

Exploring Childhood Experiences in Relation to Impostor Tendencies in Young Adults

Nimisha Singh^{1*}

ABSTRACT

This qualitative research paper will focus on the effects of childhood experiences on the formation of impostor syndrome among young adults. The study is based on the narrative interviews of 15 participants (20-30 olds), defining the main themes that explain how success-related messages early-in-life play a role in developing impostor feelings. There are other five coping themes that depict how the participants handle self-doubt and rebuild self-trust. The results provide a perspective on the role played by perfectionism, conditional validation and suppressed vulnerability in childhood in shaping adult impostorism. The implications cut across mental health support, education and mentoring at work place.

Keywords: *Impostor Syndrome, Childhood Experiences, Perfectionism, Self-Doubt, Emotional Development, Young Adults, Coping Strategies*

Impostor Syndrome can be defined as a psychological trend where people undermine their achievements and continually experience a sense of internal fear of being uncovered as a fraud (APA, 2022). The term was given to describe an internal feeling of intellectual phoniness that seems to be especially prevalent among a group of high-achieving women who were chosen in the research by psychologists Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes (1978).

Tendencies that are highlighted in the Impostor Syndrome are not accidental; maladaptive coping strategies are devoted to adjusting to internalized fear of being stigmatized as unworthy.

Impostor Syndrome Dimensions

The dimensions cover different spheres of human functioning, which is backed by the examples of the real world and current research.

i. Academic Settings

High-Achieving students, first generation students, and students who belong to the underrepresented groups are very detailed in their development of this syndrome.

ii. Workplace Contexts

¹Student

*Corresponding Author

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It can impair professional performance through performance anxiety, inability to assume leadership positions, problems in negotiating salaries, excessive preparation as a way of compensating inadequacy that is perceived by the individual.

iii. Interpersonal Relationships

Impostor Syndrome is manifested not only in the performance-focused aspects but also to emotional landscapes of romantic and interpersonal relationships.

iv. Athletic Performance

With Impostor Syndrome, one can be a successful and well-known person, at the same time.

v. Artistic Fields

Known also as the impostor syndrome of the gifted, Artists, writers, musicians, and performers are often troubled by the feelings of impostors.

vi. Parenting

It is common in the field of parenting whereby one can develop incompetence, be overwhelmed and run the risk of becoming a mistake.

Gendered aspects

Impostor Syndrome also happens in sociocultural environment whereby individuals form their self-concept.

i. Assumptions

At first the experience was invoked as a female dominated one because the high-achieving women were visible enough to signal their self-doubt in male dominated spaces.

ii. Socialization

Gendered expectations heavily design the dynamics of the internal processes of the Impostor Syndrome, and prevalence might be similar in both genders.

iii. Stereotype

This effect is especially relevant in the setting where the representatives of a certain gender are underrepresented or targeted, which was initially proposed by Steele and Aronson (1995).

iv. Help-Seeking

Influenced by larger standards of emotional expression and vulnerability, coping archways and help-seeking actions are predominantly gender-impacted.

Developmental origins

Recent research on the Impostor Syndrome indicates that the cause of this syndrome is usually traced back to childhood.

i. Emotional Attunement

The element of emotional sensitivity is critical in shaping secure self-worth, self-confidence and trust.

ii. Sibling Roles

In families that have more than one child, the child tends to form roles which may have a great impact on impostor like behavior.

iii. Cultural Expectations

Cultural and collective norms that outline the definition of what success is are the primary factors that affect childhood experiences.

iv. Attachment

Attachment theories represent a dense framework that can be used to explain the psychological foundation of impostor beliefs.

v. Failure

Neglected or scolded, humiliated, or severely criticized in the event of their faults, children may be taught to perceive mistakes as a sign of personal inadequacy instead of development.

vi. Parentification

Parentification is a dynamic that occurs in the families which have children who are prematurely pressed with adult responsibilities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Antecedents

Impostor Syndrome has also been identified in the field of research to comprehend the different factors leading to the Impostor Syndrome. The following are some of them that contribute to either the growth or the occurrence of the Impostor Syndrome in individuals:

(i) Parenting Styles

Zanchetta et al. (2020) conducted an empirical study to understand the consequences of variable emotional confirmation during childhood and found that the subjects who had received inconsistent reactions on the part of their parents were found to exhibit much higher impostor devotion in their adulthood.

