

2017

## Why Do High-Achieving Women Feel Like Frauds? Intersecting Identities and the Imposter Phenomenon

Nicole Lounsbery  
*South Dakota State University*

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### Recommended Citation

Lounsbery, Nicole (2017) "Why Do High-Achieving Women Feel Like Frauds? Intersecting Identities and the Imposter Phenomenon," *Great Plains Sociologist*. Vol. 27: Iss. 1, Article 6.  
Available at: <https://openprairie.sdstate.edu/greatplainssociologist/vol27/iss1/6>

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Article



## Why Do High-Achieving Women Feel Like Frauds? Intersecting Identities and the Imposter Phenomenon

Nicole Lounsbery, Ph.D.

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**ABSTRACT** The *imposter phenomenon* is a concept used to characterize the presence of intense feelings of intellectual fraudulence, particularly among high-achieving women. Researchers have tried to explain not only why this phenomenon occurs, but why it is more prevalent in highly successful women. This study predicts that the intersection of gender with race, class, and parental educational attainment contributes to women's feelings of fraudulence. Clance Imposter Phenomenon Scale (CIPS) scores were used to determine the effects of identity variables on imposter feelings in a sample of 403 female graduate students. Results indicate a strongly positive relationship between Native American identity and imposter feelings. More specifically, Native American female graduate students had much higher CIPS scores than all other racial groups, indicating a greatly increased sense of intellectual fraudulence. Conversely, Asian identity was significantly associated with lower CIPS scores. Additionally, higher socioeconomic status and paternal educational attainment were found to have a significant negative effect on CIPS scores.

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## INTRODUCTION

### ' *THE IMPOSTER PHENOMENON IS DEFINITELY A THING*:'

A recent article in the Chronicle of Higher Education (Hermann 2016) emphasized how many graduate students experience feelings of fraudulence without knowing what it is or that many others feel it too. According to an article recently highlighted in an EAB Daily Briefing (March 2017), around 70% of people experience symptoms of the imposter phenomenon (IP) at least once (Sakulku and Alexander 2011).

Although the imposter phenomenon (identified in 1978 by Clance and Imes) has been acknowledged in research involving both men and women, most studies suggest that women are more negatively affected by imposter issues, exhibit much higher imposter fears, and have higher scores on imposter phenomenon scales (Clance and O'Toole 1988; Kumar and Jagacinski 2006; Mack 2006). Clance and O'Toole (1988) argue that "women are more likely to be limited, and limited more powerfully than men by the imposter phenomenon" (p.53). Similar research indicates there has been a "pervasiveness and longevity of imposter feelings in high achieving women," despite repeated successes (Clance and Imes 1978:242; Clance 1985).

The recent *Lean-In* movement, which underscores the need for women to reach for opportunities and promotions, and most importantly, believe they deserve them, connects closely to the imposter phenomenon. Sheryl Sandberg (2013) addresses the way imposter feelings continue to hold women back despite their success. She states "I still face situations that I fear are beyond my capabilities. I still have days when I feel like a fraud." (Sandberg 2013:38). Sandberg and others have publicized women's reality of experiencing continuing and pervasive imposter feelings, indicating that women may keep themselves from advancing because they don't have the self-confidence that men do.

Previous studies also indicate that female college students experience substantially greater imposter feelings than their male counterparts (King and Cooley 1995, Clance, 1985; Clance & Imes, 1978; Kumar & Jagacinski 2006). Similarly, recent studies indicate that female graduate students both suffer more from imposter feelings and display a lower belief in their academic ability than do males (Jostl et al. 2012:109; Ivie and Ephraim 2009). The totality of this research begs the question: *why do high-achieving women feel like frauds?*

Few studies have specifically examined the imposter phenomenon at the graduate level. Niles (1994) found that graduate students experiencing imposter feelings blamed themselves for failures and attributed factors outside their control for successes. Ewing et al. (1996) found no correlation between African American graduate students' racial identity and imposter feelings, while Craddock et al. (2011) found that minority racial identity did impact imposter feelings in a sample of doctoral students. White (2001) sampled doctoral students and found that shame was a predictor of

imposter feelings. Jostl et al. (2012), also studying doctoral students, found that female students experienced increased imposter feelings when compared to male students.

Gibson-Beverly and Schwartz's (2008) qualitative study of female graduate students found that attachment and entitlement were significant predictors of the imposter phenomenon. The authors suggested that women with anxious attachment and elevated levels of entitlement have difficulty internalizing positive feedback and may develop a fear of failure and evaluation by others due to an underlying negative view of self.

