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## Exploring the Impostor Phenomenon's Behavioral Characteristics: How Do Gay Male Leaders and Impostors Cope?

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Exploring the Impostor Phenomenon's Behavioral Characteristics:

How Do Gay Male Leaders and Impostors Cope?

A Dissertation by

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Brandman University

Irvine, California

School of Education

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

February 2017

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February 2017

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How Do Gay Male Leaders and Impostors Cope?

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## ABSTRACT

Exploring the Impostor Phenomenon's Behavioral Characteristics:

How Do Gay Male Leaders and Impostors Cope?

by Donald B. Scott

**Purpose:** The purpose of this mixed-methods case study was to explore and describe the coping skills used to overcome 9 behavioral characteristics by gay men serving in civic or nonprofit leadership roles who are identified as experiencing the impostor phenomenon (IP) by the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS; Clance, 1985).

**Methodology:** This study used a mixed-methods, descriptive case study approach to collect both quantitative and qualitative data about 14 study participants. Each completed the 20-question CIPS that represented the quantitative strand of the study prior to an interview that included 10 semistructured interview questions designed to collect rich, descriptive data. The purpose for conducting the case study was to explore and describe the individual experiences of gay male leaders who have moderate to intense IP experiences.

**Findings:** Overall, 2 to 4 common themes shared by the participants per characteristic emerged, including focusing on values, appreciating challenges, presenting an authentic self, and following personal instincts. In addition, identifying internal motivational factors, reviewing lessons learned, and realigning personal thought processes represented the intentional approaches participants described as critical coping skills.

**Conclusions:** These findings led the researcher to conclude that individuals experiencing IP characteristics should carefully consider potential work environments, develop strategies for evaluating their personal and professional values, and establish clear

expectations and steps they plan to take prior to embarking upon new challenges. In addition, the results suggest that organizations and clinicians should focus on the role they play in raising awareness of the IP while assisting individuals who typically experience it without the benefit of knowing how to incorporate successful coping strategies.

**Recommendations:** This research should be replicated in other parts of the United States and internationally. Future research should include different comparative studies that consider other members of the LGBT community, compare sexual minorities and their heterosexual counterparts, examine other leaders and those in support roles, and compare leaders in nonprofit versus for-profit environments. Finally, a replication of this study should include full disclosure of the IP construct to its participants ahead of data collection in order to explore alternative coping strategies that may emerge.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The pressure for employees to demonstrate workplace competence continues to grow as globalization advances (Vergauwe, Wille, Feys, De Fruyt, & Anseel, 2015). As both for-profit and nonprofit business and civic agencies pursue downsizing, scholars are considering the effect on remaining employees faced with greater responsibilities they may feel unprepared to manage (Whitman & Shanine, 2012). Individuals struggling with intense internalized feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and inferiority face barriers impeding their chances for both career advancement and personal success (Bechtoldt, 2015). Although perceived by others as highly competent, these individuals maintain negative views of themselves, provoking unnecessary pressure to perform at high levels often at the expense of both their career and their own well-being (Cokley et al., 2015).

The impostor phenomenon (IP), a term psychologists Dr. Pauline Clance and Dr. Suzanne Imes coined in 1978, describes a collection of behavioral characteristics some individuals routinely exhibit in every aspect of their lives (Clance & Imes, 1978; Cusack, Hughes, & Nuhu, 2013; Hutchins, 2015). Clance (1985) created the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS) to measure three primary characteristics including an individual's fear of evaluation, fear of not being able to repeat his or her success, and fear of being less capable than others. While the CIPS has been used in multiple studies of individual populations to measure these characteristics, little research exists on the effects of the IP in the workplace (Whitman & Shanine, 2012).

One population yet to be included in the IP research is the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community. During the critical "coming out" phase of identity formation, LGBT individuals experience negative behavioral characteristics such as

anxiety and shame often associated with the IP (Brown & Trevethan, 2010). Despite increasing levels of social and cultural acceptance of sexual minorities, concern about the physical and psychological well-being of LGBT individuals persists (Martos, Nezhad, & Meyer, 2015). Examining the connection between LGBT sexual orientation formation and the behavioral characteristics associated with the IP can help fill a research gap by informing future scholars and clinicians how best to support individuals during the LGBT identity formation process (Rossi, 2010).

### **Background**

The background section begins by explaining the IP and providing context about how it affects individuals both personally and professionally. A description of the initial focus on women in early studies and the IP precedes information regarding gender and familial differences. A comparison of the IP as a combination of behavioral characteristics versus a psychological experience introduces contrasting perspectives of how the IP affects individuals. Various sexual orientation formation theories and variables affecting the coming-out process in the LGBT community are presented, positioning this study to address an identified gap in current research about the IP (Clancey, 2014).

### **Impostorism**

Though the IP term appeared in 1978, it was not until 1987 that anyone asked why awareness of the construct should matter (Clance & O'Toole, 1987). The ability to appreciate one's own successes and strengths is commonly noted as a limitation of those identified with the IP. For instance, an inclination to decline career advancement opportunities because of the IP's behavioral characteristics prevents individuals from

achieving their personal dreams (Clance & O'Toole, 1987). Likewise, impostors face difficulty reaching their full potential because of their internalized sense of fear and self-doubt (Kumar & Jagacinski, 2006). These feelings can often lead impostors to believe they must work harder than others to avoid detection, which creates a negative cycle of other destructive behaviors (Parkman & Beard, 2008).

Scholars have considered the effects of impostorism within specific professions. Hutchins (2015) described the obstacles higher education faculty members dealing with impostorism face, including their constant fear of being discovered as frauds. These psychological barriers to success negatively impact the faculty members' ability to experience personal satisfaction and affect overall job performance (Hutchins, 2015). Similarly, physician assistants experiencing feelings of impostorism find themselves questioning themselves and attribute their success to luck or charm (Mattie, Gietzen, Davis, & Prata, 2008; Prata & Gietzen, 2007). Like others who battle the IP, these physician assistants also believe they have successfully deceived others about their ability to achieve at such a high level of competence (Prata & Gietzen, 2007). This collection of personal characteristics and negative outcomes demonstrates the early foundations of the IP construct.

### **Theoretical Background**

Psychologists Clance and Imes grouped feelings of fraudulence, a fear of being exposed, and the inability to internalize actual success expressed by 150 high-achieving women under the IP umbrella (Caselman, Self, & Self, 2006; Clance & Imes, 1978; Langford & Clance, 1993; Leary, Patton, Orlando, & Funk, 2000; Whitman & Shanine, 2012). Just as these individuals demonstrated, impostors share similar beliefs about their

inferior levels of intelligence and competence while attributing their success to a variety of external factors unrelated to their own ability levels (Clance, Dingman, Reviere, & Stober, 1995). Consequently, these feelings of inferiority promote their drive to perform at higher levels in order to demonstrate that their work justifies any praise they receive (Cokley et al., 2015). All of this creates an “impostor cycle” that reinforces the initial impostor anxiety about the situation, followed by hard work, success of the project, and finally a return to a feeling that any praise or success is attributed to something other than the impostor’s competence (Caselman et al., 2006).

**Gender differences.** Scholars have debated whether the IP affects men and women differently. A study of medical, dental, nursing, and pharmacy students considered the role of gender stereotyping, indicating men entering the nursing profession are affected by the IP as much as and even more than women (Henning, Ey, & Shaw, 1998). However, Kumar and Jagacinski (2006) explored the links between the IP and anxiety and lower confidence levels in intelligence, finding women more likely to exhibit greater levels of impostor fears. Similarly, J. E. King and Cooley (1995) found the IP is a predictor of achievement and achievement behavior more frequently in women than men.

Other studies have been unable to support distinct differences in how the IP affects men and women. Fried-Buchalter (1997) noted similar levels of fear of success, a common IP characteristic, for both genders. Similarly, Sonnak and Towell (2001) reported no significant differences between male and female students regarding their likelihood of developing IP feelings. Finally, Castro, Jones, and Mirsalimi (2004) explored how family and, specifically, the concept of parentification, or role reversal of

parents and children, impacts the IP and found no significant differences between men and women.

**Family influences.** An additional factor contributing to the IP includes the role parents and family play for those who exhibit IP characteristics. Clance and Imes (1978) initially identified two groups based upon family background to describe the differences in the environments as predictors of developing IP tendencies. One group of impostors included those identified as the more sensitive of their siblings or family members. In this case, the impostors try to prove their intelligence to those around them but soon begin to believe their achievements are related to external factors rather than their own intelligence. The second group of impostors included those who receive praise for everything they do regardless of the outcome. As they encounter difficulties with certain tasks, they experience an unexpected pressure to perform at the highest level and begin to doubt the praise they receive and themselves (Clance & Imes, 1978).

Later, J. E. King and Cooley (1995) explored the parental messages children receive related to possible gender stereotyping and the impact it has on the children's development of IP tendencies. Further study about parental overprotectiveness and its connection with the IP supported the important role families play (Sonnak & Towell, 2001). Finally, Castro et al. (2004) explored parentification, the reversal of child and parental roles, and how that impacts children's reporting IP characteristics later in life. As a child assumes and is unable to meet the responsibilities associated with being a parent, feelings of inadequacy lead to anxiety and an inability for the child to develop a true sense of his or her own abilities (Castro et al., 2004). These characteristics, among others, are common for those dealing with the IP.

## **Behavioral Characteristics**

The early work of Clance and Imes (1978) placed significant attention on the behavioral characteristics impostors exhibit. The researchers identified four primary behaviors including generalized anxiety, lack of self-confidence, depression, and frustration with the struggle to achieve high expectations they set for themselves. Other researchers have explored an additional five behavioral characteristics associated with the IP, including perfectionism, self-presentation, procrastination, emotional exhaustion, and fear of failure and success (Cowman & Ferrari, 2002; Crawford, Shanine, Whitman, & Kacmar, 2016; Ferrari & Thompson, 2006; Fried-Buchalter, 1997; Henning et al., 1998; Kets de Vries, 2005; Kumar & Jagacinski, 2006; Leary et al., 2000; McElwee & Yurak, 2010; Neureiter, Traut-Mattausch, Buse, & Di Fabio, 2016; Thompson, Foreman, & Martin, 2000; Vergauwe et al., 2015).

**Generalized anxiety.** Clance and Imes (1978) explained that impostors are convinced their feelings of fraudulence accurately represent what the outside world perceives about them. These internal feelings subsequently lead impostors to experience generalized anxiety about their inability to achieve an identified goal and a belief that nobody will understand their struggle. The researchers highlighted that impostors' willingness to disclose these feelings of anxiety often takes place when they learn others share similar feelings (Clance & Imes, 1978).

**Lack of self-confidence.** Kumar and Jagacinski (2006) described confidence as the degree to which an individual believes he or she is intelligent. Clance and Imes (1978) described two situations impostors experience that lead them to question their self-confidence. First, impostors seek and obtain validation of their intellect but then

dismiss the validation, believing it is attributable to some other quality. Second, the impostors begin to question their need to seek external approval and convince themselves that a truly successful or intelligent person has no need for this kind of validation (Clance & Imes, 1978).

**Depression.** Clance and Imes (1978) included depression as a behavioral characteristic impostors present, highlighting the psychological feelings of distress impostorism creates. Subsequent researchers have also included depression, describing it using overarching categories of neuroticism or perceived levels of fraudulence (Chrisman, Pieper, Clance, Holland, & Glickauf-Hughes, 1995; Kolligian & Sternberg, 1991; McGregor, Gee, & Posey, 2008; Peteet, Brown, Lige, & Lanaway, 2015). It is the negative thought patterns and self-doubt that appear in impostors and those diagnosed with depression that demonstrate the similarities in both populations (McGregor et al., 2008).