Robinson and Goodpaster (2020) investigated the psychological effects of overprotective and over-praising parenting styles in the long-term perspective, noting that the two styles can instill self-doubt despite the intentions of parents.

(ii) Academic Pressures

The study by Tighe et al. (2021) included an in-depth study of the gendered competence expectations and the connection between these expectations and impostor syndrome, in reference to women working in and studying in the male domain. The researchers found out that self-doubt in competent women is increased by internalized societal discourses.

Hutchins and Rainbolt (2017) examined how early academic conditions and development of impostor syndrome relate to each other, with particular attention paid to performance-based validation. With their results, they emphasized that children who were subjected to an unreasonable level of competition and unrealistic school expectations tended to have more perfectionist views.

(iii) Attachment Styles

Rahimi, Litman, and Castagna (2023) developed this theoretical framework by examining the effect of adult attachment styles on impostor feelings in the workplace. Their cross-sectional investigative study on the working professionals revealed that people with anxious-preoccupied attachment styles had significantly higher scores on impostor syndrome scales.

Shin and Steger (2016) examined emotional validation in the context of parent-child relationships and its relationship with authenticity and impostorism among young adulthood. Their results suggested that people who were consistently emotionally validated during childhood had more authenticity and less impostor syndrome and those who were conditionally validated had a higher probability of a fragmented sense of self and had difficulties at school and work.

(iv) Sociocultural Influences

The article by Kumar and Kaur (2022) was a critical analysis of the Indian education system and attracted attention to the striking regional and socio-economic differences in the access to a high-quality education. They observed that poor children usually experience poor teaching standards, crammed classes and less exposure to co-curricular development.

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Sharma and Shukla (2020) investigated how caste and class influenced academic confidence and impostor experiences of Dalit students at elite institutions. Their ethnographic research showed that though Dalit students were admitted either by merit or by affirmative action, they still tended to feel like tokens in the upper-caste dominated spaces.

The present study

The current research design was a qualitative type of research to comprehend the nature of the early dynamics of life such parenting styles, cultural and educational backgrounds, and social expectation factors leading to impostor tendencies.

Objectives

To explore life circumstances in earlier life, which have led to the development of Impostor Syndrome in adulthood.

To investigate coping mechanisms that work in people with Impostor Syndrome.

METHODOLOGY

It was decided to use a qualitative research in order to get deep insight into personal stories, emotional, as well as, internalised design of self-concept among the participants.

Participants

In this study, fifteen participants were used (six female and nine male) with the youngest age of 18 and the oldest age of 25, and the mean age of the whole sample amounted to 22.1 years, which allowed considering the experience of impostors in the stage of their development as young adults, the sample was chosen using purposive selection.

The religious background of the sample consisted of thirteen people who identified as Hindu and two-Christian and had different cultural backgrounds in India: six were of Marwari, three were of Rajputs, two were Christian (and further Anglo-Indian and South Indian Christian subgroups), and four were Bengali.

The eligibility of the respondents in the study- Four postgraduates who are already working in various fields. Four students who are undertaking postgraduate degrees. Three of them had finished their education but were unemployed at the time. The other four are freshly graduated about to take up professional post graduate courses in Clinical Psychology (two), Business Administration (one), and Journalism (one).

Procedure

This is qualitative research based on semi-structured interviews, which investigates the relationship between childhood and impostor syndrome in young adults.

The subjects were recruited in institutional means. Through the social media communication where posts were made by reaching out to the population of young adults, initial contact was made, some also made by passing out forms, with clear instructions on the inclusion criteria, in various college groups. The interview consisted of 26 open-ended questions, which involved exploration of themes and it was conducted face-to-face, in a place of mutual agreement in the institutions of learning where comfort and privacy were guaranteed. The length of every session was around 45 to 60 minutes.

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Sample Items:

“Have you ever questioned yourself whether you really are worthy of what you have achieved?”

“Do you remember a particular childhood event that made you feel strongly supported or validated in your talents? What was the significance of that moment?”

