not indicate women are suffering from low self-esteem. As this study noted, it is possible that the roots of this phenomenon exist in an entire social system that socializes women to feel this way. These feelings may not originate within the woman in some sort of organic way; they are likely imposed from the outside. Approaching these feelings from what is wrong within the woman may do additional harm to the woman’s already tenuous sense of self.

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Appendix A

Human Subjects Review Approval Letter from Smith College



Smith College Institutional Review Board
Northampton, MA 01063

Date: November 19, 2007

To: Sara Wiener, 'A08
Smith College School for Social Work

From: Phil Peake, Co-Chair
Smith College Institutional Review Board

RE: HSR Proposal # 0708-025 - MSW thesis: "Exploring how socialization contributes to feelings of fraudulence among diverse female undergraduates"

Approved: November 14, 2007

Expiration: November 14, 2008

Research Adviser of Record: Efrosini Kokaliari, SSW

EXPEDITED Review - The Smith College Institutional Review Board has reviewed and approved the research protocol referenced above. Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form. You must retain signed consent documents for at least three years past completion of the research activity.

Amendments: If you want to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms, or subject population), all changes must be submitted to the IRB for approval. Please contact the IRB for Change of Protocol forms.

Renewal: Protocols receive IRB approval for a maximum of one year. **You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.** Each individual protocol approval letter has a stated expiration date. Please contact the IRB for the necessary forms for Continuing Review. Requests for renewal of approval must be submitted to the IRB at least one month prior to the approval expiration date.

Completion: You are required to notify the IRB when your study is completed.

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Appendix B

Human Subjects Review Approval Letter from Kalamazoo College

the farther journey



13 November 2007

Sara Wiener
75 Elm St Apt C4
Worcester, MA

Dear Ms. Wiener,

I have reviewed your research proposal entitled, "Exploring how socialization contributes to feelings of fraudulence among diverse female undergraduates." The research methods you propose are in compliance with the guidelines of the Kalamazoo College IRB, and the research is approved. You may initiate the project as described in the proposal at any time. If you have any questions or require further clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laura Lowe Furge'.

Laura Lowe Furge, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board, Chair
Associate Professor of Chemistry

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form, Phase I, Smith College

Dear Smith College student:

My name is Sara Wiener and I am a second year Master's degree student in the Smith College School for Social Work conducting a study on undergraduate women's experiences feeling "out of place," like an impostor or fraud in college.

You are invited to participate in this research study. The purpose of the study is to collect stories of diverse undergraduate college women who have felt like frauds in academic environments. The study is designed to gather in depth information from women who feel this way and the stories are expected to shed light on the ways women are socialized to feel like frauds. Ultimately, this research will be published as my Master's thesis and may be used in the future for presentations to counselors, therapists, or high school or college employees. Before the publication as my thesis, this research may be the subject of informal talks with my colleagues in the field of social work.

If you decide to volunteer for this study, you would be asked to answer a few questions regarding your demographic information and some information about your family such as the number of siblings you have (if any), their gender(s), your socioeconomic level growing up, etc. You would also complete a brief questionnaire that measures feelings of fraudulence. Answering the demographic information and questionnaire will not take longer than 15 minutes. If you find any questions too personal or if you simply do not want to answer a question you may skip it. Over fifty students will likely complete this part of the research. Follow up research will be conducted. Those participants who meet the criteria to participate in the second phase of the research study will be asked if they would like to participate in an interview that will not exceed one hour. This study ends in July of 2008.

Again, to participate in this study you would be asked to answer a few demographic questions and complete a questionnaire that measures feelings of fraudulence. This study does not involve any physical risk to you. However, your participation could bring more attention to feelings you have that might be uncomfortable, including, but not limited to shame, sadness, and frustration. Some questions posed or issues raised may be embarrassing or remind you of unhappy past experiences. If you become upset in any way as a result of participating in this study, counseling is available at the Smith College Counseling Center at 413-585-2840. While it is possible that you will not benefit directly from this study, the information you provide will add to the overall knowledge about high achieving women who feel like frauds in academic environments. The results of this study can be made available to interested research

participants. Respondents are welcome to contact the study investigator for more information.