**Perfectionism.** Kets de Vries (2005) described perfectionism and highlighted two distinct types predicting one's likelihood of developing IP characteristics. Benign perfectionists thrive on their perfectionist tendencies, suffering few negative effects and often finding success. In contrast, absolute perfectionists establish a negative cycle of setting unrealistic goals they are unable to achieve, followed by a belief that working harder will compensate for their deficiencies. Establishing unattainable goals leads impostors to express more concern about making mistakes in addition to miscalculating the number of mistakes they are actually likely to make (Thompson et al., 2000). Finally, Henning et al. (1998) noted that impostors possessing perfectionist characteristics are more susceptible to various forms of psychological distress.

**Self-presentation.** Along with perfectionism, scholars have studied the importance of self-presentation among impostors. Leary et al. (2000) explored the implication of different situations impostors encounter and how each affects how the impostors react. Cowman and Ferrari (2002) compared the role of guilt and shame related to the degree to which impostors adjust their self-presentational attributes. Likewise, Ferrari and Thompson (2006) noted that impostors tend to be concerned with how they are perceived by others, linking that back to the desire to demonstrate perfection.

**Procrastination.** Clance et al. (1995) noted that impostors engage in a pattern of self-sabotage including the tendency to procrastinate. As a result, the individuals find they are paralyzed by their fear of looming deadlines, placing additional pressure on themselves to complete a task. Upon successful task completion, the impostors perpetuate their own self-doubt by attributing their success to luck versus their ability (Sakulku & Alexander, 2011). Further, Yuen and Depper (1987) indicated that procrastination offers impostors an opportunity to avoid negative consequences by associating failure with a lack of effort versus a lack of ability.

**Emotional exhaustion.** Another characteristic emerging as common among identified impostors involves the toll impostorism takes on an individual's emotional state. Crawford et al. (2016) highlighted the constant strain impostors face as they try to balance their need to conceal their feelings of fraudulence while striving to meet the demands of their professional and personal responsibilities. The success, or lack thereof, with which they are able to meet these demands coupled with any sources of support for their experiences can determine how the impostors manage this characteristic.

**Fear of failure and fear of success.** Two seemingly opposing behavioral characteristics are also frequently mentioned. Neureiter et al. (2016) highlighted that impostors may deal with both but mentioned the characteristics represent different psychological experiences and are often reflective of a person's stage in life. Fried-Buchalter (1997) considered both by highlighting that the fear of failure can affect the types of goals one sets, while fear of success appears when an impostor suspects any perceived success will result in the loss of affection from others.

Other recent studies have begun to consider whether the IP is a personality trait or a psychological experience triggered by specific situations individuals encounter throughout their lives (McElwee & Yurak, 2010). Research has recently explored how individual self-perceptions represent one of several core self-evaluations individuals formulate over time that supports the complex understanding of how the IP develops (Vergauwe et al., 2015). These behavioral characteristics can affect not only an individual's personal life but also his or her professional life.

### **Coming-Out Process**

Scholars agree that the coming-out process for LGBT individuals is complex and includes a set of milestones each individual experiences in his or her own time (Brown & Trevethan, 2010; Martos et al., 2015; Rossi, 2010). Likewise, D'Augelli (1991) described the process as a series of transitions one experiences as he or she moves from one identity to another. Further, Vaughan and Waehler (2010) noted two primary types of growth LGBT individuals experience after coming out, including an improvement in how they perceive themselves and an improvement in how they perceive their relationships with other LGBT individuals.

Current research is beginning to consider the benefits of stress-related personal growth associated with the coming-out process. Cox, Dewaele, Van Houtte, and Vincke (2011) noted the personal issues LGBT individuals face, such as their own internalized homonegativity as well as the impact of coming out on their relationships with others. However, Solomon, McAbee, Åsberg, and McGee (2015) noted that an individual may withhold disclosure as a way to avoid negative outcomes and fail to realize the potential for growth associated with the critical step of coming out to others.

In addition to their personal lives, LGBT individuals must consider the impact of coming out on their professional lives as it concerns fears of job loss or professional credibility (Troiden, 1989). As societal acceptance of the LGBT community has evolved over time, so have proposed models designed to explain the sexual orientation development and coming-out processes individuals experience (Benozzo, Pizzorno, Bell, & Koro-Ljungberg, 2015; Creed & Scully, 2011; Dunlap, 2016; Manning, 2015; Martos et al., 2015).

**Sexual orientation models.** The earliest models of LGBT sexual orientation development described a linear-stage process of several key steps including recognition of one's sexual attractions, exploration of same-sex sexual experiences, self-identification as LGBT, public disclosure, and developing pride in one's identity (Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1989). Recent scholars have suggested that linear-stage models discount the different experiences men and women have as they embrace their true sexual orientation (Bogaert & Hafer, 2009; Martos et al., 2015; Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000). Unlike linear-stage models that include sexual behavior as part of the sexual orientation development process, life course development models that consider variables including age and gender

are currently described as a more appropriate depiction of the process (Dube, 2000; Floyd & Bakeman, 2006; Grov, Bimbi, Nanín, & Parsons, 2006). For instance, an individual's age as well as the social-political and cultural circumstances at the time he or she comes out are considered key variables left out of the earlier stage models (Floyd & Bakeman, 2006). Understanding LGBT sexual orientation developmental models is important to clarify how the developmental stages LGBT individuals experience differ compared to their heterosexual counterparts (Peacock, 2000).

**Gender differences.** Martos et al. (2015) stated that men reach sexual orientation milestones before women, though they highlighted greater lengths of time between achieving each of them. Calzo, Antonucci, Mays, and Cochran (2011) supported these findings but found women coming out sooner than men if the process took place later in life. The role of gender stereotyping is still present and may impact the goals LGBT individuals attempt to achieve (Blashill & Powlisha, 2009).

**Professional implications.** Scholars have debated whether coming out in the workplace is a beneficial experience despite increasing levels of societal acceptance (Benozzo et al., 2015; Legate, Ryan, & Weinstein, 2012; Priola, Lasio, De Simone, & Serri, 2014). While often described as producing greater levels of employee well-being, the organizational context and potential costs associated with coming out force LGBT individuals to carefully consider the decision (Croteau, Anderson, & VanderWal, 2008; E. B. King, Reilly, & Hebl, 2008). In addition, scholars have noted that as changes occur in individuals' career paths or within organizations, LGBT individuals are forced to repeat the coming-out process and face the same dilemma multiple times throughout their careers (Benozzo et al., 2015; Colgan & Wright, 2011).

## **Leadership**

Early researchers including Bass (1985) explored leadership styles and described the differences between transactional and transformational leadership. Focused on their corresponding levels of success, the transactional style involved a series of employee incentives and punishments to inspire results (Bass, 1985). The employee-centered transformational style built upon transactional leadership by incorporating a leader's ability to inspire an employee through personal connection and highlighting the importance of and the ability for the employee to make significant contributions to the organization (Bromley & Kirschner-Bromley, 2007).

Recent literature has built upon historic leadership models but has placed its focus on leaders' task orientation versus their people orientation (Gartzia & Baniandr s, 2016). Further, the role that mentors, family background, and an individual's age play in an individual's level of leadership confidence is beginning to emerge as another important characteristic to consider for those struggling with impostorism (Sanford, Ross, Blake, & Cambiano, 2015). Largely missing from the literature are studies exploring what, if any, behavioral characteristics impostors, leaders, and members of the LGBT community have in common.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

Shifting 21st-century demographics are compelling organizations to consider what impact succession planning will have on the next generation of leaders (Parkman & Beard, 2008). Despite strong qualifications, internal fear of being exposed as a fraud reduces individuals' desire to lead and can even inhibit some from pursuing leadership positions (Kets de Vries, 2005). Scholars have explored impostor feelings among various

student populations, but limited research exists about how impostorism influences individuals and their work-related professional success (Vergauwe et al., 2015).

A central principle of the IP highlights the negative view impostors can develop about themselves and the long-term effect on future success (Caselman et al., 2006; Clance & O'Toole, 1987; Cokley et al., 2015). Studies exploring how the IP affects specific populations of individuals have included gender differences (Fried-Buchalter, 1997; Henning et al., 1998; J. E. King & Cooley, 1995; Kumar & Jagacinski, 2006; Sonnak & Towell, 2001) but have failed to include sexual orientation as another variable. As impostors, individuals learn to cope with challenges invisible to external observers much like LGBT individuals as they consider disclosing their identity to those around them (Bogaert & Hafer, 2009).

Studies have considered the factors LGBT individuals experience that impact the coming-out process (Calzo et al., 2011; Martos et al., 2015; Savin-Williams, 1998). For instance, Birkett, Newcomb, and Mustanski (2015) highlighted how victimization can lead to psychological distress and feelings of chronic stress. In addition, Benozzo et al. (2015) observed that while coming out is often considered beneficial, it is not a one-time experience but rather forces individuals to repeatedly have to divulge that they are different from others.

Studies have explored both the IP and the LGBT coming-out process independently of one another. However, no data exist regarding how LGBT individuals who also identify as impostors cope with the behavioral characteristics associated with the IP (Clancey, 2014). Investigating the similarities between the feelings of fraudulence that impostors experience and the impact of the fraudulent life that LGBT leaders lead

until they come out will offer greater insight about how each group of individuals navigate the challenges they face.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this descriptive, mixed-methods case study was to explore and describe the coping skills used to overcome nine behavioral characteristics by gay men serving in civic or nonprofit leadership roles who are identified as experiencing the impostor phenomenon (IP) by the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS; Clance, 1985).

### **Research Question**

The study attempted to answer the following question:

What coping skills do gay men serving in civic or nonprofit leadership roles who are identified as experiencing the IP, using the CIPS (Clance, 1985), use to overcome nine behavioral characteristics associated with the IP?

1. Anxiety
2. Lack of self-confidence
3. Depression
4. Perfectionism
5. Procrastination
6. Self-presentation
7. Emotional exhaustion
8. Fear of failure
9. Fear of success

## **Significance of the Problem**

The IP construct has only been studied for the last 38 years. Clance and Imes (1978) identified generalized anxiety, lack of self-confidence, depression, and internalized frustration as behavioral characteristics that those identified with the IP struggle to overcome. More recently, scholars have considered perfectionism, emotional exhaustion, self-presentation, depression, fear of failure, and fear of success as additional characteristics that can affect an individual who is struggling with impostorism in the workplace (Dudău, 2014; Egan, Piek, & Dyck, 2015; Hutchins, 2015; Vergauwe et al., 2015; Whitman & Shanine, 2012). It is the prevalence of these hidden characteristics combined with other well-kept secrets that calls for further examination.

Clance and Imes (1978) noted the IP is a well-guarded secret an impostor strives to keep. Much like impostors, members of the LGBT community may attempt to hide their identity at the risk of increasing the likelihood of experiencing their own fear of exposure (Solomon et al., 2015). Further, Birkett et al. (2015) noted that increased levels of victimization and other stress LGBT individuals face related to the coming-out process can lead to chronic stress and difficulty with coping.

Despite increased societal acceptance of the LGBT community, Pachankis and Goldfried (2006) reported that gay men concerned about having their sexual orientation challenged experience greater levels of social anxiety related to their interactions with others as compared to their heterosexual counterparts. Their desire to avoid certain social situations can preclude gay men from finding the kind of social support that research suggests is critical for sexual minorities (Pachankis & Goldfried, 2006). Equally important is knowing that current models of sexual orientation development highlight

that the coming-out process often takes place in an environment of shame and alienation (Floyd & Bakeman, 2006). As a result of these conditions, LGBT individuals face a difficult decision that carries important implications. Further, the lack of research regarding any connection between sexual orientation formation and behavioral characteristics associated with the IP supports the need for further investigation (Clancey, 2014).