All interviews were tape recorded with permission and transcribed word-to-word. There was anonymization of transcriptions, which made them confidential. The handling of all data was done according to ethical requirements of conducting research on human subjects.

This scientific and morally upright process allows obtaining a profound insight into the inner worlds and experiences of the participants.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data analysis was carried out through the use of thematic analysis. It entailed: becoming conversant with the data, the initial-code generation, Theme identification, Theme-review, Theme-definition, and Report Production, as theorized by Braun and Clarke (2006). As this technique can enable both inductive and deductive investigation, it was appropriate to investigate subjective phenomena such as impostor-syndrome.

It is in this research that thematic analysis was useful and frequently emotionally-evocative accounts given by young adults about their childhood memories and the present sense of self-doubt. The flexibility of the method enabled the involvement of both shared and unique dimensions, pointing to the various trajectories that overshadow the self-concept and coping strategies.

In-person semi-structured interviews were carried out and taped in order to increase the precision of the collected data, following informed consent of every participant.

Transcription of the collected data followed post data collection, and the data were transcribed in English paying keen attention to maintaining semantic integrity, cultural context and emotional tone so that the expressions of participants could remain faithful. This step was crucial to capture the richness of inner struggle, contemplation and emotional frailty of the stories of the participants.

Frequent and extensive reading was added to ensure profound and familiarity. When reading through them, preliminary notes were taken about recurring ideas, metaphors, inconsistencies, and passages of emotional interest. A hybrid approach was used in initial open coding, which was conducted on all transcripts and based on the theoretical constructs as well as the emergent data insights. The text segments that seemed significant, recurrent, or theoretically important received codes. These were references to parenting styles, academic expectations, emotional support or neglect, identity struggles and patterns of coping.

The second step was the axial coding in which similar codes were put together into wider categories. This step would involve the researcher comparing transcripts and finding common patterns where the researcher is sensitive to divergent voices and differences related to context. After sorting, the codes were then validated and sorted with the help of

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constant comparison and themes started to emerge which were related to underlying psychological constructs, developmental patterns and social-environmental factors.

Themes were not merely an overview of material but were formulated to convey the deeper structuring of meaning that provided insight into the manner in which impostor feelings were created, strengthened and handled across time. It was done in a recursive manner, as the data was shifted back and forth between raw, codes, and thematic categories to make sure that each theme was consistent, clear, and based on the narratives of the participants in an empirical way.

The various codes were used to support each theme in the tables, and the analysis was based on lived experience by reference to the narratives of selected participants. This method made it possible to do analytical triangulation, which enhanced the reliability and credibility of the findings.

The analysis of the study approaches the topic of thematic analysis and a systematic process of coding, theme-generation, and categorization as a result of which the study provides a balanced and empirically substantiated vision of the relationship between childhood experiences and impostor syndrome in young adults. The variety of the culturally and regionally diverse participants and the strict procedures of translation and transcription make the analysis contextually sensitive, especially in the context of the Indian setting under-researched, in which impostor syndrome is rarely addressed except within the context of the academic world or gender studies.

On the whole, this procedure allowed the study to transcend the superficial accounts and permit the development of deep-rooted developmental and emotional topics that lead to impostor syndrome. It also helps in pointing out the key of early intervention and systemic awareness both at the family and the institution level in a bid to create a setting that helps nurture true self-worth and emotional strength.

RESULTS

The results section is further subdivided into two clear tables, where one table is devoted to the various aspects of the experiences of the participants with impostor syndrome and how they were coping with it, with the codes under this table providing an idea as to how such topics contribute to the emotional and psychological experience of the participants and how this leads to the development of their impostor thoughts.

Table 4.1: Factors behind Impostor Syndrome delves into the underlying factors that might lead to feelings of incompetence and self-doubt and the discussion of the underlying themes that led to those conditions including the pressure to prove oneself, the reliance on external validation, and internalized perfection.

Table 4.2: Coping Mechanisms center on ways of coping and overcome these negative feelings. It brings out themes like emotional support seeking, refraining perspective, and accepting the growth of oneself.

Combined these two tables give us a full picture of the causes of the impostor syndrome and how people handle and manage the challenges they experience.