Focusing on female students at the *graduate* level is important in several ways. Primarily, much of the previous IP research focuses on the undergraduate experience, leaving a gap in the literature. In addition, graduate students feel increased pressure to become an "academic" or a "professional," which may result in additional conflict related to identity. Professional socialization is a process that "prepares the graduate student for the academic world and its expectations, as well as the professional role and its associated values and culture" (Gardner and Barnes 2007:7). Several processes of socialization take place at the same time: socialization to the role of graduate student, socialization to academic life and the profession, and socialization to a specific discipline or field (Austin 2002:96; Polson 2003).

Over the years, academic culture and the socialization that comes with it reflects the experiences of men; specifically, older, white men, who still continue to be the majority of full professors and administrators (Gardner 2008; Walker 1998). Thus, the diverse experiences of students who "do not fit the mold of graduate education are explainable in that these students' socialization experience is not entirely normative due to differences in their underrepresented status" (Gardner 2008:128).

The structure of incentives, relationships, and rewards differs for males and females, both during and after graduate school, and often women are viewed as less dedicated and less promising by faculty (Berg and Ferber 1983:631). More recently, Hart (2006) notes that "academe is entrenched in the power of patriarchy...and although women are more prevalent in higher education, academic culture has changed very little" (p.41). Despite the progress that has been made with respect to gender and racial equality, colleges and universities "continue to maintain environments that discourage participation by women and students of color" (Ellis 2001:42). Women's inclusion is still not prevalent in higher education discourse; more specifically, the literature rarely focuses on the intersection of gender with race, class, or related socioeconomic factors (Hart 2006).

The current study is the first to examine whether and to what extent the intersection of gender with race, class, and parental educational attainment impacts the presence of imposter feelings in a sample of female graduate students. This research addresses the scarcity of literature on female graduate students and the imposter phenomenon, as well as the lack of intersectional research in identity and student

development studies. Furthermore, the extensive and more profound experience of graduate education has the potential to shed light on whether women's identity struggles related to the imposter phenomenon persist throughout the life span.

## THE IMPOSTER PHENOMENON

Individuals who exhibit characteristics of the imposter phenomenon identify with the feeling of being an "imposter," second guessing their accomplishments (Clance and Imes 1978; Clance 1985; Clance and O'Toole 1988; Kumar and Jagacinski 2006). These self-identified "imposters" often fear that others will find out that they actually lack ability (Kumar and Jagacinski 2006; Mack 2006). In addition, experienced successes neither decrease imposters' fraudulent feelings nor increase belief in their own ability (Ferrari 2005). This in turn leads to a cycle of self-doubt that is only temporarily relieved by personal achievements (Clance and O'Toole 1988; Ferrari 2005; Kumar and Jagacinski 2006).

Identity differences, such as race, class and gender, can lead individuals to believe they are the "wrong type", often sabotaging themselves rather than risk being seen as an imposter (Clance and Imes 1978; Clance 1985; Clance and O'Toole 1988; Mack 2006:56). These self-pronounced "imposters" may display generalized anxiety, perfectionism, lack of self-confidence, depression, frustration due to their inability to meet their own standards of achievement, low self-esteem, tendency to excessively worry about mistakes, and to reject evidence of their success (Clance and Imes, 1978; Thompson, Foreman, and Martin 2000; Bernard et al. 2002; Ferrari 2005).

Bernard et al. (2002) found that college students who scored high on the Clance Imposter Phenomenon Scale (Clance 1985) were prone to feelings of depression and anxiety, while Ross and Krukowski (2003) suggested the imposter phenomenon was also associated with depression, as well as maladaptive personality. Additional studies suggest that imposter feelings are connected to self-handicapping behaviors, such as lack of effort and procrastination (Ross et al. 2001; Cowman and Ferrari 2002; Want and Kleitman 2006). Imposters may also use self-handicapping behaviors to avoid being evaluated and to reduce the chance that they will be revealed as a fraud. Additionally, imposters perceive that their success is not a result of talent or ability, but rather is a result of luck or evaluative error (Clance 1985; Ferrari 2005).

In explanation of the phenomenon, Clance et al. (1995) suggest that societal values and conflicting expectations related to gender roles contribute to women's feelings of fraudulence in higher education, making it difficult for women to embody the masculine roles necessary for success. Craddock et al. (2011) note that imposter feelings are multiplied when 'women are successful in environments where society tells them they do not belong' (p.432, from McIntosh 1989). In addition, research has shown that

imposter feelings affect women more intensely due to being doubly or triply disadvantaged (Clance et al. 1995; Cokley et al. 2013) because of identity differences such as race, class or first generation status.