Dunlap (2016) noted that the coming-out process has shifted over time, with it taking place more frequently during adolescence versus in adulthood. Numerous scholars have reported the positive effect mentoring and social support can offer impostors (Dancy & Brown, 2011; Vergauwe et al., 2015; Whitman & Shanine, 2012) as well as members of the LGBT community (Birkett et al., 2015; Calzo et al., 2011). This support offers LGBT individuals an opportunity to validate their feelings of distress and anxiety associated with coming out (Solomon et al., 2015).

The results of this study should provide insight for 21st-century organizations as they consider how to identify and support employees struggling with intense feelings of fraudulence and anxiety at a time when succession planning for a new generation of leaders is more important than ever (Parkman & Beard, 2008). Finally, the study assists in filling a gap in the research regarding the internal struggle the IP poses for gay men who also contend with the daily challenges of being a sexual minority in contemporary society (Clancey, 2014).

## Definitions

### Theoretical Definitions

**Coping skills.** The skills used to execute a response to a threat (Bachmann & Simon, 2014; Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989; Hutchins, 2015; Neureiter et al., 2016).

**Impostor phenomenon (IP).** A psychological construct describing an individual's intense internal experience of feeling intellectually fraudulent, possessing a fear of exposure, and being unable to internalize actual success (Bechtoldt, 2015; Caselman et al., 2006; Clance & Imes, 1978; Vergauwe et al., 2015).

### Operational Definitions

**Adult.** For the purposes of this study, an adult is an individual over the age of 21.

**Behavioral characteristics.** For the purposes of this study, behavioral characteristics are personal qualities typically associated with those identified as impostors by the CIPS (Clance, 1985). This study addressed the following nine characteristics: anxiety, lack of self-confidence, depression, perfectionism, procrastination, self-presentation, emotional exhaustion, fear of failure, and fear of success.

**Civic agency.** For the purposes of this study, a civic agency is any entity working on behalf of a group of citizens to identify and address issues of public concern.

**Coming out.** A phrase used to describe the culminating milestone of the sexual orientation development process for members of the LGBT community (Calzo et al., 2011). The American Psychological Association (2016) extended the definition to

include the process individuals experience when they acknowledge, accept, and disclose their sexual orientation to others.

**Coping skills.** For the purposes of this study, coping skills are the actions individuals take in response to the negative behavioral characteristics created by feelings of impostorism.

**Impostor cycle.** A series of behaviors and actions beginning with diligence and hard work to overcome the fear of exposure as a fraud, followed by finding success with a project, and finally returning to the initial fear of exposure (Clance & Imes, 1978).

**Impostor phenomenon (IP).** For the purposes of this study, the researcher focused on individuals scoring 45 or higher on the CIPS (Clance, 1985).

**Leadership position.** A leadership position is defined as an individual name or job title indicating there is at least one follower who is working toward achieving a common goal (Bennis, 2007). For the purposes of this study, participants were identified leaders in civic or nonprofit agencies.

**Nonprofit agency.** An entity organized and operating according to strict guidelines regarding its earnings and limitations on actions it may take as set forth by the Internal Revenue Service (2016).

**Parentification.** The role reversal of parents and children resulting in children sacrificing their own needs to meet the unmet needs of their parents (Castro et al., 2004).

**Sexual orientation.** A pattern of physical, emotional, and/or sexual attraction individuals follow in relationship to others (American Psychological Association, 2016).

### **Delimitations**

1. The study was delimited to self-identified gay men.
2. The study was delimited to leaders serving in civic or nonprofit agencies in California.
3. The study was delimited to participants who scored 45 or higher on the CIPS (Clance, 1985).
4. The study was delimited to gay men who came out after the age of 21.

### **Organization of the Study**

The study is organized into chapters addressing the key elements supporting the purpose of the research. Chapter II provides an extensive review of relevant literature regarding the IP construct, its common behavioral characteristics, and how it compares and overlaps with sexual orientation and sexual orientation development theory. Chapter III outlines the research methodology chosen for the study, including descriptions of the research instruments used and the data collection process. Chapter IV details the quantitative and qualitative data acquired through the research process. Finally, Chapter V summarizes the study, including answers to the research question and recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of literature begins with an examination of the impostor phenomenon (IP) construct. An overview of the phenomenon's initial inspiration and 38 years of subsequent research is included. A discussion regarding how the IP has evolved and affects individuals, those affected, proposed causes, and the associated workplace implications follows. A description of nine behavioral characteristics associated with the IP precedes a summary of general coping models individuals use. Literature describing how lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals experience the coming-out process is also included. The chapter concludes by explaining the continued challenges and future opportunities to support gay men who deal with the IP within an organizational context.

### **Impostor Phenomenon**

Finding the courage to pursue a goal sounds simple until an individual experiences feelings of self-doubt or, in some cases, total paralysis that affect his or her ability to achieve that goal. Individuals struggling with the IP, which may be confused with humility, struggle to believe they deserve any success they experience (Kets de Vries, 2005). Whether the individuals are doctoral students, college instructors, or organizational leaders, scholars agree that these feelings of inadequacy are common responses to the stressful environments these individuals encounter (Craddock, Birnbaum, Rodriguez, Cobb, & Zeeh, 2011).

### **Describing the Impostor Phenomenon**

Dr. Pauline Clance and Dr. Suzanne Imes (1978) first described the IP as a common set of experiences that 150 high-achieving women reported during their clinical

psychotherapy work. The researchers specifically noted how their clients convinced themselves of their lack of intelligence while dismissing any evidence supporting their considerable competence. This observation inspired further discovery regarding to what their clients attributed success, general behaviors they exhibited, and the creation of a general impostor profile (Clance, 1985).

**Attributions of success.** Women in Clance and Imes's (1978) initial study often cited external attributes such as luck and charm as the explanation for their success. Subsequent IP scholars have explored what role attributing success to external factors plays in an impostor's life. Fujie (2010) highlighted how externalizing success leads to a temporary feeling of short-term satisfaction for the impostor instead of a sense of achievement. Further, Parkman and Beard (2008) pointed out that attributing their success to luck also precedes impostors' need to explain the many reasons why they believe they are undeserving of such praise.

McGregor et al. (2008) noted that impostors are likely to be their own worst critics, who are constantly measuring their performance against that of others. Paradoxically, their constant comparison to others only exacerbates their feelings of inadequacy because of the level of uncertainty about their own skills and abilities (Kumar & Jagacinski, 2006). In order to compensate for the feeling that success is due to temporary circumstances over which they have no control, impostors may resort to such tactics as working harder than might actually be necessary (Ferrari, 2005). Ultimately, impostors feel that any success they experience is unwarranted, thereby reinforcing their overall sense of inadequacy (Caselman et al., 2006).

**Behaviors.** In their initial study, Clance and Imes (1978) noted four primary behaviors their clients exhibited once they assumed the role of impostor. The four behaviors included focusing on diligence and hard work, committing acts of intellectual inauthenticity, using charm or other actions to seek approval of others, and finally surrendering to gender-related expectations of behavior.

***Focus on diligence and hard work.*** The group of women in the initial study exhibited a cycle of actions meant to ensure they avoided their fear of discovery by acquiring a superior's approval through hard work (Clance & Imes, 1978). The study participants' doubts of their own intelligence, willingness to work hard, belief they were deceiving others, and feeling of temporary success only resulted in reinforcing their overarching fear of detection as a fraud (Clance & Imes, 1978). This behavior remains a central tenet of IP research. Kets de Vries (2005) mentioned that impostors often believe they fall short of everyone's expectations but also stand a better chance of meeting those expectations by working harder. Impostors who attribute their success only to their hard work further support their internal disregard of their own abilities (Rohrmann, Bechtoldt, & Leonhardt, 2016).

***Acts of intellectual inauthenticity.*** Clance and Imes (1978) further suggested the likelihood of some impostors committing acts of intellectual inauthenticity. First, the impostors might refrain from sharing their true opinions and beliefs with others by purposely opting to agree with those around them. This misrepresentation permits them to avoid the fear of looking foolish in front of others but has the reverse negative effect of limiting the impostors' opportunity to be spontaneous and creative (Clance, 1985). Similarly, impostors may purposely withhold their opinions and beliefs when they run

contrary to the prevailing conversation for fear of looking unintelligent. Langford and Clance (1993) pointed out the importance impostors place on the impressions they leave on others and the motivation they have to appear intelligent for their own sense of self-validation.

***Seek external approval.*** Clance and Imes (1978) identified the importance of seeking external approval that, like an impostor's focus on hard work, remains an essential attribute when describing the IP. At the time, Clance and Imes related their study participants' qualities such as charm, appearance, and even sexuality as opportunities to seek the approval of others. Much like the acts of intellectual inauthenticity, Clance and Imes reported the negative reinforcing nature of impostors' seeking external approval. At first, the impostors receive the approval of others and are inclined to dismiss it, believing it was offered in response to the methods used to obtain it rather than because it was earned. Additionally, impostors begin to question their need to seek the approval of others, convincing themselves that true intellectuals would have no need for this type of validation (Clance & Imes, 1978). Nevertheless, Hillman (2013) highlighted how impostors seek external validation and exhibit a heightened sensitivity to the actions others exhibit as contributing factors to their eventual exposure as the frauds they believe themselves to be.

***Gender-related expectations.*** The final general behavior Clance and Imes (1978) associated with impostors related to societal gender expectations. The researchers noted the decision the study's participants believed they faced regarding their ability to find success while retaining a level of expected femininity and, therefore, greater social acceptance. Impostors adopted a sense of intellectual inferiority despite their clear

success, making them feel accepted but with detrimental effects to their careers (Clance & Imes, 1978). At the time of their study, Clance and Imes encouraged further research about men exhibiting impostor behaviors, noting that it seemed to occur “in men who appear to be more in touch with their ‘feminine’ qualities” (p. 241).

**General profile.** Clance (1985) highlighted several characteristics upon which later scholars based additional IP research. Clance stressed that impostors did not have to exhibit each of the characteristics but usually possessed two or three.

***Impostor cycle.*** Clance (1985) indicated that the negative set of feelings impostors experience, including self-doubt, fear, and performance anxiety, serve as the basis of a cycle impostors create for themselves. The impostors may begin the cycle by establishing unattainable goals, working hard to reach them, but ultimately failing to do so, supporting their internal belief that they are incapable of finding success (Kets de Vries, 2005; Parkman & Beard, 2008). In some cases, impostors, full of anxiety and self-doubt, procrastinate on starting a task, rush to bring it to successful completion, and finally attribute their success to luck, believing it is the only valid explanation (Thompson, Davis, & Davidson, 1998). Conversely, impostors, believing they must work harder than others, may overprepare or overwork and, upon successful completion of the task, attribute their success to their extreme efforts (Clance et al., 1995; Thompson et al., 1998). Parkman and Beard (2008) pointed out that this cycle becomes repetitive and self-perpetuating because impostors believe that others would not have to work as hard to complete the same task but that failing to do so increases the opportunity for exposure as a fraud.

***Fear of failure.*** Clance (1985) outlined two characteristics underlying the overarching impostor characteristic of fearing failure, including the need to be special and the need to be a superwoman/superman. Clance and Imes (1978) noted that one message some impostors receive growing up is that they should experience no challenges in completing tasks because of their intelligence. This positions the impostors to work hard to excel in life and become accustomed to the idea they are exceptional until they encounter situations where they find themselves surrounded by other high-achieving individuals. Facing an environment of equally competent individuals incites impostors' feelings of doubt if they believe they are no longer the best (Clance, 1985).