Table 4.1 Factors Behind Impostor Syndrome

THEMES	CODES	REPRESENTATIVE QUOTE
1. Never Enough.	a. Chasing Approval.	“I started equating mistakes with failure, and failure with personal inadequacy.”
	b. Proving Loop.	“Every achievement comes with an expiration date, and I have to keep proving myself over and over again.”
	c. Living for Praise.	“I knew they were proud of me, but only when I was excelling.”
	d. Only Perfect Counts	“Even small failures felt catastrophic.”
2. The Unsaid Expectations.	a. Expected to Excel.	“There was an unspoken rule that anything less than excellence was disappointing.”
	b. Conditional Care.	“I felt like I had to keep achieving to maintain that pride.”
	c. Not Allowed to Feel.	“Failure wasn’t something we openly discussed—it was something to be avoided at all costs.”
3. No Time to Learn	a. Comparison Trap.	“If I had to work harder than my peers to achieve the same results, I assumed it meant I wasn’t naturally talented.”
	b. Sibling Standard.	“No matter what I did, it never seemed as impressive because he had already done it better.”
	c. Grades = Worth	“Even when I brought home 95%, I’d immediately think about the 5% I lost.”
4. Still Not Proud	a. Nothing Special	“I think, ‘Anyone could have done this,’ or ‘I was just in the right place at the right time.’”
	b. Can’t Take Compliments.	“I usually deflect or minimize my achievements—‘Oh, it wasn’t that hard.’”
	c. Disowning Success.	“I struggle to own my success. I tend to downplay my role and attribute a lot of it to external factors.”
5. Pushing Myself	a. What If I Fail?	“I became obsessed with perfection because I felt like anything less wasn’t good enough.”
	b. Thriving, Yet Doubting	“I don’t necessarily feel like a fraud, but I do wonder if I’ve done <i>enough</i> to deserve my success.”
	c. Not as worthy.	“I worry that people overestimate me.”
	d. Can’t Open Up.	“I only know that way of emotional handling... I’ve never been consoled for my failures.”

Table 4.1 highlights the factors responsible for onset of impostor syndrome.

The stories by the participants were grouped into five main themes that each had several particular codes reflecting the subtle commonalities in the data. The themes reflect more general psychological or emotional processes that lead to impostor syndrome and the codes reflect particular cognitive or behavioral dispositions that translate impostor feelings.

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Questions are provided in great numbers as representative quotes to maintain the richness of the voices of the participants and offer first hand evidence of the analytical assertions.

The following is the definition and explanation of all of the themes and codes in Table 1:
Never Enough.

a. Chasing Approval.

Such code defines people whose self-worth and identity are validated only by the success or accomplishment.

b. Proving Loop.

This code addresses the stress of constantly demonstrating value, even following its success in the past.

c. Living for Praise.

This code is based on external validation as the main source of self esteem.

d. Only perfect counts.

When people believe so, they tend to equate anything that is not a perfect performance with complete failure, and that will continue to inculcate the feeling of a fraud whenever they commit an error.

The Unsaid Expectations.

This is the theme that touches on the covert or suppressed pressures and expectations which people undergo. Such pressures can be implicit but these are known and internalized and lead to feelings of inadequacy and impostorism.

a. Expected to excel.

This code is the unwritten code or rather expectations that people are born to and in most cases are the rules and expectations of the family or that of the culture.

b. Conditional Care.

This code is known as the conditional love and acceptance where affection and pride are usually connected with success.

c. Not allowed to Feel.

In this code, failure is avoided and the inability to support the experience of failure is discouraged, there is a focus on correction of errors and not the validation of the emotions of the person.

No time to Learn.

The person is constantly in a rivalry with other people especially those in the family and compares his or her success against those who seem to succeed with ease or naturally.

a. Comparison Trap.

This code can be seen as the comparison with the rest, the siblings or the peers when the given individual feels that they should strive harder to obtain equal results.

b. Sibling Standard.

This code is defined as the competitive process in families, where one can feel that he always constantly compares himself to a sibling or a relative.

c. Grades = Worth

This code emphasizes the fact that one is always gauged against others in regard to success, usually by percentages or rank.

Still not Proud.