The information you provide for this study will be kept strictly confidential. To protect your privacy, your name will not be associated with your study materials or with the study's research findings. The findings of this study will be interpreted and reported only on a group basis with no identification of specific individuals and all information about individuals will be held in confidence. I will store the data, locked, in my possession for 3 years, after which time it will be destroyed.

There will be no cost to you for participating in this study, beyond the time and effort required to complete the procedures described elsewhere in this consent form. You will receive no financial compensation for your participation in this part of the study. However, some people might qualify to participate in the second part of the study. Should you meet the criteria and should you wish to participate you may indicate your interest at the end of the questionnaire. A \$5 gift certificate to a local coffee shop will be provided to those who are invited and participate in a confidential interview with the researcher.

The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study *at any time* without affecting your relationship with the investigators of this study or Smith College. Your decision will not result in any loss or benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely from the interview at any point during the process; additionally, you have the right to request that the interviewer not use any of your interview material up to that point.

You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me, Sara Wiener, at swiener@email.smith.edu or by telephone at 508-849-5600 ext 354. If you like, a summary of the results of the study will be sent to you. If you have any other concerns about your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the investigator, you may contact Phil Peake, Chair, the Smith College Institutional Review Board at (413) 585-3914.

Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research subject for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep, along with any other printed materials deemed necessary by the study investigator.

I have read and understood the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Subject's Name (print): _____

Subject's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Investigator's Signature: _____

Date: _____

FOLLOW-UP RESEARCH:

Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up research study at a later date?

YES ___ NO ____

If so, what is the best way to reach you?

Email Address: _____ Phone Number: _____

Appendix D

Informed Consent Form, Phase I, Kalamazoo College

Dear Kalamazoo College student:

My name is Sara Wiener and I am a 2003 graduate of Kalamazoo College now in my final year of my Masters in Social Work at Smith College. I am conducting a study on undergraduate women's experiences feeling "out of place," like an impostor or fraud in college.

You are invited to participate in this research study. The purpose of the study is to collect stories of diverse undergraduate college women who have felt like frauds in academic environments. The study is designed to gather in depth information from women who feel this way and the stories are expected to shed light on the ways women are socialized to feel like frauds. Ultimately, this research will be published as my Master's thesis and may be used in the future for presentations to counselors, therapists, or high school or college employees. Before the publication as my thesis, this research may be the subject of informal talks with my colleagues in the field of social work.

If you decide to volunteer for this study, you would be asked to answer a few questions regarding your demographic information and some information about your family such as the number of siblings you have (if any), their gender(s), your socioeconomic level growing up, etc. You would also complete a brief questionnaire that measures feelings of fraudulence. Answering the demographic information and questionnaire will not take longer than 15 minutes. If you find any questions too personal or if you simply do not want to answer a question you may skip it. Over fifty students will likely complete this part of the research. Follow up research will be conducted. Those participants who meet the criteria to participate in the second phase of the research study will be asked if they would like to participate in an interview that will not exceed one hour. This study ends in July of 2008.

Again, to participate in this study you would be asked to answer a few demographic questions and complete a questionnaire that measures feelings of fraudulence. This study does not involve any physical risk to you. However, your participation could bring more attention to feelings you have that might be uncomfortable, including, but not limited to shame, sadness, and frustration. Some questions posed or issues raised may be embarrassing or remind you of unhappy past experiences. If you become upset in any way as a result of participating in this study, counseling is available at the Kalamazoo College Counseling Center at 269-337-7191. While it is possible that you will not benefit directly from this study, the information you provide will add to our overall knowledge about high achieving women who feel like frauds in academic environments. The results of this study can be made available to interested research

participants. Respondents are welcome to contact the study investigator for more information.

The information you provide for this study will be kept strictly confidential. To protect your privacy, your name will not be associated with your study materials or with the study's research findings. The findings of this study will be interpreted and reported only on a group basis with no identification of specific individuals and all information about individuals will be held in confidence. I will store the data, locked, in my possession for 3 years, after which time it will be destroyed.

There will be no cost to you for participating in this study, beyond the time and effort required to complete the procedures described elsewhere in this consent form. You will receive no financial compensation for your participation in this part of the study. However, some people might qualify to participate in the second part of the study. Should you meet the criteria and should you wish to participate you may indicate your interest at the end of the questionnaire. A \$5 gift certificate to a local coffee shop will be provided to those who are invited and participate in a confidential interview with the researcher.