In the same way impostors need to feel they are the best, they also strive for perfection in order to maintain their role as superwomen/supermen (Clance, 1985). Impostors who have always performed well believe there is no room for imperfection if they hope to seek the approval of others (Seritan & Mehta, 2016). In addition, the desire for impostors to avoid failure supports their ability to manage any potential for poor performance (Thompson, 2004). Ironically, impostors seeking to avoid the negative consequences they associate with a fear of success may otherwise perceive their fear of failure more positively (Fried-Buchalter, 1992).

***Fear and guilt about success.*** Clance (1985) noted that an impostor's fear of success runs contrary to the other characteristics associated with the IP until one understands how it affects an impostor. Factors including impostors' family structure, race, sex, and region where they live can elicit the feelings of separation from others that impostors strive to avoid (Clance, 1985). While the drive to succeed is present, impostors question their true abilities and fear the possibility of rejection of their peers or

loss of affection from family members (Neureiter et al., 2016). Further, Fried-Buchalter (1997) endorsed the idea of impostors' willingness to remain competitive but noted their inconsistent performance as signs of success start to appear. Clance (1985) noted that impostors question whether they are willing to experience the kind of stress and anxiety that seeking success creates. As a result, they struggle with the internal doubts that they are considered competent by those around them.

***Denial of competence and praise.*** Another contradictory characteristic for impostors is a tendency to dismiss the praise they internally crave. Clance and Imes (1978) described one family structure that impostors encounter where praise is provided so frequently that it leads to a sense of distrust so that any praise they receive from others is considered disingenuous. Further, Clance (1985) noted that impostors are convinced any acknowledgement of their competence is undeserved. Instead, the impostors dismiss the praise, offering explanations they believe reflect the true reasons for success, thus effectively redirecting the attention away from themselves. Leary et al. (2000) related impostors' tendency to deny competence and praise to their desire to avoid any possibility of future failure in the event additional responsibilities are assigned. This inclination to deflect attention away from themselves further supports impostors' desire to minimize their success because they believe acknowledgement of it may cause it to disappear (Chae, Piedmont, Estadt, & Wicks, 1995).

### **The Psychological Construct**

Scholars have recently debated whether the IP constitutes a stable personality trait or if it is an individual's reaction to specific situational experiences. Chae et al. (1995) proposed considering the IP as a motivational style similar to that of one's fear of failure

or fear of success when compared with personality dimensions. For example, impostors may choose to avoid competitive situations because of their internal impostor feelings versus having the feelings represent a unique personality phenomenon. This perspective inspired others to reconsider the IP and whether each situation creates a different reactive style versus a consistent and predictable reaction. For instance, Leary et al. (2000) conducted three separate studies exploring how self-identified impostors responded to situations involving their performance and how they were perceived by others. The researchers suggested that a greater level of interpersonal benefit motivated the individuals to express typical impostor behaviors. Self-deprecation and outright admission of their feelings of fraudulence represented an opportunity for impostors to proactively avoid the negative implications of possible failure. Further, the extent to which the outcomes of the impostors' actions were outwardly apparent played a role in determining the level of impostorism (Leary et al., 2000).

McElwee and Yurak (2007) extended the debate about the stable presence of impostor characteristics, citing the differences they noted between the inconsistent reasons for IP behaviors appearing in the subjects' personal and professional lives. Similar to other studies supporting the IP as a self-presentation strategy, impostors expressed feelings of inadequacy as expected but failed to believe that others held higher expectations of them than they held of themselves. The researchers suggested that individuals experience impostor feelings in various personal and professional domains of their lives but not always in all of them (McElwee & Yurak, 2007).

Subsequently, McElwee and Yurak (2010) reiterated the claim that impostorism is a psychological experience related to specific situations rather than a stable personality

variable. Specifically, the researchers considered the negative effects impostors reported when believing others overestimated their abilities. This position supports the idea that individuals seek a balance between being thought of positively and being thought of accurately and in line with their own self-perceptions (McElwee & Yurak, 2010).

More recently, Seritan and Mehta (2016) revisited and highlighted the situational aspect of the IP and how it can inspire exceptional performance and, therefore, greater levels of individual productivity. While the challenges impostors face in certain situations may prove beneficial at times, the researchers noted the struggle impostors encounter to manage the negative behavioral characteristics associated with the increased productivity. These challenges can be both personal and professional and affect not only the individual but also those around him or her (Seritan & Mehta, 2016).

### **Influential Factors**

In their original study, Clance and Imes (1978) mentioned that the IP was not the initial reason their study's participants sought professional therapeutic help. The researchers offered their explanation about family background and societal expectations of women at the time as the sources of the IP after identifying recurring themes among the individuals. Since that original study, other researchers have expanded upon the role family and parents play in establishing expectations or mindsets that persist into adulthood and help establish the impostor cycle that individuals experience (Castro et al., 2004; R. A. Jones & Wells, 1996; Whitman & Shanine, 2012).

**Family influences.** Clance and Imes (1978) grouped each of their study participants into one of two family structures that the researchers believed explained the presence of impostor tendencies. Roles, or labels, either expressly stated by the family or

adopted by the children on their own serve the purpose of distinguishing the children's unique position within the family unit (Harvey & Katz, 1985). Further, the positive or negative label "may imply a whole world of meaning about what a child can—and can't—accomplish, and what role he is expected to play throughout life" (Harvey & Katz, 1985, p. 135). Childhood roles assigned as either the sibling of another child identified as the intelligent member of the family or as a child incapable of failure lead individuals to internalize a set of expectations about what they believe the family values (Clance et al., 1995).

Subsequent research expanded the idea of individual roles to include four common familial features impostors experienced in their formative years (Clance, 1985). Clance (1985) found that inconsistency between internal familial and external feedback, a recurring message emphasizing the importance of intelligence, a sense of the child being different than the rest of the family, and a lack of praise appeared consistently among impostors, leaving them with the need to consider the effect of these factors on later development. Langford and Clance (1993) added the level of family support one experiences growing up as a critical factor leading toward the development of impostor feelings. If family support is lacking, individuals may seek validation of their intelligence or other success by striving for unrealistic goals that satisfy what they believe others expect them to achieve (Craddock et al., 2011; Langford & Clance, 1993).

Other researchers explored the importance of family, including the role parenting styles play in relation to the formation of impostor characteristics. Li, Hughes, and Thu (2014) pointed out that the choice of parenting style establishes a climate each member of a family experiences and, therefore, to what extent a child may be inclined to develop

impostor tendencies. Unlike warm and nurturing parents who help their children learn to enjoy their successes while accepting their failures, overprotective parents convey a belief that they lack confidence in their children's ability to find success on their own (Li et al., 2014; Sonnak & Towell, 2001). Harvey and Katz (1985) stressed that although it is one of many factors, parenting has a significant impact on a child's internalization of impostor feelings. In the case of two-parent families, the researchers noted that children may experience approval from one parent but not the other, creating a sense of doubt about who to believe and, further, a need to secure the disapproving parent's approval (Harvey & Katz, 1985).

**Parentification.** Scholars researching family environments and how they contribute to the development of impostor feelings have included parentification as a possible explanation. Whitman and Shanine (2012) defined parentification as an expectation that children will fulfill the role of parent and attend to their parents' needs at the expense of the children's developing their own sense of self as they mature. In their study of 213 graduate students, Castro et al. (2004) found a moderate correlation between parentification and the IP, noting that children's sense of inadequacy at meeting their parents' needs evolves into similar feelings of inadequacy as adults. The inability to develop a true sense of their own skills and abilities to satisfy the needs of others "contributes to false self-development, or narcissistic personality characteristics" (R. A. Jones & Wells, 1996, p. 149). The potential for an individual to experience a false sense of development as a child inspired subsequent scholars to delve more deeply into considering common personality characteristics as possible contributors to the

development of impostor feelings (Bernard, Dollinger, & Ramaniah, 2002; Chae et al., 1995; Vergauwe et al., 2015).

### **Five-Factor Personality Trait Model**

Following years of debate and other models attempting to group personality characteristics, McCrae and John (1992) proposed the five-factor model (FFM) to represent a starting point for describing the personality characteristics, or dimensions, found in all individuals. The five factors include conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, and extraversion. McCrae and John noted they had no expectation that the model explained every personality type but rather pointed out that the factors address the universal issues everyone experiences. Specifically, the researchers noted that all people “must be responsive to danger, loss and threat; interact with others to some degree; choose between the risks of exploration and the limitations of familiarity; weigh self- against social interest; balance work and play” (McCrae & John, 1992, p. 199).

Several scholars have considered the FFM as another contributing factor explaining the IP (Bernard et al., 2002; Chae et al., 1995; Ross, Stewart, Mugge, & Fultz, 2001; Vergauwe et al., 2015). The researchers consistently focused on neuroticism and conscientiousness as the two primary FFM factors associated with those scoring high as impostors. McCrae and John (1992) defined neuroticism in relation to how an individual experiences feelings of distress and the thoughts and behaviors that follow. Positive correlations with neuroticism in each study supported the description of an impostor appearing confident to the outside world while struggling internally with feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy (Bernard et al., 2002; Chae et al., 1995; Ross et al., 2001;

Vergauwe et al., 2015). These strong correlations with neuroticism also reinforced the suggestion Clance and Imes (1978) made regarding the important influence of depression and anxiety in the lives of impostors (Ross et al., 2001).

McCrae and John (1992) described conscientiousness as a traditional representation of one's character and meaning "either governed by conscience or diligent and thorough" (p. 197). While not as strong as the positive correlation neuroticism demonstrated in relationship to impostorism, prior studies consistently reflected a negative correlation between conscientiousness and impostor scores (Bernard et al., 2002; Chae et al., 1995; Ross et al., 2001; Vergauwe et al., 2015). Bernard et al. (2002) observed that the negative correlation between conscientiousness and impostorism contradicted the common description that some impostors overprepare and work diligently to compensate for their feelings of incompetence. The researchers offered two explanations including that impostors have a greater level of confidence in their intelligence versus their effort and that impostors demonstrate low levels of effort as a way to sabotage their potential for success (Bernard et al., 2002). Since the original Clance and Imes (1978) study, impostorism and its associated characteristics have generated interest in understanding how they affect both individuals and groups of individuals who share common attributes.

### **Populations Studied**

A significant amount of interest in studying how the IP affects all individuals emerged from the original focus that Clance and Imes (1978) placed on high-achieving women. Both men and women experience the phenomenon; however, researchers noted it "occurs with much less frequency in men and that when it does occur, it is with much

less intensity” (Clance & Imes, 1978, p. 241). Later, Harvey and Katz (1985) suggested that 70% of successful individuals deal with some level of the IP. This claim inspired other researchers to consider the influence of the IP among specific segments of the population, including the role gender plays and the impact of the phenomenon within various career fields (Caselman et al., 2006; Castro et al., 2004; Clark, Vardeman, & Barba, 2014; Cokley et al., 2015; Cusack et al., 2013; Fried-Buchalter, 1997; J. E. King & Cooley, 1995; Topping & Kimmel, 1985).

**Gender.** Gender is typically considered a socially constructed idea that specifies the acceptable roles for men and women to play (September, McCarrey, Baranowsky, Parent, & Schindler, 2001). Clance and Imes (1978) noted that the gender stereotyping some individuals experience early in life can influence the fraudulent impostor feelings they develop and to what they attribute their success in life. In addition, other researchers considered the personality traits characteristically associated with genders and explored the role they play in individual behaviors. For example, Cozzarelli and Major (1990) reinforced the role of gender expectations, noting that men were expected to suppress any feelings of doubt regarding their ability to find success, while women were to “value nurturance over autonomy or achievement” (p. 403). Similarly, Clance et al. (1995) highlighted that socially desirable qualities like competence and objectivity were normally associated with males, while women were described using the qualities of warmth and attentiveness. Further, Fried-Buchalter (1997) noted the inconsistency of identifying ambition as a positive quality for men to overcome their fears of failure but as a negative quality for women. These examples supported the assertion Cokley et al. (2015) offered about the likelihood of individuals developing impostor feelings when the

individuals believe they will be judged based upon their gender versus their actual performance.