People with impostor syndrome do not like to overstate their achievements and, instead, explain them by some external independence, such as chance or fortunes, and not by their own capabilities.

a. Nothing Special

This code indicates the inclination to minimize personal achievements, either by the claim of being in a specific situation or their importance.

b. Cannot Take Compliments.

A person with an impostor syndrome also tends to be uneasy with recognition and they tend to ignore compliments and even achievements so as to avoid the embarrassment of being praised.

c. Disowning Success.

This code is characteristic of the refusal to accept the credit of one's own successes and transfer it to outside circumstances, like fortune or the hour.

Pushing Myself.

This theme brings out the pressure most people put on oneself to always perform better. It is not about living to external expectations, but it is about being incessantly fuelled by an inner voice that seeks perfection, productivity, and evidence.

a. What If I Fail?

This code examines the debilitating fear of loss and the assumption that being less than best is not merely a blowback of the failure but the manifestation of their fundamental inefficiency.

b. Thriving, Yet Doubting.

This code is the reflection of the people who are outwardly successful yet deep inside them they are unsure whether they really deserve such success. Successes bring temporary satisfaction which will be replaced quickly by the sensation of doubt, which causes emotional burns and continuous loop of self-defense.

c. Not as worthy.

This code is concerned with the fear that others have overrated oneself. Even in their best performance, people fear that they are not as good as they are and could be discovered. This is a continuous doubt about oneself which undermines belief and contributes to impostor phenomenon, particularly when one feels achieved or lucky.

d. Can't Open Up.

This code revolves around the idea of emotional inhibition, that is, the incapability to show vulnerability. When people are not allowed to feel the failure emotionally or are brought up in a world where difficulties are downplayed, they develop the habit of repressing unpleasant emotions.

Table 4.2: Highlights The Coping Mechanisms Incorporated.

THEMES	CODES	REPRESENTATIVE QUOTES
1. Trying to Belong	a. Seen in Struggle.	“Opening up to people made me realize I’m not the only one who feels this way.”
	b. Guided Growth	“Therapy has helped me unlearn a lot of harsh self-talk.”
	c. Safety in Connection	“Even if I mess up, I know my parents still believe in me.”
2. Compassion on Replay	a. Healing the Inner Critic	“I actively remind myself that I don’t have to be perfect to be valuable.”
	b. Redefining Worth.	“I’m learning to just say thank you instead of brushing off praise.”
3. Feel to Heal.	a. Grace in Falling	“I try to see failure as information, not a verdict on me.”
	b. Unfiltered Me.	“I used to compare myself to my brother constantly. It made me feel small.”
	c. Rewriting the Rules	“Success used to mean a title. Now it’s about peace.”
4. Changing the Ending.	a. Beyond Appearances.	“Success for me now is alignment with my values.”
	b. From Doubt to Dignity	“I’ve stopped telling myself I only matter when I’m productive.”
	c. Letting It Sink.	“I thought people only praised me because they didn’t know the truth.”
5. In the Making	a. Fitting Into Myself	“I tried everything—from karate to piano—until I found what fit.”
	b. Perfectly Imperfect.	“I don’t obsess over details anymore. I just want to be consistent.”
	c. Trust the Training.	“I deal with impostor feelings by building skills until I feel capable.”

Table 4.2 highlights the various coping mechanisms incorporated by the respondents.

This table focuses on the strategies and mechanisms participants use to manage and mitigate feelings of impostor syndrome.

Trying to Belong

The theme of how people cope with feelings of impostor by searching and establishing relationships that help them feel visible, appreciated, and comprehended is discussed.

a. Seen in Struggle

This code encompasses the effect of the vulnerability particularly in the context of exchanging emotional baggage with close people. Speaking their fears aloud and receiving

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empathy which was received helped legitimize their feelings and rebrand their feelings as normal human experiences.

b. Guided Growth

This code can be referred to as the way in which mentorship, therapy, and supporting feedback brought about personal development and provoked the deep-seated perceptions concerning self-worth. Outside advice served to reframe participant internal stories and perceive pain or failure as a means of development, rather than a sign of incompetence.

c. Safety in Connection

The code identifies the importance of secure relationships with others in establishing self-worth. Making the participants feel unconditionally supported assisted in buffering the impostor feelings.