The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study *at any time* without affecting your relationship with the investigators of this study or Kalamazoo College. Your decision will not result in any loss or benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely from the interview at any point during the process; additionally, you have the right to request that the interviewer not use any of your interview material up to that point.

You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me, Sara Wiener, at swiener@email.smith.edu or by telephone at 508-849-5600 ext 354. If you like, a summary of the results of the study will be sent to you.

Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research subject for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep, along with any other printed materials deemed necessary by the study investigator.

I have read and understood the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Subject's Name (print): _____

Subject's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Investigator's Signature: _____ Date: _____

FOLLOW-UP RESEARCH:

Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up research study at a later date?

YES ___ NO ___

If so, what is the best way to reach you?

Email Address: _____ Phone Number: _____

Appendix E

Demographic Questionnaire, Phase I, Smith College

Please answer the following:

1. In what year were you born?
2. In what year are you at Smith?
3. How do you identify yourself racially?
4. How do you define your sexuality?
5. What was your cumulative GPA as a high school student?
6. What is your GPA now?
7. Do you have siblings? YES _____ NO _____ If yes, how many?

What are their ages and genders?

8. By whom were you raised?

9. What is the highest education level of your primary caregiver?
Some high school____
High school diploma____
Some college____
Associates degree____
Undergraduate degree____
Graduate degree____
Doctorate____

10. Secondary caregiver?
Some high school____
High school diploma____
Some college____
Associates degree____
Undergraduate degree____

Graduate degree ____

Doctorate ____

11. In what income bracket did you spend most of your life?

Up to 29,999 ____

30,000-49,999 ____

50,000-69,999 ____

70,000-89,999 ____

90,000-109,999 ____

110,000-129,999 ____

130,000-149,999 ____

150,000-169,999 ____

170,000-189,999 ____

190,000-209,999 ____

210,000 and above ____

Appendix F

Demographic Questionnaire, Phase I, Kalamazoo College

Please answer the following:

1. In what year were you born?
2. In what year are you at Kalamazoo?
3. How do you identify yourself racially?
4. How do you define your sexuality?
5. What was your cumulative GPA as a high school student?
6. What is your GPA now?
7. Do you have siblings? YES _____ NO_____ If yes, how many?

What are their ages and genders?

8. By whom were you raised?
9. What is the highest education level of your primary caregiver?
Some high school____
High school diploma____
Some college____
Associates degree____
Undergraduate degree____
Graduate degree____
Doctorate____
10. Secondary caregiver?
Some high school____
High school diploma____
Some college____

Associates degree ___
Undergraduate degree ___
Graduate degree ___
Doctorate ___

11. In what income bracket did you spend most of your life?

Up to 29,999 ___
30,000-49,999 ___
50,000-69,999 ___
70,000-89,999 ___
90,000-109,999 ___
110,000-129,999 ___
130,000-149,999 ___
150,000-169,999 ___
170,000-189,999 ___
190,000-209,999 ___
210,000 and above ___

Appendix G

Clance IP Scale

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Give the first response that enters your mind.

Also, answer these questions considering yourself in the academic environment only

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

Not at all true	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very true
1	2	3	4	5

2. I can give the impression that I'm more competent than I really am.

Not at all true	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very true
1	2	3	4	5

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

Not at all true	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very true
1	2	3	4	5

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

Not at all true	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very true
1	2	3	4	5

5. I sometimes think I obtained my present position or gained my present success because I happened to be in the right place at the right time or knew the right people.

Not at all true	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very true
-----------------	--------	-----------	-------	-----------

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

Not at all true	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very true
1	2	3	4	5

14. I'm often afraid that I may fail at a new assignment or undertaking even though I generally do well at what I attempt.

Not at all true	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very true
1	2	3	4	5

15. When I have succeeded at something and received recognition for my accomplishments, I have doubts that I can keep repeating that success.

Not at all true	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very true
1	2	3	4	5

16. If I receive a great deal of praise and recognition for something I've accomplished, I tend to discount the importance of what I have done.