Several studies focused on student populations have supported the position that the IP is a gender-neutral experience and begins early in life (Caselman et al., 2006; Craddock et al., 2011; Cromwell, Brown, Sanchez-Huceles, & Adair, 1990; Leary et al., 2000). Cromwell et al. (1990) investigated high school honors students and found no gender differences among those reporting impostor feelings. The researchers noted a set of behavioral characteristics including feelings of anxiety shared between impostors, supporting the idea of the common experience impostors of all ages share (Cromwell et al., 1990). Later, Caselman et al. (2006) also found a lack of gender differences among high school students reporting impostor feelings, though they noted a difference in social support networking. In contrast to female students relying on a network of friends and adults for social support, males relied more on only their network of friends when dealing with impostor feelings (Caselman et al., 2006).

Studies of college students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels have yielded similar results related to gender differences. Leary et al. (2000) found no gender differences in reported feelings of fraudulence among undergraduate students. However, the researchers noted how self-presentation impostor strategies changed for the individuals based upon the public versus private nature of divulging their shortcomings (Leary et al., 2000). In their study of doctoral students, researchers concluded that the onset of impostor feelings was a natural experience for all graduate students facing the new and stressful experience of doctoral study (Craddock et al., 2011; Watson & Betts, 2010). The scholars noted that doctoral students face multiple challenges in learning to

balance their academic and personal responsibilities while preparing to pursue future professional goals (Craddock et al., 2011; Watson & Betts, 2010).

**Professionals.** The impact of the IP among working professionals is an evolving area of study. Though Clance and Imes (1978) included high-achieving professional women in their initial study, only a handful of scholars have expanded that research to explore a number of specific career fields (Clark et al., 2014; Fried-Buchalter, 1997; Mattie et al., 2008; Prata & Gietzen, 2007; Topping & Kimmel, 1985).

In their study of university faculty members, Topping and Kimmel (1985) expanded upon the premise of how differently men and women explained their success along with the corresponding impact on reported impostor feelings. Unlike female faculty members, who learned to embrace and overcome the challenges their gender posed, Topping and Kimmel argued that men reported greater levels of impostorism because they followed an easier path on their way to success. Extending beyond gender differences, Clark et al. (2014) supported the idea that the IP was related to individuals' stages in their career paths. The researchers found that newer librarians or those tasked with more technical responsibilities reported impostor tendencies more frequently than more experienced librarians. The researchers also suggested that mentoring would offer new librarians an opportunity to discuss their job performance with someone other than a supervisor as they matured into the position, thus supporting their ability to overcome their impostor feelings (Clark et al., 2014). Hutchins (2015) reinforced the idea of career stage implications, highlighting the pressure new and nontenured university faculty members face to publish research in order to advance in their careers. Hutchins further

noted, “The direct and indirect influence of mentors on curbing impostor thoughts emerged as an important factor at influencing academic identity” (p. 8).

Prata and Gietzen (2007) considered the impact of the IP among working health professionals, with a focus on physician assistants. The researchers suggested that two types of the IP may exist, with one being more temporary in nature and related to the length of time an individual has been on the job (Prata & Gietzen, 2007). A follow-up study supported the idea that health professionals experienced impostor feelings more frequently when they were new to a position but noticed a reduction in those feelings as they gained more self-confidence and a greater understanding of how to perform their job effectively (Mattie et al., 2008). Recent studies focusing on the impostor experience and how to identify and support individuals struggling with it in the workplace have offered additional insight beyond the clinical treatment approaches customarily discussed in the literature.

### **Impostors in the Workplace**

Recent scholars have started to consider the long-term impact on the professional lives of those dealing with the IP and the associated outcomes as they affect both the individuals and their organizations (Crawford et al., 2016; Hirschfeld, 1985; Neureiter et al., 2016; Parkman & Beard, 2008; Sanford et al., 2015; Seritan & Mehta, 2016; Vergauwe et al., 2015; Whitman & Shanine, 2012). Impostor behaviors including perfectionism and internal fears of failure and success have led to employee burnout and, ultimately, affected organizational effectiveness (Parkman & Beard, 2008). However, a number of different strategies have emerged as opportunities to mitigate the negative effects of the IP, which offer a promising level of support for those who struggle with it.

**The impostor experience.** Scholars considering employees who reported impostor feelings of fraudulence found that those employees displayed a number of different reactions to the idea of advancement and contradicted what outside observers typically expected. Those employees who feared success were likely to decline challenging work assignments or even promotions because of an associated underlying fear of peer rejection (Neureiter et al., 2016; Seritan & Mehta, 2016). Instead, these impostors chose to dismiss their opportunities for advancement and focused on their existing positions in an effort to reinforce the good work and contributions they were already making to their organizations (Neureiter et al., 2016). Parkman and Beard (2008) noted that some self-identified impostors working in higher education even opted to leave organizations when faced with pressure to advance in order to avoid being discovered or judged more frequently in leadership positions. These factors support the belief that impostors report a greater level of job dissatisfaction compared to their nonimpostor counterparts (Vergauwe et al., 2015).

Scholars identified an additional set of reactions for those impostors already in leadership positions that led to negative work environments for other employees. Seritan and Mehta (2016) noted that impostors' inclination to overprepare and their inability to make final decisions can result in poor management styles, promoting low employee morale within the organization. Further, the impostors' self-imposed sense of perfectionism can lead to "a very narrow definition of acceptable performance standards for peers and subordinates," further damaging the culture of the organization (Parkman & Beard, 2008, p. 31). An impostor struggling with internal feelings of fraudulence and a

lack of self-confidence to effectively lead an organization faces the personal risk of becoming a workaholic unless some form of support exists (Seritan & Mehta, 2016).

**Workplace support.** Researchers agree that an organizational culture can play a significant role in supporting workplace impostors. Hirschfeld (1985) noted the importance of organizational culture by stressing that a leader should encourage impostors to work to their greatest potential. However, equally important was recognizing when the leader's encouragement started to threaten the impostors or impose the same kind of pressure that intensified their impostor feelings. In addition to encouragement, scholars also pointed out the importance of offering praise to employees based upon their hard work while treating their mistakes as learning opportunities (Crawford et al., 2016; Seritan & Mehta, 2016). Additionally, the type of feedback and external support employees receive can help diminish the impostor feelings they experience on the job. Whitman and Shanine (2012) noted the importance of providing more frequent but less formal feedback to impostors to help reinforce their contributions to the organization. While feedback from an employer was considered ideal, scholars agreed that formal mentorship programs and networking opportunities also play a supportive role for impostors. In the case of both mentoring and networking opportunities, the impostors benefit by gaining greater confidence, setting goals, and having the chance to share their experiences with others regarding the IP's behavioral characteristics negatively affecting their perceived success in the workplace (Neureiter et al., 2016; Parkman & Beard, 2008; Sanford et al., 2015).

## **Behavioral Characteristics**

The review of behavioral characteristics associated with the IP reveals their overlapping nature as they affect individuals. Vergauwe et al. (2015) described the IP as a “complex co-occurrence of these different but interrelated personality manifestations that form the breeding ground of impostor tendencies” (p. 577). Further, a review of definitions offers clarity about several commonly used terms as they relate to individual behaviors.

### **Anxiety**

Anxiety was included as one of the primary clinical symptoms Clance and Imes (1978) identified in their original IP research. A review of the definitions of anxiety and anxiety disorders reinforced the importance of understanding the difference between the two and how each affects the daily life of an individual.

For example, the American Psychiatric Association (2015) described anxiety as a common reaction to stress. However, if the feelings of anxiety persist for more than 6 months, are considered out of proportion to a situation or age inappropriate, or negatively affect an individual’s ability to function normally, they develop into a serious anxiety disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2015). For example, someone experiencing generalized anxiety disorder can encounter adverse physical and cognitive symptoms related to critical parts of his or her life, including family and job responsibilities. Similarly, social anxiety disorder emerges when individuals worry excessively about “social or performance situations in which they expect to feel embarrassed, judged, rejected, or fearful of offending others” (National Institute of Mental Health, 2016, para. 6). Scholars building upon the original IP research continued to identify anxiety and its

associated psychological distress as an important behavioral characteristic impostors possess (Ross & Krukowski, 2003; Whitman & Shanine, 2012).

The importance impostors place on worrying about how others perceive them and their related feelings of inadequacy are common themes related to social anxiety within IP literature. Impostors' social anxiety compels them to constantly monitor their own behavior and question the perception others have of them in an effort to reduce any possibility of public exposure (Whitman & Shanine, 2012). Chrisman et al. (1995) also noted that a strong relationship existed between impostors' anxiety levels and their desire for positive recognition.

The self-imposed pressure impostors experience reinforces their internal feelings of anxiety. Researchers have noted that unrealistic internal expectations of intelligence, the need for external validation, and an extreme sensitivity to criticism actually prevent impostors from acknowledging any true sense of their own success (Castro et al., 2004; Chae et al., 1995; Cromwell et al., 1990; Hutchins, 2015). Further, Rohrman et al. (2016) argued that the cognitive nature of impostor anxiety prevented impostors from controlling their own fears and apprehensions when considering the other behavioral characteristics impostors routinely exhibit.

### **Lack of Self-Confidence**

The lack of self-confidence among their study participants was a second characteristic that Clance and Imes (1978) highlighted in their original research. Subsequent scholars continued exploring self-confidence in relation to impostors' willingness to take certain actions in both their personal and professional lives (Bechtoldt, 2015; Cokley et al., 2015; Mattie et al., 2008; Neureiter et al., 2016). Other

scholars have considered self-esteem and self-efficacy as different considerations for explaining impostor behavior (Fujie, 2010; Jostl, Bergsmann, Luftenegger, Schober, & Spiel, 2012; Langford & Clance, 1993; Peteet et al., 2015; Thompson, 2004). While seemingly interchangeable terms, Langford and Clance (1993) noted that impostors can possess a healthy level of self-esteem while struggling with low levels of self-confidence, believing that they are incapable of finding or replicating success. Similarly, Jostl et al. (2012) described self-efficacy as a set of actions individuals feel capable of accomplishing in a particular area of their lives versus the more general lack of overall self-confidence associated with impostors.

The tendency for impostors to embrace their own success and to dismiss their actual level of competency was a common theme in the literature about self-confidence. Gibson-Beverly and Schwartz (2008) noted that impostors' ability to internalize their own success coupled with their inability to internalize positive feedback negatively affected their sense of self-confidence. Further, despite performing at superior levels, high achievers routinely underestimated their capabilities while remaining highly self-critical (September et al., 2001; Want & Kleitman, 2006). In their study of Canadian university students, September et al. (2001) noted that their participants maintained a negative outlook toward problem solving, preferring to view challenges as an opportunity for failure versus an opportunity to demonstrate their competence. Finally, Neureiter et al. (2016) suggested that impostors' lack of self-confidence could have long-term career implications, including their unwillingness to seek leadership positions for which they believed they were unqualified.

## **Depression**

The American Psychiatric Association (2015) indicated that normal sadness and depression appear to be similar experiences but noted that these feelings must last for more than 2 weeks for an individual to be diagnosed as clinically depressed. Clance and Imes (1978) included depression as one of the primary clinical IP symptoms in their original study, emphasizing it as one of several possible issues their study participants encountered. Subsequent scholars have explored the feelings of worthlessness and self-loathing associated with clinical depression, reinforcing the idea of its inclusion as one of several key behavioral characteristics impostors exhibit (Bernard et al., 2002; Chrisman et al., 1995; Clance et al., 1995; Mattie et al., 2008; Oriel, Plane, & Mundt, 2004; Rohrmann et al., 2016; Ross & Krukowski, 2003).