Compassion on Replay

This theme is an intentional and recurrent attempt to substitute internal monologues of harshness with compassion, to start to forget how to self-criticize and to practice kindness as a way of responding to impostorism.

a. Healing the Inner Critic

The participants were also actively attempting to quiet their inner critic by deciding to talk nice to themselves by recognizing their natural value.

b. Redefining Worth

The participants started questioning their assumption that they deserve to be appreciated only when they are perfect, and started to believe that they can be appreciated as they are.

Feel to Heal

This is a theme of the strength of emotional honesty in the face of impostor syndrome. According to the participants, their growth was stimulated by experiencing their emotions as a response to not suppressing them.

a. Grace in Falling

This code forfeits the concept of reinterpreting failure as an educational instrument rather than an individual judgment. The respondents shared how they came to think more positively of setbacks as a way to transition to feeling curious and resilient, which served them in disinvesting self-worth in performance.

b. Unfiltered Me

That code is known as the shedding of performative comparison and the learning to accept oneself in all his or her authenticity. The participants became aware of the impact of social media curated realities or sibling comparisons on them and began to oppose the narratives.

c. Rewriting the Rules

Such code is a self-reconstruction of success and value, the shift of all external demands to interpersonal correspondence. The participants ceased to pursue traditional or societal definition and began respecting their own values.

Changing the Ending

This is a theme of re-writing beliefs of long held perception on identity, success, and worth. They are no longer allowing the messages internalized or impostor feelings to dictate the story; instead, people are rewriting their definitions to place their focus on authenticity, dignity, and self-acceptance.

a. Beyond Appearances

The code represents the transition between the performance of success and meaningfulness. The subjects have had to abandon the necessity to appear successful and seek values, fulfillment, and integrity.

b. From Doubt to Dignity

This code encompasses the rejection of self-worth as a result of productivity. The participants started to demand their right to live with dignity and value, although they did not always produce anything.

c. Letting It Sink

This code is a complicated process of internalization of praise and deserving it. Respondents described their experiences on how they are learning to believe that they are valuable when they have always been doubtful.

In the Making

This theme is more flowing, experimental and forgiving of identity and success. The participants stressed that exploration, process, and progress rather than the perfection is vital. Their anecdotes point out on self-acceptance on the move.

a. Fitting Into Myself

This code encompasses the exploration role in identity. Members engaged in different activities to discover who they are and they also appreciated trial-and-error to master something, rather than being able to master something at a time.

b. Perfectly Imperfect

This principle is called accepting the incompleteness and the importance of being consistent instead of being perfect. It is a growing realization that perfection is not only unrealistic but it is unnecessary.

c. Trust the Training

This code underlines the fact that trust may be established by action and effort. The participants had empowered themselves through appearing, skills development, and believing in their progress.

DISCUSSION

The impostor syndrome is a widespread psychological symptom which is typified by self-doubt all through, failure the inability to externalize achievements and the fear of being discovered as a fraud even though he or she is obviously doing well (Clance and Imes, 1978). It was first theorized through the high-achieving women prism, and since that time, it was interpreted as a pervasive phenomenon, which crosses gender, culture, and the professional border, in particular, and impacts young adults in their transition (Parkman, 2016).

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The psychological cost of the imposter syndrome is enormous. It does not just manifest itself as occasional feelings of insecurity, but as a chronic distortion in cognition that is characterized by hyper-vigilance, perfectionism and increased reliance on external validation. Specifically, there is a lack of qualitative research that penetrates into the initial formative years of those who end up having this condition.

This paper reveals the psychological scripts that are internalized during childhood which subsequently lead to the development of impostor-like tendencies in adulthood by drawing upon rich and narrative-based information on 15 in-depth interviews. The approach was specifically qualitative to ensure that subtlety would be traced. These interviews turned out to be portals into the delicate, mostly unacknowledged processes that defined the inner world of participants: family norms, sibling comparisons, school cultures, reaction to failure, the use (or absence) of emotive language that surrounded success and confirmation.