Not at all true	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very true
1	2	3	4	5

17. I often compare my ability to those around me and think they may be more intelligent than I am.

Not at all true	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very true
1	2	3	4	5

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

Not at all true	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very true
1	2	3	4	5

19. If I'm going to receive a promotion or gain recognition of some kind, I hesitate to tell others until it is an accomplished fact.

Not at all true	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very true
-----------------	--------	-----------	-------	-----------

Appendix H

Informed Consent Letter, Phase II, Smith College

Dear participant:

Thank you for completing the demographic information questions and the questionnaire called the Clance IP Scale. It was very informative and useful, and therefore I am approaching you in the hope that you will participate in the second part of this study. I am interested in exploring what factors may contribute to feelings of fraudulence among college-aged women. Therefore, I would like to interview you.

You are invited to participate in the second part of this research study. The purpose of the study is to collect stories of diverse undergraduate college women who have felt like frauds in academic environments. The study is designed to gather in depth information from women who feel this way and the stories are expected to shed light on the ways women are socialized to feel like frauds. Ultimately, this research will be published as my Master's thesis and may be used in the future for presentations to counselors, therapists, or high school or college employees. Before the publication as my thesis, this research may be the subject of informal talks with my colleagues in the field of social work.

If you decide to volunteer for this phase of the study, you would be asked to meet with me for an audio taped interview that would last between 45 and 60 minutes. The questions in this interview include those that ask for your personal reflections on feeling like a fraud, your understanding of where these feelings might come from, and when they started and why. If you find any questions too personal or you simply do not want to answer a question you may skip it. Twelve to 14 students will be asked to participate in this interview process. This study ends in July of 2008.

Again, to participate in this part of the study you would be asked to participate in an interview with me and the questions center on your understanding of where your feelings of fraudulence might stem from, when they started and why. This study does not involve any physical risk to you. However, your participation could bring more attention to feelings you have that might be uncomfortable, including, but not limited to shame, sadness, and frustration. Some questions posed or issues raised may be embarrassing or remind you of unhappy past experiences. If you become upset in any way as a result of participating in this study, counseling is available at the Smith College Counseling Center at 413-585-2840. While it is possible that you will not benefit directly from this study, the information you provide will add to our overall knowledge about high achieving women who feel like frauds in academic environments. The results of this study can be made available to interested research participants. Respondents are welcome to contact the study investigator for more information.

The information you provide for this study will be kept strictly confidential. To protect your privacy, your name will not be associated with your study materials or with the study's research findings. The findings of this study will be interpreted and reported

only on a group basis with no identification of specific individuals and all information about individuals will be held in confidence. I will store the data, locked, in my possession for 3 years, after which time it will be destroyed.

There will be no cost to you for participating in this study, beyond the time and effort required to complete the procedures described elsewhere in this consent form. As appreciation for your participation in this phase of the study you will receive a \$5 gift card to a local coffee shop.

The decision to participate in this part of the study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study *at any time* without affecting your relationship with the investigators of this study or Smith College. Your decision will not result in any loss or benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely from the interview at any point during the process; additionally, you have the right to request that the interviewer not use any of your interview material up to that point.

You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me, Sara Wiener, at swiener@email.smith.edu or by telephone at 508-849-5600 ext 354. If you like, a summary of the results of the study will be sent to you. If you have any other concerns about your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the investigator, you may contact Phil Peake, Chair, the Smith College Institutional Review Board at (413) 585-3914.

Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research subject for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep, along with any other printed materials deemed necessary by the study investigator.

I have read and understood the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Subject's Name (print): _____

Subject's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Investigator's Signature: _____ Date: _____

I agree to be audio taped for this interview:

Subject's Name (print): _____

Subject's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Investigator's Signature: _____ Date: _____

FOLLOW-UP RESEARCH:

Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up research study at a later date?

YES ___ NO ____

If so, what is the best way to reach you?

Email Address: _____ Phone Number: _____

Appendix I

Informed Consent Letter, Phase II, Kalamazoo College

Dear Kalamazoo College participant:

Thank you for completing the demographic information questions and the questionnaire called the Clance IP Scale. It was very informative and useful, and therefore I am approaching you in the hope that you will participate in the second part of this study. I am interested in exploring in depth what factors contribute to feelings of fraudulence among college-aged women. Therefore, I would like to interview you.