Clance et al. (1995) highlighted that depressive symptoms impostors reported were related to the persistent feelings of unworthiness and incompetence they faced because of their inability to reach self-imposed expectations. At the same time, a study validating the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS) found a strong correlation between the CIPS and measures of depression, supporting the belief that impostorism is related to the “dependent and self-critical aspects” of the experience that depressed individuals encounter (Chrisman et al., 1995, p. 462). More recent impostor research has considered the FFM of personality traits and impostorism. Bernard et al. (2002) argued for including impostorism as part of the neuroticism trait given the repeated correlations linking it with depression. Similarly, Ross and Krukowski (2003) identified neuroticism and, specifically, depression as a strong predictor of impostor scores among their sample of college students, further supporting the interrelated nature of the two.

## **Perfectionism**

Equally prevalent in the literature about impostor behavioral characteristics is discussion about perfectionism. Early definitions of perfectionism tended to include only a focus on an individual's likelihood of setting unrealistic standards of performance associated with excessive self-criticism for not achieving those standards (Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990). As Frost et al. (1990) noted, this limited perspective failed to account for those highly competent individuals who successfully achieved ambitious goals while remaining less self-critical than those associated with negative perfectionist tendencies. Subsequent scholars have explored the role of negative perfectionism in conjunction with the IP, noting the excessive concern impostors have about making mistakes, concern about the way they are perceived by others, and the effect it can have on those around them (Bieling, Israeli, & Antony, 2004; Dudău, 2014; Henning et al., 1998; Parkman & Beard, 2008; Sakulku & Alexander, 2011; Stoeber & Otto, 2006; Thompson et al., 2000).

Frost et al. (1990) conducted four seminal studies highlighting the greater level of importance that negative perfectionists place on making mistakes versus the importance placed on the failure to reach unrealistic goals. In their study of undergraduate students, Bieling et al. (2004) reported the negative cognitive effects associated with the amount of time negative perfectionists worry about their potential lack of success. These negative effects also play a role in an impostor's daily life. As an example, Thompson et al. (2000) highlighted the tendency for impostors to avoid situations they were convinced would lead them to make mistakes. Sakulku and Alexander (2011) reinforced that same

idea, noting the impostors' focus on hiding their perceived limitations from the view of others.

Henning et al. (1998) noted that medical students who scored high as impostors and perfectionists experienced psychological distress due to their assumptions of others' opinions of them. This illustrates the importance impostors place on the opinions of others. Hewitt et al. (2003) reinforced this idea, offering that "certain perfectionists are committed to displaying an ideal public self that conveys an image of being flawless" (p. 1303). As Sakulku and Alexander (2011) pointed out, this commitment to presenting an outward appearance of perfection places impostors in a contradictory position because they routinely divulge their inner feelings of self-doubt and imperfection as part of their impostor tendencies.

Scholars have also noted how perfectionist behavior affects both impostors and those around them. In their article discussing impostor behaviors within organizations, Parkman and Beard (2008) noted the opportunity for impostors to transfer their expectations for perfection along to those with whom they work. This transfer of expectations can create negative interpersonal situations between the impostors and their colleagues (Egan et al., 2015). Further, an organization or individual is susceptible to a sense of paralysis if the perfectionist is unwilling or unable to make decisions because of his or her internal fears about potential mistakes (Seritan & Mehta, 2016). This paralysis and need for perfection can lead to procrastination as another common behavior impostors exhibit (Egan et al., 2015).

## **Procrastination**

Procrastination and perfectionism are routinely linked together throughout IP research because they both support an impostor's desire to avoid failure (Frost et al., 1990; Kets de Vries, 2005; Rohrmann et al., 2016; Seritan & Mehta, 2016; Thompson, 2004). Like perfectionism, procrastination can have both positive and negative attributions. In its negative form, procrastination represents the start of a negative cycle because "voluntarily delaying an intended course of action despite the expectation of being worse off for the delay is inherently risky or negative behavior" (Steel, 2007, p. 81). Further, impostors' feelings of inadequacy lead them to seek failure-avoidant strategies including procrastination in an effort to minimize or even remove the possibility of failure and, therefore, any further damage to feelings of self-worth (Thompson, 2004). This concern about personal competence results in work-related strain, reduced levels of achievement, and impostors' unwillingness to try and master new challenges (Clark et al., 2014; Rohrmann et al., 2016; Ross et al., 2001). If impostors procrastinate on beginning a new task but ultimately succeed in the effort, they attribute their success to luck rather than their own talents, further reinforcing their own self-destructive behavioral cycle (Clance et al., 1995; Thompson et al., 1998).

Other scholars have related procrastination to self-handicapping or self-sabotaging behavioral patterns (Ross et al., 2001; Thompson, 2004; Want & Kleitman, 2006). E. E. Jones and Berglas (1978) defined self-handicapping as the act of individuals "finding or creating impediments that make good performance less likely" and, therefore, a way for them to protect their internal sense of competence (p. 201). Thompson (2004) considered procrastination a form of self-handicapping and self-sabotage used by

impostors to cope with their fear of evaluation or to overcome their self-imposed belief that they could be regarded as anything other than fully competent. Further, Ross et al. (2001) noted that self-handicapping actions like procrastination may represent an individual's "reaction to persistent feelings of vulnerability and inadequacy" (p. 1354).

### **Self-Presentation**

Recent scholars have considered other behaviors that impostors exhibit, including the role self-presentation plays in conjunction with self-handicapping and impostors' need to be perfect. These studies raised questions about whether impostorism is a manipulative act by individuals to reduce expectations others have or as a way to elicit support from them in advance of new challenges and the possibility that they may fail (Ferrari & Thompson, 2006; Leary et al., 2000; McElwee & Yurak, 2007, 2010).

Leary et al. (2000) conducted three separate studies and challenged key IP principles. For example, the researchers noted that impostors' willingness to disclose their feelings of fraudulence was contradictory to the belief that impostors fear exposure. Further, Leary et al. reported that impostors' self-deprecating behavior developed more often in response to their belief that others held low expectations of them versus the more widely accepted belief that others have high expectations of impostors. Finally, the scholars argued that impostors were influenced by the social circumstances they faced, stating, "People may respond in the nonenhancing manner characteristic of impostors because they believe such tactics will have interpersonal benefits" (Leary et al., 2000, p. 751).

McElwee and Yurak (2007) suggested that impostorism itself was a self-diminishing, or negative, self-presentational strategy used when individuals faced

situations where they felt inadequate. In their comparison of two different impostor scales, the researchers noted that they both measured negative self-presentation styles but suggested that the CIPS (Clance, 1985) measured a controlled self-presentation style, indicating individuals' inclination to manipulate how others viewed them. While their study could not support conclusive evidence that impostors attempt to manipulate others, it did reinforce what role social context plays, as Leary et al. (2000) suggested. A second study reflected the common nature of the impostor experience but noted that those scoring high on impostor scales face greater levels of “fear/distress and guilt/shame in response to an actual IP episode than do people who score lower” (McElwee & Yurak, 2010, p. 193). The scholars argued that those scoring high on impostor scales may do so in their attempt to reduce the expectations others have of them if the impostors believe that others are overestimating their abilities (McElwee & Yurak, 2010).

Kets de Vries (2005) noted that all individuals have a private and a public side that emerge at different points based upon the circumstances they face. However, Ferrari and Thompson (2006) noted that impostors who routinely use negative self-presentational behaviors “contribute to anxiety and emotional exhaustion as they re-invent alibis of incapacity and fraudulence in successive achievement contexts” (p. 350).

### **Emotional Exhaustion**

IP research has largely focused on the origins and symptoms of impostorism within student populations since the original Clance and Imes (1978) study. Recent scholars exploring the IP in the workplace have considered what challenges impostors encountered as a result of the phenomenon, including emotional exhaustion (Crawford et al., 2016; Hutchins, 2015; Whitman & Shanine, 2012). Along with cynicism and

inefficacy, Maslach and Jackson (1981) defined emotional exhaustion as one of three key elements associated with job burnout. Later, Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001) added that emotional exhaustion represents the stress associated with burnout and the “feelings of being overextended and depleted of one’s emotional and physical resources” (p. 399).

The role emotional resources play with the IP builds upon the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989). The theory applies to stress and whether individuals react positively or negatively to the potential or actual loss of one of four types of resources tied to stress-inducing situations (Hobfoll, 1989). The four resources include object resources, conditions, personal characteristics, and energies. Crawford et al. (2016) noted that impostors concerned about being discovered as frauds face a loss of personal emotional resources. This constant level of stress leads to emotional exhaustion, carrying both personal and professional consequences including job burnout and work-family conflicts. For example, Hutchins (2015) found university faculty, especially nontenured faculty seeking tenure, at a greater risk of experiencing emotional exhaustion because of the pressure they faced to perform at the highest level. Additionally, Whitman and Shanine (2012) suggested that impostors unable to organize other resources to counterbalance the loss of emotional resources were likely to experience a cycle of repeated losses, leading to even greater levels of emotional exhaustion. As with other impostor characteristics, the choice of coping methods impostors select can have broad implications for either breaking the cycle of losses or reinforcing their feelings of inadequacy (Whitman & Shanine, 2012).

## **Fear of Failure**

Fear of failure is another behavioral characteristic often linked with perfectionism and the IP. Conroy (2001) expanded upon early definitions of fear of failure, suggesting that individuals were motivated to avoid five specific consequences associated with failing. The five consequences included “(a) experiencing shame and embarrassment, (b) devaluing of one’s self-estimate, (c) losing social influence, (d) having an uncertain future, and (e) upsetting important others” (Conroy, 2001, p. 431). Conroy, Kaye, and Fifer (2007) later added that individuals were likely to feel a heightened sense of anxiety when assessing the possible threat of failure associated with specific situations.

IP scholars have associated fear of failure with a general lack of self-confidence and lower sense of self-esteem (Cozzarelli & Major, 1990; Fried-Buchalter, 1992; Neureiter et al., 2016). In their study of undergraduate students, Cozzarelli and Major (1990) reinforced the idea that impostors struggle to internalize success but noted the greater impact of potential failure on their sense of self-worth. Thompson et al. (1998) also considered impostor reactions to failure versus success. The researchers noted that impostors expressed greater levels of humiliation attributed to failure versus the negative reactions conveyed about finding success. Additionally, Neureiter et al. (2016) noted that students who scored high as impostors and attributed their success to external rather than internal factors developed an emerging sense of fear about future failure and a reduced sense of self-esteem.

Scholars have also pointed out that impostors are more likely than nonimpostors to internalize and overgeneralize their fears of perceived or actual failure (Kumar & Jagacinski, 2006; Thompson et al., 1998). Yuen and Depper (1987) defined failure as the

difference between individuals' personal expectations or set of standards and their own perception of accomplishment. The combination of high standards that impostors establish for themselves and a tendency to be highly self-critical reinforces impostors' fear of failure and the likelihood that they will avoid situations where potential failure, or success, is possible (Seritan & Mehta, 2016).

### **Fear of Success**

The fear of success was noted in scholarly literature as far back as the mid-1930s, when Horney (1936) associated it with individuals' underlying need to compete with others. Horney indicated that highly neurotic individuals constantly compared themselves to others, believed they had to be the best in everything they attempted, and convinced themselves that nobody else could be more successful. Much like IP study, the fear of success was initially associated with women and the evolving study of gender differences (Horner, 1972). Subsequent researchers noted that individuals scoring high as impostors, regardless of gender, reacted in similar ways to competitive environments while considering motivation and achievement as additional factors contributing to their fear of success (Fried-Buchalter, 1992, 1997; Ivers & Downes, 2012; Neureiter et al., 2016; Piedmont, 1995; Rothman, 1996; Seritan & Mehta, 2016).