## INTERSECTING IDENTITIES

### *RACE, CLASS, GENDER & FIRST GENERATION*

The impact of race on student success and experiences in higher education has been identified in the literature. Specific racial groups, including African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans, are less likely to attend college and graduate (Kao and Thompson 2003; Dennis, Phinney and Chuateco 2005; Ishitani 2006). Furthermore, first generation college students with minority racial status may be negatively affected by additional stressors beyond what college students normally face, such as cultural expectations to fulfill family obligations and duties (Phinney and Haas 2003), racism and discrimination, cultural insensitivity, and educational hegemony (Goodman and West-Olatunji 2010; Cokley et al. 2013).

According to the findings of Ellis (2001), race is a significant factor in the graduate student experience influencing socialization, satisfaction level, and commitment to degree completion. Research has also shown that being a female minority student has a significant impact on students. Bassett (1990) states “the minority female in higher education, regardless of her qualifications, is often perceived as a ‘token’; at times she may find herself disregarded or patronized, or she may meet open hostility” (p. 239). Saenz (1994) indicates that a token status often causes minority students to feel responsible for positively representing their group at all times, which for females, leads to increased self-consciousness and can result in performance deficits or imposter feelings.

Only a few published studies regarding racial minority college students and the imposter phenomenon exist in the literature. Cokley et al. (2013) found that African-Americans reported higher minority status stress than Asian Americans and Latino/a Americans, while Asian Americans reported higher imposter feelings, despite higher academic achievement. Craddock et al. (2011) found that doctoral students’ marginalized racial identity increased their imposter feelings. However, Ewing et al. (1996) indicated African American graduate students experienced imposter feelings that were influenced more by worldview and academic self-concept than racial identity.

Socioeconomic status has been shown to influence student experiences and identity in academia. Research indicates that a higher level of socioeconomic status positively impacts academic and social integration (Ishitani 2006:863). Lower income students pursuing higher education often experience a “painful dislocation between old and newly developing habitus, which are ranked hierarchically and carry connotations of

inferiority and superiority" (Baxter and Britton 2001:99). Many poor to working class students confess that they try to "pass" as middle or upper-class students by not divulging background information and embracing the culture of their fellow students (Aries and Seider 2005). The working class student's struggle to "pass" can lead to living in fear of being unmasked as undeserving (Mack 2006:56), a core characteristic of the imposter phenomenon.

Across class status, middle-class women often find their role obligations truncated to being good mothers and wives, while working-class women are expected to be good mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, cousins, on down the line. Within class, but across gender, working class female college students often go home to help the family, while their working-class brothers are left to focus solely on their college life (Fuller 2004:17). These examples further highlight class values and conflicting expectations related to gender roles which can also contribute to women's feelings of fraudulence.

Parental educational attainment has been identified as an influential factor in the student experience. Past research shows that when compared to their peers, first generation college students are at a pronounced disadvantage regarding basic knowledge about the higher education process, high school academic preparation, degree expectations and plans, as well as socioeconomic status and support (Pascarella et al. 2004; Orbe 2008). First generation students have a more difficult transition from high school to college than their peers, are less likely to stay in college through graduation (Pascarella et al. 2004; Orbe 2008), and experience increased feelings of alienation and inadequacy (Aries and Seider 2005). In a study of first generation graduate students (80% of which were women), imposter feelings were prevalent, with participants indicating a lack of belonging and concern that they would be "found out" or told they "could not persist" (Gardner and Holley 2011:88).

Numerous first generation professional scholars from working-class backgrounds report long-lasting identity conflicts, still feeling like outsiders and imposters in academia years later (Jones 1998; Lawler 1999). First generation graduate students face the reality of having to construct a professional or academic identity, one that may differ greatly from their previous experiences and parental models, thereby increasing the likelihood of developing imposter feelings.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Intersectionality is the theoretical framework guiding this research. Intersectionality refers to "the interaction between gender, race, class, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements,

and cultural ideologies, and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power " (Davis 2008:68).

The term "intersectionality" (Crenshaw 1989), was initially used as a "critique of difference" (Davis 2008:68) to highlight experiences of women of color that both feminist and anti-racist discourse were not addressing at the time (Yuval-Davis 2006; Jordan-Zachery 2007). Crenshaw (1989) implied that existing theory needed to show how gender and race interacted to shape the "multiple dimensions of Black women's experiences" (p.139).