The results showed that ten broad themes- Never Enough, The Unsaid Expectations, No Time to Learn, Still Not Proud, Pushing Myself, Trying to Belong, Compassion on Replay, Feel to Heal, Changing the Ending, In the Making- define how impostor syndrome establishes itself and maintains itself. Certain codes obtained in the course of inductive analysis support the themes, and representative quotations, which describe common patterns of affects and cognitions exhibited by the participants.

Findings

The results of this research support and enlarge the current literature on imposter syndrome. Clance and Imes (1978) determined the key dynamics of imposter syndrome and identified perfectionistic family systems and conditional validation in childhood to be the key contributors, which is in line with two of the major themes in this study, which are Never Enough and The Unsaid Expectations, both reflecting how high-achieving children received applause on performance only, and thus this leads to internalized perfectionism and the need to repeatedly prove oneself.

According to Kumar and Jagacinski (2006), achievement motivation and external pressures contribute largely to the development of imposter syndrome that is likely to be seen among highly competitive academic environments. This can be matched with the theme of this study "No Time to Learn" particularly within codes of Comparison Trap, Sibling Standard and Grade = Worth.

Nevertheless, as the existing body of literature has mostly addressed the issue of imposter syndrome in relation to work, academia, and professional identity, the study presents two very important yet under-researched factors emotional suppression and affective invalidation, investigating childhood emotional experiences, family validation patterns and shaping interpersonal dynamics, The statements like Pushing Myself with the following codes Can't Open Up What If I Fail? Not as Worthy fill the major gap in the literature. These findings suggest that the imposter syndrome does not only appear to be a result of external validation systems, but internalized emotional blueprints as well. Equally, although some of the concepts, such as perfectionism and comparison, were recognized earlier, in this work, they are repackaged in the form of a more personalized narrative approach, in the sense of how the pressures are internalized through the unspoken family rules, subtle sibling interactions, and childhood cultural socialization.

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This work is also the first, to the knowledge of the researcher, to present the emotional theme of Still Not Proud as an independent phenomenon, the discrepancy between the external appreciation and internal validation. The respective codes show that even praise may be disturbing or denied when it goes against the deeply held internal discourses. Such a theme may be the foundation of more specific research to examine the psychology of resistance to praise and the inability to internalize success, particularly in the context of high-functioning adults.

Finally, another gap in the existing literature is pointed to by the code Can't Open Up in the theme Pushing Myself, the failure or unwillingness to process failure on an emotional level. Such emotional unconnection, which might be due to early family norms concerning expression of emotions, also indicates that impostor syndrome is potentially highly related to emotional intelligence, emotional safety during early relationship, and internalization of psychological support, which remain under-investigated in the existing literature.

IMPLICATIONS

The results of the present study have far-reaching consequences to various parties that are concerned with the emotional health and personal growth of young adults- mental health professionals, educators, parents, and organizational leaders.

To mental health practitioners, and in particular those that deal with adolescents and young adults, these findings necessitate a therapeutic change of emphasis on the past life experiences of the clients instead of emphasizing on the current self-doubt or workplace pressures. Integration therapy combining psychodynamic search, inner child therapy or narrative therapy may assist people to revisit and reinterpret those underlying experiences.

The results of the research in the educational and parenting areas show that there is an urgent necessity to question and reshape the measures of success and failure modeling to children. The statistics indicate that most respondents have been raised in a setting where their value was pegged on the performance results- grades, rankings, achievements or in comparison to their sisters or brothers. It is important to create classroom cultures and home environments in which success, interest in learning and perseverance are valued more than achievement or perfection.

The implications are also critical in the organizational and professional contexts. When these young adults enter the labor market or college life, they naturally take these internalized tendencies with them, and have to live with a sense of inadequacy in the face of outward achievements. Companies aiming to develop resilient, innovative and confident individuals need to be active in the provision of psychological safety.

The second implication is that peer mentorship and community support structures have a potential of interfering with impostor patterns. Mentorship opportunities made institutional may be potent offsets to internalized self-doubt.

Lastly, this study highlights the fact that we need to change the system and culture of our way of discussing success. Through family structures, educational systems and workplaces, more inclusive, sustainable and emotionally responsive definitions of success can be redefined.