The perceived outcome of finding success consistently appeared as a common concern among both students and working professionals in multiple studies. For instance, feelings of loneliness, sadness, and alienation from entire social networks forced individuals to consider whether achieving success was worthwhile (Fried-Buchalter, 1997; Ivers & Downes, 2012). In addition, the potential loss of friendships, a need to remain the best, and the stress related to additional responsibility represented the negative

costs of success (Fried-Buchalter, 1992). Further, Piedmont (1995) suggested that those lacking the necessary coping skills to deal with the stress of competition found themselves paralyzed and unable to compete successfully, reinforcing the dilemma individuals faced about their motivation to succeed.

### **The Coping Construct**

Literature about the coping construct is broad and reflects an evolving area of research from both a behavioral and cognitive perspective. Coping research builds upon the work of Lazarus and Folkman (1984), who linked coping with the assessment one makes of stressful life circumstances and the negative effect they may have on an individual's ability to reach his or her goals (Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen, & DeLongis, 1986; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Subsequent researchers went on to use multiple terms to define coping strategies but have been unable to reach consensus about how best to organize the many coping approaches individuals use (Compas et al., 2014; Mark & Smith, 2012; Skinner, Edge, Altman, & Sherwood, 2003; Szymanski & Henrichs-Beck, 2014). Other scholars have explored coping by exploring emotion regulation and emotion flexibility in their attempt to explain the complex construct (Bonanno & Burton, 2013; Compas et al., 2014; Gross, 1998; Hill & Gunderson, 2015; Kato, 2012; Lazarus, 2006; McDavitt et al., 2008).

### **Coping**

Initially, two primary categories emerged to define coping strategies as a way to “manage (reduce, minimize, master, or tolerate) the internal and external demands of the person-environment transaction that is appraised as taxing or exceeding the person's resources” (Folkman et al., 1986, p. 572). Problem-focused or active coping served to

assist an individual with addressing an identified stressor and was often considered an adaptive or positive approach (Bonanno & Burton, 2013; Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010). Hutchins (2015) noted that university faculty struggling with the IP used problem-focused coping skills such as humor or seeking the support of others to address their impostor concerns. Conversely, emotion-focused or avoidant coping was considered a maladaptive or negative approach to deal with a stressful situation and was attributed to increasing levels of psychological distress or destructive behavior (Compas et al., 2014; Szymanski & Henrichs-Beck, 2014; Tucker-Seeley, Blow, Matsuo, & Taylor-Moore, 2010). In a study of sexual minorities, Hill and Gunderson (2015) highlighted substance abuse and denial as forms of emotion-focused coping that sought to “reduce or eliminate the experience of negative emotions with maladaptive activities” (p. 234). Continuous research building upon these two forms of coping and attempting to provide a clear explanation of the coping construct has produced more than 100 different coping measures and the identification of over 400 types of coping strategies (Austenfeld & Stanton, 2004; Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007; Skinner et al., 2003).

### **Emotion Regulation and Flexibility**

Psychologists and emotion regulation scholars drew a distinction with coping based upon the type of emotion each attempted to regulate (Bonanno & Burton, 2013; Compas et al., 2014; Gross, 1998; Hill & Gunderson, 2015; Lazarus, 2006; McDavitt et al., 2008). In addition to the negative emotions coping primarily sought to address, scholars also explored the motives individuals had to regulate and sustain positive emotions in their lives (Quoidbach, Mikolajczak, & Gross, 2015; Tamir, 2016). Emotion regulation was defined as “the processes by which individuals influence which emotions

they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions” (Gross, 1998, p. 275). Further, Compas et al. (2014) noted that emotion regulation skills one learns as a child establish the foundation individuals use to develop effective coping skills later in life. Scholars defined five forms of emotion regulation, pointing out that the timing and context of various situations impact the strategies individuals use to regulate their emotions (Gross, 1998; Quoidbach et al., 2015). These points included the selection of the situation, the potential of modifying it, the ability to focus on certain elements of the situation, the opportunity to revise an initial appraisal of it, and finally, the physical or behavioral influence in relation to the situation (Gross, 1998; Quoidbach et al., 2015).

A third and emerging theory in the literature considered flexible coping strategies in relation to stressful situations (Bonanno & Burton, 2013; Cheng, 2001; Kato, 2012; Tamir, 2016). Bonanno and Burton (2013) noted that flexible coping accounts for individual differences and expands identification of coping strategies beyond adaptive or maladaptive classifications. Further, Kato (2012) explained that flexible coping incorporates the need for individuals to evaluate their coping strategies and adapt them by considering and implementing alternative strategies until they reach a positive outcome. Regardless of the strategies used, Hill and Gunderson (2015) noted that ineffective coping skills expose individuals to a greater level of sensitivity to stressful experiences “and possibly [make them] more vulnerable to their effects” (p. 234).

### **Sexual Identity and the Coming-Out Process**

The decision to reveal a concealed identity offers both positive and negative consequences that individuals consider carefully (Dunlap, 2016; Forenza, 2016; Legate et

al., 2012; Manning, 2015; Solomon et al., 2015). An illustration of this type of decision is the coming-out process that members of the LGBT community face. Scholars exploring sexual identity development noted that coming out reflects the complexity of identity development and encouraged further investigation as societal acceptance of sexual minorities evolves (Manning, 2015; Morgan, 2013; Vaughan & Waehler, 2010). Further, gender and professional implications were other key factors central to ongoing research (Benozzo et al., 2015; del Pino et al., 2016; Dunlap, 2016; Legate et al., 2012; Manning, 2015; Martos et al., 2015; McDermott & Schwartz, 2013; Priola et al., 2014; Weber-Gilmore, Rose, & Rubinstein, 2011; Willis, 2012).

### **Models of Sexual Identity Development and Coming Out**

Historically, sexual identity development has been described using either linear stages or developmental milestones that define specific markers individuals reach on their way to fully realizing their sexual identity (Cass, 1979, 1983; Troiden, 1979). As Manning (2015) noted, these models focused on individuals' developing a sexual minority identity that followed a prescribed pattern, largely ignoring other factors such as race or historical context. More recently, scholars have expanded early sexual identity classifications, limited to heterosexual, gay/lesbian, or bisexual, to include additional classifications that reflect an increasingly diverse and accepting society (Morgan, 2013; Vrangalova & Savin-Williams, 2012).

Likewise, scholars have continued to explore coming out beyond the early focus on procedural steps one takes when coming out by investigating the internal decision-making aspect of the process and benefits or costs associated with it. For example, Legate et al. (2012) suggested that the decision to come out is influenced by the

environment an individual faces, pointing out that some situations encourage one to suppress disclosure. Other scholars have considered how the role of internalized homophobia or the perceived negative stigma associated with coming out affects individuals' decision to divulge their identity (Benozzo et al., 2015; Birkett et al., 2015; del Pino et al., 2016; Weber-Gilmore et al., 2011). This is in contrast to the scholars who noted that coming out offers the ability to increase visibility and give LGBT individuals a voice in predominantly heterosexual cultures (Bell, Özbilgin, Beauregard, & Sürgevil, 2011; Creed & Scully, 2011). Furthermore, scholars explained the potential for LGBT individuals to experience positive outcomes and growth resulting from their decision to reveal their true identity to others (Birkett et al., 2015; Cox et al., 2011; Hill & Gunderson, 2015; Solomon et al., 2015; Vaughan & Waehler, 2010).

### **Gender Differences**

Research considering sexual identity formation has examined gender differences alongside age cohort differences to explore recent shifts in societal acceptance of sexual minorities. Consistently, differences between genders regarding identity development processes have appeared to be disappearing (Calzo et al., 2011; Dunlap, 2016; Grov et al., 2006; Martos et al., 2015). Further, irrespective of gender, trends indicated that individuals experienced key identity development milestones earlier in life. However, other studies suggested that men encounter more challenges related to gender and social stereotypes. Using gender role journey theory as their model, McDermott and Schwartz (2013) noted, "Some men struggle with their gender self-concept because they have overidentified with beliefs and behaviors that perpetuate negative stereotypes of men and women" (p. 202). Gender role journey theory provides a "theoretical framework for how

men navigate from positions of acceptance of traditional gender roles to feminist activism and gender role transcendence” (McDermott & Schwartz, 2013, p. 202). Priola et al. (2014) reinforced the role that environments play and their effect on gender expectations. The scholars suggested that individuals’ willingness to disclose their sexual identity was compromised when they associated expected behaviors with gender stereotypes.

### **Professional Implications**

Research concerning the coming-out process has also emphasized the concept of heteronormativity and the contextual environment that LGBT individuals face as key factors impacting individuals’ decision to come out in the workplace (Bell et al., 2011; Benozzo et al., 2015; Buddel, 2011; Priola et al., 2014). Benozzo et al. (2015) noted that unlike their heterosexual counterparts, LGBT individuals still contend with the possible implications that coming out generates despite an increasing number of legal protections and greater levels of societal acceptance. Further, the level of perceived or actual support of one’s work environment has routinely predicted an individual’s sense of well-being, though it has failed to remove the need to repeat the coming-out process any time a change occurs within the organization (Benozzo et al., 2015; Colgan & Wright, 2011; Creed & Scully, 2011; Legate et al., 2012).

Regardless of the advances made with levels of acceptance, scholars have also demonstrated that individuals still question the social cost of coming out, including possible rejection, loss of status, and mild forms of discrimination (Croteau et al., 2008; Priola et al., 2014). Further, researchers have noted that LGBT individuals have the opportunity to manage their decision to disclose given the invisible nature of their sexual identity (Benozzo et al., 2015; Buddel, 2011; Croteau et al., 2008; E. B. King et al.,

2008). While managing the disclosure process offers advantages, it also creates feelings of dishonesty or failure among individuals unwilling or unable to come out within an organization (Benozzo et al., 2015). As Creed and Scully (2011) noted, “Employees who can enact their authentic selves are likely to spend less time and energy managing their invisibility and guarding against stigmatization and thus might contribute more fully to the workplace” (p. 409).

### **Leadership**

Literature highlighting the evolution of leadership theory defining what constitutes an effective leader is broad. However, recent scholars pointed out that existing theories describe the ideal leader and his or her individual qualities without considering unique circumstances that aspiring and current leaders from underrepresented minority populations experience (Chin, Desormeaux, & Sawyer, 2016; Courtney, 2014; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Fassinger, Shullman, & Stevenson, 2010). While gender and racial differences are gaining attention in leadership research, the challenges LGBT individuals continue to face, despite an increasingly accepting society, remain largely absent in the literature (Chin et al., 2016; deLeon & Brunner, 2013; Leipold, 2014; Muhr & Sullivan, 2013).

### **Continued Challenges**

Scholars have noted that LGBT leaders continue to live in a heteronormative society that identifies and expects individuals to adhere to traditional gender roles assigned to men and women (deLeon & Brunner, 2013; Fassinger et al., 2010). Fassinger et al. (2010) highlighted that acting in gender nonconforming ways leads to a greater risk of negative reactions from followers and a loss of credibility for LGBT leaders. For

example, a study of 17 educational leaders noted the importance placed on public perception and their awareness of the need to avoid acting in ways generally associated with nonheterosexual individuals (deLeon & Brunner, 2013). Additionally, the invisible nature of their sexual identity forces LGBT leaders to contend with the decision to retain their heterosexual privilege by remaining silent or to face the risks associated with disclosure of their true identities (Chin et al., 2016). For instance, members of the LGBT community still face a unique set of internal questions during a job search, including whether they are prepared to expose themselves to scrutiny and how best to address different constituents with whom they will interact (Leipold, 2014).