Intersectionality as a framework for studying identity emerged from critical legal studies and research conducted by women of color (Torres et al. 2009). The goal was to respond to the lack of representation of their experiences in the literature, while at the same time advancing the "lived experiences of marginalized individuals" (Torres et al. 2009:588). Researchers have used intersectionality in traditional and nontraditional ways to analyze and understand women's multiple identities and the challenges that women face.

Thus, intersectionality as a theoretical approach to conducting research provides answers to many questions left unanswered by the more common unitary or multiple approaches. It is especially useful in this study to help understand how female graduate students experience imposter feelings at the intersections of race, class, and first generation status. Although intersectionality is more often used in qualitative studies, it has also been successfully utilized in quantitative analysis (Brooks and Redlin, 2009).

## METHOD

### *PARTICIPANTS*

403 female graduate students participated in this study. All participants were enrolled in a Midwest state land-grant institution with approximately 800 female graduate students. Participants' age ranged from 21 to 64 years, with a majority (44.3%) between 25-34 years of age. The majority of participants identified as White (84%), followed by Asian (5.6%), Two or More Races (4.3%), Native American (3.1%) Pacific Islander (.51%), and Black (2.54%). 2.28% identified as Hispanic or Latino. The majority of respondents (21.43%), reported family income of \$35,000-50,000 dollars a year, which was only a fraction higher than the second highest response of \$20,000-\$35,000 a year (21.17%). Percentages reflect overall female graduate student population at the university, thus limit generalizability.

Overall, statistics indicate that a large percentage (40-45%) of respondents were first generation college students. The majority of respondents (71%) were from populations of 10,000 or below, indicating a mostly rural sample. Most respondents (92%) indicated they were U.S. citizens.

### *Instrument and Procedure*



The Clance Imposter Phenomenon Scale (CIPS) is the instrument utilized in this study (Clance 1985). The CIPS contains 20 statements which identify fear of evaluation, fear of not being able to repeat success, and fear of being less capable than others (Clance 1985). Examples of questions include:

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

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

The CIPS uses a 5-point Likert scale for responses, ranging from 1 (not at all true) to 5 (very true) and is scored by totaling the numbers of the responses to each item. The higher the score, the more frequently and seriously the imposter phenomenon may inhibit a person's life (Clance 1985:20-22).

The CIPS has been extensively tested and found reliable across multiple studies (Kumar and Jagacinski 2006; Chrisman et al. 1995; Cokley et al. 2013). Chronbach's alpha for this study was .95. The CIPS has also been proven to reliably distinguish between imposters and non-imposters, thus demonstrating substantiation of known-groups validity (Cokley et al. 2013:87).

Quantitative data was collected using an online survey format. 403 out of 800 female graduate students completed the survey during a 4-week time frame, slightly over a 50% response rate.

#### *DEPENDENT AND INDEPENDENT VARIABLES*

The dependent variable of investigation was the CIPS score. The CIPS scoring method was used to determine an overall IP score, with possible CIPS scores ranging from 0 to 100. According to Clance (1985), the higher the respondent's score, the more frequently and seriously the imposter phenomenon interferes in the respondent's self-perception of competence, and potentially, in the success in graduate school or other endeavors.

The four independent variables included: racial identity (Asian, Native American, Pacific Islander, White, Two or more races, Black); mother's educational level, father's educational level, and family income of respondent while in high school. Racial identity was measured using six categorical responses. In a separate question, participants answered whether or not they identified as Hispanic or Latino. For analysis, the resulting race values were recoded as dichotomous (0=participant did not select racial category and 1=participant selected racial category). Recoding variables allowed for closer analysis of self-identified racial comparisons. Parental educational level was measured using six ordinal responses for both father's and mother's education ranging from "not a high school grad" to "Doctorate or Professional degree." Family income was measured

using eight response categories coded as ordinal variables, ranging from < \$20,000 to >\$ 200,000.

The CIPS data was analyzed using the CIPS (Clance 1985) scoring method and SPSS. Data was analyzed to provide the necessary descriptive statistics, including the mean, range, and standard deviation of the online sample CIPS scores. Both correlational and multiple linear regression analysis were also conducted to identify the strength of the relationships between the dependent variable (CIPS score) and the independent variables, as well as how the CIPS score was affected by each of the variables.