You are invited to participate in the second part of this research study. The purpose of the study is to collect stories of diverse undergraduate college women who have felt like frauds in academic environments. The study is designed to gather in depth information from women who feel this way and the stories are expected to shed light on the ways women are socialized to feel like frauds. Ultimately, this research will be published as my Master's thesis and may be used in the future for presentations to counselors, therapists, or high school or college employees. Before the publication as my thesis, this research may be the subject of informal talks with my colleagues in the field of social work.

If you decide to volunteer for this phase of the study, you would be asked to meet with me for an audio taped interview that would last between 45 and 60 minutes. The questions in this interview include those that ask for your personal reflections on feeling like a fraud, your understanding of where these feelings might come from, and when they started and why. If you find any questions too personal or you simply do not want to answer a question you may skip it. Twelve to 14 students will be asked to participate in this interview process. This study ends in July of 2008.

Again, to participate in this part of the study you would be asked to participate in an interview with me and the questions center on your understanding of where your feelings of fraudulence might stem from, when they started and why. This study does not involve any physical risk to you. However, your participation could bring more attention to feelings you have that might be uncomfortable, including, but not limited to shame, sadness, and frustration. Some questions posed or issues raised may be embarrassing or remind you of unhappy past experiences. If you become upset in any way as a result of participating in this study, counseling is available at the Kalamazoo College Counseling Center at 269-337-7191. While it is possible that you will not benefit directly from this study, the information you provide will add to our overall knowledge about high achieving women who feel like frauds in academic environments. The results of this study can be made available to interested research participants. Respondents are welcome to contact the study investigator for more information.

The information you provide for this study will be kept strictly confidential. To protect your privacy, your name will not be associated with your study materials or with the study's research findings. The findings of this study will be interpreted and reported

only on a group basis with no identification of specific individuals and all information about individuals will be held in confidence. I will store the data, locked, in my possession for 3 years, after which time it will be destroyed.

There will be no cost to you for participating in this study, beyond the time and effort required to complete the procedures described elsewhere in this consent form. As appreciation for your participation in this phase of the study you will receive a \$5 gift card to a local coffee shop.

The decision to participate in this part of the study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study *at any time* without affecting your relationship with the investigators of this study or Kalamazoo College. Your decision will not result in any loss or benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely from the interview at any point during the process; additionally, you have the right to request that the interviewer not use any of your interview material up to that point.

You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me, Sara Wiener, at swiener@email.smith.edu or by telephone at 508-849-5600 ext 354. If you like, a summary of the results of the study will be sent to you.

Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research subject for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep, along with any other printed materials deemed necessary by the study investigator.

I have read and understood the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Subject's Name (print): _____

Subject's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Investigator's Signature: _____ Date: _____

I agree to be audio taped for this interview:

Subject's Name (print): _____

Subject's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Investigator's Signature: _____ Date: _____

FOLLOW-UP RESEARCH:

Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up research study at a later date?

YES ___ NO ____

If so, what is the best way to reach you?

Email Address: _____ Phone Number: _____

Appendix J

Interview Guide, Phase II

Topic: Opening the interview

- a. What motivated you to be part of the second part of this study?
- b. What do you hope to gain from being part of the second part of the research?
- c. Do you have any questions or concerns at this point?

Topic: The family's possible role in these feelings

- a. Tell me about your family.
- b. What kinds of things were you taught about being successful academically? (If needed: about what it means to be successful, what it takes to be successful, what success *is*...)
- c. On what types of things were you complimented when you were a child? On what types of things does your family compliment you now?
- d. [Only to participants who have siblings] Did you notice if you and your siblings were ever treated differently when it came to academic achievement?

Topic: How she processes/experiences success

- a. When you succeed academically, what goes through your mind?
- b. Do these thoughts/feelings differ when you've done well in a class that's hard for you versus one that comes more easily?
- c. If you've ever not achieved at the level you'd like—say, if you got a “bad” grade on something—what goes through your mind?
- d. Do you see yourself as successful? Do other people? What does it mean to you to be successful?
- e. If you see yourself as successful, to what do you attribute your success?
- f. What are some of your academic, career, or personal goals? Do you think you'll achieve these goals? Why or why not?
- g. Are there spheres of your life where you do not feel fraudulent? (At work, with friends, etc)
- h. Do you think there are societal forces acting upon you that contribute to your feeling like a fraud? What are some of these forces?
- i. Why do you think high achieving women your age discount their accomplishments?