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This paper is an important contribution to theory by focusing on the childhood production of impostor discourses, especially by focusing on the experience of constructing an impostor through subtle, unsaid, and emotionally colored experiences. It builds upon the work of Clance and Imes, by placing the feelings of impostors in the ecosystem of interpersonal relationships and not in the realm of individual cognition alone. It also delineates new substructures like emotional muting, sibling shadowing, and praise discomfort that can be underlying theoretical models of impostor development.

High performance, respectability, and social status are the South Asian family norms that started to surface as important subtexts in most interviews. This implies that the problem of impostorism can be heightened in collectivist cultures that value discipline, humility, and success as social capital. These observations provide a cross-cultural enrichment of a syndrome that has been examined mostly in a Western setting.

Limitations

Although this research offers detailed qualitative explanation of developmental background and experience, it has a number of limitations that should be admitted to keep its results and the scope in proper context.

To begin with, the sample size, although adhering to the qualitative research tradition where the researcher should focus on depth rather than breadth, is rather limited, with only fifteen participants. Although thematic saturation was realized in this category, the conclusions of the study might not be applicable to larger groups. The abundance of the data is conducive to subtle interpretation, whereas the insufficient number of voices also predetermines low generalizability. Therefore, the results will be more of an exploration and representation, and not conclusive.

Second, the demographic characteristic of the participants brings about the further limitation of diversity and inclusiveness. They were all English speaking, formally educated and were able to access some level of psychological vocabulary or introspection language, which allowed them to describe emotional and cognitive patterns in complex forms. This can be a result of some socio-cultural cohort of the young adults- the ones who are already somewhat exposed to psychological discussion or those who have access to education and emotional literacy. Thus, the life of people with non-English-speaking background, lower socioeconomic status, or psychologically under-supported background is not entirely defined in this research.

The third weakness is associated with the retrospective nature of the interviews. Participants were requested to consider their childhood life and childhood emotional settings, which is very much dependent on the recall of previous experiences. Such recollections are bound to be burdened with recall bias, emotional reinterpretation and the implication of present views. Moreover, the interviewer might have influenced the responses of the participants in a more subtle way considering that there was an interviewer at the time of data collection. Although the facilitator may have tried to establish a non-judgmental, safe environment to talk to each other, some participants might have suppressed or censored emotionally vulnerable information, especially when speaking about their relationships with their parents, shame, or feelings of perceived insufficiency.

Lastly, the research does not purport to provide a general theory of impostor syndrome. Rather, it tries to focus on lived emotional experience to be one of the primary lenses

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through which to comprehend the formation of the syndrome. This is a strength as far as the inclusion of emotional nuance is concerned, but it might not be compatible with more clinical or quantitative models, which prioritize symptomatology or diagnostic criteria.

With these constraints taken into consideration, the results of this research can be regarded as a stepping stone to further research, a qualitative but initial starting point that opens the new avenues of further empirical, cross-cultural and interdisciplinary studies of the roots and outcomes of impostor syndrome.

Future Research Recommendation.

Although this research offers a qualitative depth of understanding on the emotional and developmental causal factors of impostor syndrome among young adults, it also presents valuable possibilities of future research.

A good step would be to consider intersectional factors and how these intersecting identities mediate or intensify impostor experiences so that researchers would understand how impostor emotions are mediated by power, access, and systemic inequality.

Moreover, longitudinal research would also be of great use in providing an addition to the literature by monitoring the impostor-related beliefs during the main developmental milestones, such as the transition in adolescence into the higher education sphere, or the transition in the first career jobs into the leadership. Such studies may shed light on how feeling of impostor develops, reaches its peaks, or diminishes over time with the development of self-awareness, development of skills, or social support.

Moreover, by incorporating quantitative measures (e.g., validated scale e.g., Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale) or cognitive-emotional scales, researchers would be in a judicious position to not only record the statistical frequency of impostor experiences in the population but also place these frequencies in the context of the personal emotional narratives. These designs can also assist in isolating crucial predictors or protective factors that can be used to buffer impostor syndrome.

Lastly, the next level of future studies should be to test interventions. Preventive models that are evidence-based, like school-based emotional literacy programs, systematic parental guidance programs, workplace mentorship programs, or community-based story telling circles may be examined in terms of possible reduction in the internalization of toxic measures of success.

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Conflict of Interest

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