### *HYPOTHESES*

Three hypotheses were developed based on variables included in the survey. The purpose of these hypotheses was to explore whether and to what extent race, class and parental education impacted the presence of imposter feelings in a sample of female graduate students.

Hypothesis 1: Respondents with minority racial identities will have higher CIPS scores than White/European American respondents.

Hypothesis 2: Respondents' CIPS scores will decrease as mother's and father's educational level increases.

Hypothesis 3: Respondents' CIPS scores will decrease as yearly family income increases.

### RESULTS

Results show that the lowest CIPS score in the sample was 26 (N=1), the highest score was 100 (N=5), and the average score was 63.46. Among different racial identities of respondents, Native American students had the highest average IP score at 89, followed by 2 or more races = 64.2, Black = 63.9, White = 63, Asian = 55.3 and Pacific Islander = 51. The frequency distribution of the sample indicated a mean of 63.46 and standard deviation of 17.52.

Three of the independent variables: family income, mother's education and father's education; significantly correlated with the dependent variable, CIPS score (see Table 1 below).

**Table 1: Correlations between Variables**

Measure	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Family income	1.00	.416**	.238**	-.138	-.376**
2. Mother's education	.416**	1.00	.569**	-.134	-.284**
3. Father's education	.433**	.569**	1.00	-.105	-.329**
4. Racial identity	-.034	-.134**	-.105*	1.00	.084
5. CIPS score	-.376**	-.284**	-.329**	.084	1.00

\*\*Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

\*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

Items in Table 1 show a modest to moderate strength of correlation with the dependent variable (CIPS score). The independent variables of family income, mother's and father's education level are significantly correlated with CIPS score. Negative correlations indicate that as family income and parental educational levels increase, CIPS scores decrease.

To examine relationships of different racial identities and CIPS score, distinct categories were identified and a separate correlation analysis was completed (Table 2).

**Table 2: Correlations for Racial Identity Variables**

Measure	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Asian	1.00	-.043	-.039	-.017	-.052	-.557**	-.106**
2. Native American	-.043	1.00	-.029	-.013	-.038	-.406**	.259**
3. Black	-.039	-.029	1.00	-.012	-.034	-.370**	.004
4. Pacific Islander	-.017	-.013	-.012	1.00	-.015	-.164**	-.053
5. 2+ races	-.052	-.038	-.034	-.015	1.00	-.487**	.009
6. White	-.557**	-.406**	.370**	.164**	.487**	1.00	-.056
7. CIPS score	-.106*	.259**	.004	-.053	.009	-.056	1.00

\*\*Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

\*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

Results indicate a correlation between Asian identity and decreased CIP scores. Conversely, Native American identity was correlated with increased CIPS scores. None of the other identity variables were statistically significant.

Multiple regression analysis provides a way to predict how the dependent variable, CIPS score, is affected by the independent variables. Table 3 below provides a representation of the model, excluding racial identity variables not significantly correlated with CIPS score.

**Table 3: Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for CIPS Scores**

Variable	B	SE(B)	$\beta$		Sig. ( <i>p</i> )
Family income	-2.84	.542	-.283	-5.233	.000**
Mothers education	-1.13	.916	-.072	-1.233	.218
Father's education	-1.92	.842	-.135	-2.282	.023*
Asian	-10.85	3.724	-4.479	-2.913	.004*
Native American	16.03	4.546	6.617	3.526	.000**

$$R^2 = .24$$

\*\*significant at the .01 level

\*significant at the .05 level

Examining the variable 'family income,' it could be determined that for every categorical increase in family income, we would expect a decrease in CIPS score by 2.84. For example, as family income increases from the \$20,000-35,000 range to \$35,000-50,000; a CIPS score of 26 would decrease to approximately 23.16.

The next variable, 'mother's educational level,' was not significantly associated with a decrease in CIPS score ( $p=.218$ ). Interestingly, 'father's education level' was significant at the .05 level, indicating that for every per rank increase in father's education, such as moving from 'some college, AA, or technical degree' to 'bachelor's degree,' we would expect a decrease in CIPS score by 1.92. In this case, having a father with a bachelor's degree would correlate with a CIPS score of 1.92 less than having a father with some college, AA, or technical degree. As mentioned previously, the lower the respondent's CIPS score, the fewer imposter feelings are recognized as being present in a respondent's life.