Topic: How racism or classism may contribute to feelings of fraudulence among diverse women

- a. One of the things this study is considering is the experiences of women who are outside of the dominant culture—that being White, middle or upper class and

heterosexual. If you consider yourself outside of any of those groups—race, class, or sexuality—do you think being not of the dominant culture (in any one of those areas or all) has contributed to you feeling like a fraud? [If yes, how so?]

Topic: Closing of interview

- a. Do you ever talk about these feelings with anyone?
- b. What have you found to be helpful when it comes to understanding or fighting these feelings?
- c. Can you tell me about your experience of the interview?
- d. Do you have any suggestions as to how I could make this interview more useful?
- e. Is there anything I did not ask that you feel is important and would like to share?
- f. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Appendix K

Transcriptionist's Assurance of Research Confidentiality

STATEMENT OF POLICY:

This thesis project is firmly committed to the principle that research confidentiality must be protected. This principle holds whether or not any specific guarantee of confidentiality was given by respondents at the time of the interview. When guarantees have been given, they may impose additional requirements which are to be adhered to strictly.

PROCEDURES FOR MAINTAINING CONFIDENTIALITY:

- All volunteer and professional transcribers for this project shall sign this assurance of confidentiality.
- A volunteer, or professional transcriber should be aware that the identity of participants in research studies is confidential information, as are identifying information about participants and individual responses to questions. Depending on the study, the organizations participating in the study, the geographical location of the study, the method of participant recruitment, the subject matter of the study, and the hypotheses being tested may also be confidential information. Specific research findings and conclusions are also usually confidential until they have been published or presented in public.

It is incumbent on volunteers and professional transcribers to treat information from and about research as privileged information, to be aware of what is confidential in regard to specific studies on which they work or about which they have knowledge, and to preserve the confidentiality of this information. Types of situations where confidentiality can often be compromised include conversations with friends and relatives, conversations with professional colleagues outside the project team, conversations with reporters and the media, and in the use of consultants for computer programs and data analysis.

- Unless specifically instructed otherwise, a volunteer or professional transcriber upon encountering a respondent or information pertaining to a respondent that s/he knows personally, shall not disclose any knowledge of the respondent or any information pertaining to the respondent's testimony or his participation in this thesis project. In other words, volunteer and professional transcribers should not reveal any information or knowledge about or pertaining to a respondent's participation in this project.
- Data containing personal identifiers shall be kept in a locked container or a locked room when not being used each working day in routine activities. Reasonable caution shall be exercised in limiting access to data to only those persons who are working on this thesis project and who have been instructed in the applicable confidentiality

requirements for the project.

- The researcher for this project, Sara Wiener, shall be responsible for ensuring that all volunteer and professional transcribers involved in handling data are instructed in these procedures, have signed this pledge, and comply with these procedures throughout the duration of the project. At the end of the project, Sara Wiener shall arrange for proper storage or disposition of data, in accordance with federal guidelines and Human Subjects Review Committee policies at the Smith College School for Social Work.
- Sara Wiener must ensure that procedures are established in this study to inform each respondent of the authority for the study, the purpose and use of the study, the voluntary nature of the study (where applicable), and the effects on the respondents, if any, of not responding.

PLEDGE

I hereby certify that I have carefully read and will cooperate fully with the above procedures. I will maintain the confidentiality of confidential information from all studies with which I have involvement. I will not discuss, disclose, disseminate, or provide access to such information, except directly to the researcher, Sara Wiener, for this project. I understand that violation of this pledge is sufficient grounds for disciplinary action, including termination of professional or volunteer services with the project, and may make me subject to criminal or civil penalties. I give my personal pledge that I shall abide by this assurance of confidentiality.

Janet F. Garcia
3-10-2008

Signature

Date

Sara Wiener
3-10-08

Sara Wiener

Date