Native American racial identity was associated with a rise in CIPS score by 16 points. The p value (.001) indicates a highly significant relationship, and the effect size reveals a prominent association between Native American racial identity and intense imposter feelings. On the other hand, Asian identity was associated with a decrease in CIPS score by almost 11 points. The p value (.004) also indicated a significant relationship, and the effect size reveals a prominent association between Asian identity and lower imposter feelings. All other racial identity variables were not significant.

Taken together, the independent variables (racial identity, yearly family income, mother's and father's educational level) explain 24% of the variance in CIPS scores,  $R^2 = .24$ ,  $F(12.296)$ ,  $p = .000$ .

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Results indicate that Hypotheses 3 was supported by the data. Categorical increases in yearly family income were associated with decreases in respondents' CIPS scores. Hypothesis 1 and 2 were only partially supported. Although Native American identity was associated with higher CIPS scores; Asian identity was associated with lower CIPS scores, and all other minority racial identities were not significantly associated with CIPS scores. Additionally, an increase in father's educational level was significantly associated with a decrease in CIPS scores; however, mother's educational level was not significantly associated with CIPS scores.

Findings suggest that a female graduate student with low family income, a father who didn't go to college, and Native American racial identity would have a higher score on the CIPS than a woman with high family income, a father who went to college, and White racial identity. The findings from this study show that intersecting identity variables of class, parental educational attainment and race, *do* contribute to imposter feelings among high-achieving women, in this case a sample of female graduate students.

This study's findings support previous research which indicates a connection between lower class status and the presence of increased feelings of fraudulence and the struggle to keep from being "unmasked" as an imposter (Granfield 1991, Mack 2006, Aries and Seider 2005), as well as a connection between first generation status and increased alienation and imposter feelings (Aries and Seider 2005, Gardner and Holley 2011). More specifically, increases in father's educational attainment were significantly associated with decreases in imposter feelings. The significance of father's education might suggest that women in graduate school are challenging traditional feminine status, and therefore could be seen as taking on a male role and reacting to a male role model. However, more research is

needed to determine actual differences between the influence of mother's and father's educational attainment on imposter feelings.

Findings also suggest that racial identity was not a significant variable associated with experiencing increased imposter feelings for all racial minority groups sampled. Only Native American female graduate students exhibited significantly higher imposter scores. Conversely, Asian female graduate students experienced significantly lower imposter scores, contrary to previous research related to Asian American college students and imposter feelings (Cokley et al. 2013). These results may be impacted due to potential cultural differences between Asian American and Asian international populations; in this study, almost all Asian participants were international students.

Research suggests that Native American students' perceptions of confidence, competence and self-efficacy are integral to their motivation for academic achievement and persistence (Kerbo 1981; McInerney and Swisher 1995; Jackson, Smith and Hill 2003). Despite these findings, the development and impact of imposter characteristics has not been specifically applied to Native American success in higher education. This study's results provide a tool (CIPS) researchers can use to measure students' feelings of competence, confidence, and ability to succeed, which can offer additional data regarding the challenges Native American students face in higher education.

Conclusions based on this research reflect the intersectional nature of identity variables, given that mutually occurring variables were significantly correlated with an increase in imposter phenomenon scores. Examining identity variables together provides a more realistic picture of their contribution to imposter feelings in high-achieving women. Women of color may be more intensely affected by impostor feelings because of a double or triple minority status (Clance and Imes 1978; Clance et al. 1995), which can make the entire graduate school experience more difficult to navigate. They must often "leave themselves, who they are, at the door of graduate education in order to succeed" (Turner 2002:89). According to these women, the process of fitting in or aligning themselves with what is expected, causes identity (who they are) to take a back seat (Turner 2002). Gardner (2008) notes that "graduate students' individual demographic characteristics (race, gender, class) play an influential role in their preparation for the degree program and their experience in it" (p.127).

Ultimately, this research aids in understanding why high-achieving women may feel like frauds by illustrating how gender intersects with race, class, and parental educational attainment to influence the presence and intensity of imposter feelings. Further studies involving Native American students and the imposter phenomenon would be helpful in identifying and understanding the significance of this relationship to the lack of representation in higher education and to unpack the presence of imposter feelings in Asian women. Additionally, more research could identify and examine differences in the impact of maternal vs. paternal education levels on the presence and intensity of imposter feelings.

In conclusion, examining identity variables to give voice to students who are often marginalized or underrepresented because of identity differences not only provides a framework to understand and research identity and student identity development, but also addresses the larger purpose of institutional and social policy change. The present and future studies provide important insight for shaping institutional policies and programs that provide student support services within colleges and universities, and assist graduate departments in identifying the needs of new graduate student populations.

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