### **Future Opportunities**

Despite the challenges that sexual minorities continue to face, existing and emerging research suggests that there is an opportunity for increased awareness of diversity issues in the future. Chin et al. (2016) highlighted four competencies that a group of diverse leaders suggested will be “crucial to leadership in the coming years as organizations become increasingly diverse: leveraging personal and social identities, utilizing a global and diverse mindset, leveraging community and organizational contexts, and promoting a diversity-supportive and inclusive climate” (p. 49). Further, scholars have noted the importance of intersectionality, or the multiple identities, individuals bring to leadership positions and how that benefits both the leaders and their followers (Chin et al., 2016; Fassinger et al., 2010; Sawyer, Salter, & Thoroughgood, 2013). Others have suggested that their ability to cope with stressful situations, need to meet higher standards of performance, and desire to be the role models they never had

position LGBT individuals to be effective leaders in an evolving society (Chin et al., 2016; Courtney, 2014; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Leipold, 2014).

### **Summary**

The preceding literature review explored the IP's original focus on women and provided insight about the internal and silent struggle many individuals face each day (Clance & Imes, 1978; Hutchins, 2015; Rohrmann et al., 2016; Vergauwe et al., 2015). Further, as a relatively new construct, limited research about coping with impostor behavioral characteristics highlighted the need to expand upon existing literature focused primarily on the phenomenon's origins (Craddock et al., 2011; Crawford et al., 2016; Whitman & Shanine, 2012). While prior IP studies considered various populations based upon gender, different professions, and student status, sexual minority populations represent a gap in current research.

Similar to impostors, the internal experiences that sexual minorities have remain invisible to the outside world (Dunlap, 2016; Martos et al., 2015; Perales, 2016; Solomon et al., 2015). The literature highlighted the challenges that gay men face each day, including deciding whether to disclose their true identity in a society that continues to evolve in its acceptance of nonheterosexual identities (Benozzo et al., 2015; Birkett et al., 2015; Hill & Gunderson, 2015). Coming out occurs repeatedly, requiring individuals to cope with questioning how they are perceived by others, anxiety about the implications of revealing their true identity, and the emotional toll of living with a fear of exposure if they choose not to disclose (Leipold, 2014; Priola et al., 2014).

Researchers have noted that an increasingly diverse society and the changing nature of 21st-century organizations call for further exploration of how best to support

employees and their leaders (Chin et al., 2016; Collins, 2012; Fassinger et al., 2010; Parkman & Beard, 2008). The internal challenges that impostors and sexual minorities experience impact the ability for others to identify potential barriers that these individuals encounter and have to overcome in order to help them reach their full potential (Kets de Vries, 2005; McDermott & Schwartz, 2013; Neureiter et al., 2016). Research is needed to explore the diversity of paths that others have followed to overcome their own barriers in order to inform the next generation of leaders.

### **Synthesis Matrix**

A synthesis matrix demonstrating the compiled literature and guiding points of this literature review is included in Appendix A.

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

### **Overview**

This chapter describes the research methodology used to complete this study. A review of the study's purpose statement and research question precedes a detailed description of the mixed-methods research design used to collect the data presented in a later chapter. The study's target population and the logic supporting the purposeful sampling method used are described in full detail. The chapter also discusses the data collection instruments used in the study along with descriptions of their associated reliability and validity. A thorough description of the data collection and data analysis processes prefaces the limitations of the study. The chapter concludes with a summary of the information presented in this chapter.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this descriptive, mixed-methods case study was to explore and describe the coping skills used to overcome nine behavioral characteristics by gay men serving in civic or nonprofit leadership roles who are identified as experiencing the impostor phenomenon (IP) by the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS; Clance, 1985).

### **Research Question**

The study attempted to answer the following question:

What coping skills do gay men serving in civic or nonprofit leadership roles who are identified as experiencing the IP, using the CIPS (Clance, 1985), use to overcome nine behavioral characteristics associated with the IP?

1. Anxiety
2. Lack of self-confidence
3. Depression
4. Perfectionism
5. Procrastination
6. Self-presentation
7. Emotional exhaustion
8. Fear of failure
9. Fear of success

### **Research Design**

This study used a descriptive, mixed-methods case study design to capture both quantitative and qualitative data. Creswell (2003) advocated collecting both types of data provides “the best understanding of a research problem” (p. 14). More specifically, Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) explained that mixed methods is a hybrid research design allowing “researchers to embed both quantitative and qualitative data within traditional designs or procedures” (p. 95). In addition, Creswell and Plano Clark (2006) noted that mixed-methods studies require the researcher to make three critical decisions when selecting which mixed-methods design to use. The decisions include the order in which the data will be used, the amount of emphasis placed on each type of data collected, and how the two sets of data will be mixed or related to one another. A mixed-methods design was best suited for this study because the quantitative data collected as the first step in the research supported the collection of rich, descriptive data through the qualitative inquiry process that followed. The quantitative data collection process served

the purpose of assisting the researcher with locating individuals who satisfied specific criteria supporting the study's research question. Further, the choice to prioritize the qualitative strand of this mixed-methods study was in line with other qualitative researchers' seeking to answer the questions "What?" "Why?" and "How?" when they explore the meanings, experiences, and cultures of the subjects they study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Yin, 2014). The design of this study offered the opportunity to explore, through a number of sources, the individual experiences of a group of gay male leaders who cope with the IP.

Merriam (1988) defined case study research as "the complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated" (p. 43). The bounded incident or entity represents a single unit of analysis versus the topic of the investigation. In addition, Merriam noted, "Case studies share with other forms of qualitative research the search for meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, an inductive investigative strategy, and the end product being richly descriptive" (p. 39). Patton (2015) added that descriptive research is an opportunity to take "the reader into the setting being described" (p. 533) and highlighted that case study can be considered either the process a researcher follows to collect data or the final product of the analysis the researcher conducts. Finally, Yin (2003) defined descriptive case studies as those describing the real-life context associated with an intervention or phenomenon.

### **Population**

A population, for the purposes of scholarly research, was defined by McMillan and Schumacher (2010) as "a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects, or

events, that conform to specific criteria and to which we intend to generalize the results of the research” (p. 129). According to Gates (2014), there are between 5.2 and 9 million lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals living in the United States. In addition, the National Center for Charitable Statistics (2016) reported that there are nearly 1.6 million nonprofit agencies registered in the United States. Further, Salamon, Sokolowski, and Geller (2012) reported that nonprofit employment represented 10.1% of total employment in the United States, with total employees numbering 10.7 million. Using a 2016 U.S. Census Bureau estimated adult population of 245,576,910, the researcher projected that nearly 396,000 LGBT individuals worked in civic or nonprofit agencies at the time of the study, with many employed in some leadership capacity. Therefore, the population for this study was gay men identified as leaders in civic or nonprofit agencies in the United States.

A target population was defined by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) as “a group of individuals (or a group of organizations) with some common defining characteristic that the researcher can identify and study” (p. 142). This study’s target population included gay men serving in civic or nonprofit leadership roles as identified by their agency’s organizational chart. Further, these leaders held job titles including director, chief academic officer, executive director, and principal, denoting some level of decision-making authority within their organizations. Finally, McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined a survey population as “the list of elements from which the sample is actually selected” (p. 129). This study’s survey population was gay men serving in civic or nonprofit leadership roles who completed the CIPS (Clance, 1985) and whose sexual

orientation was public knowledge and/or self-disclosed to the researcher or the person who referred them to the researcher.

### **Sample**

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined sampling as identifying “the group of subjects or participants from whom the data are collected” (p. 129). In order to find the type of participant needed for this descriptive, mixed-methods case study, the researcher used a nonprobability, purposeful snowball sampling technique that produced the identification of “information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (Patton, 2015, p. 230). McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined nonprobability sampling as selecting “subjects who happen to be accessible or who may represent certain types of characteristics” (p. 136). Further, the use of purposeful snowball sampling permitted the researcher to identify a specific set of participants so that “individuals are selected because they have experienced the central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2003, p. 25).

The snowball strategy used to obtain this sample allowed the researcher to identify a sufficient number of study participants by asking other individuals, well-connected informants, and the participants to suggest names of other potential study participants. The choice to use purposeful snowball sampling was to help the researcher collect a minimum sample size of 14 research subjects who satisfied the specific participant criteria. As Patton (2015) noted, “Exercising care not to overgeneralize from purposeful samples, while maximizing to the full the advantage of in-depth, purposeful sampling will do much to alleviate concerns about small sample sizes” (p. 314).

Selection of the sample participants started with the researcher identifying and contacting potential participants known to him personally or through his own personal and professional network of contacts. The potential participants in the first set of contacts were identified using the following criteria:

- self-identified as a gay man, and
- considered a leader in a nonprofit organization or civic agency as represented on an organizational chart.

The researcher asked each potential study participant to consider his own personal and professional network of contacts who satisfied the initial set of participant criteria and to provide him with their contact information. As potential participants emerged, each participant received a link to complete an electronic consent form and the CIPS (Clance, 1985) via Survey Monkey, an electronic survey collection instrument (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>). A total of 14 individuals satisfied all of the study's participant criteria, including being a gay man in a leadership role who scored higher than 45 on the CIPS, and were invited to participate in the next phase of the research. Each individual agreed to contribute to the study.

### **Instrumentation**

The instrumentation used for this descriptive, mixed-methods case study included a quantitative instrument, the CIPS, and a qualitative instrument, the researcher, to collect multiple sources of qualitative data to support the case study design.

#### **Quantitative Instrument**

The CIPS (Clance, 1985) served as the only quantitative instrument in this study and was used as a locator survey for identifying a specific set of participants. While a

key element contributing to the overall study, the quantitative data collected through the CIPS played a supporting role in seeking answers to the research question, which had a qualitative focus. The researcher sought and obtained permission to use the CIPS instrument as part of this study (Appendix B).

The CIPS consists of 20 questions scored on a 5-point Likert scale of 1 (*not at all true*) to 5 (*very true*) designed “to help individuals determine whether or not they have IP characteristics and, if so, to what extent they are suffering” (Clance, 1985, p. 19). Ranges of total scores classify individuals as having few (40 points or less), moderate (41-60 points), frequent (61-80 points), or intense (80 points or more) impostor experiences as it relates to their fears of evaluation, not being able to repeat their successes, and being less capable than others.

### **Qualitative Instrument**

The researcher represented the primary instrument of qualitative data collection for this study. Patton (2015) noted that qualitative research is a personal endeavor affected by the researcher’s background as he or she “seek[s] to understand the perceptions, feelings, experiences, and knowledge of people” (p. 27). Further, Yin (2011) emphasized the important role of collecting data from multiple sources in order to support the qualitative nature of case study research. The researcher used a mixed-methods approach to triangulate data and used interviews to collect information about the perceptions of the participants’ lived experiences (Harrell & Bradley, 2009).

Yin (2011) emphasized the importance of individual interviews as part of case study research and highlighted two key roles the researcher plays during the interview process. First, the researcher followed his own line of inquiry as outlined in his interview

protocol in order to pursue the *why* and *how* involved in supporting the qualitative strand of this study. Second, the researcher had to pose questions in a conversational and unbiased manner to help produce the necessary data to support this study's research question. Rather than asking a fixed set of structured questions or a more flexible set of unstructured interview questions, the researcher elected to utilize a semistructured collection of questions as part of this study.

### **Semistructured Interview Questions**

Leech (2002) described semistructured interviews as an opportunity to collect data that "can provide detail, depth, and an insider's perspective" (p. 665). Further, Harrell and Bradley (2009) outlined three different types of semistructured questions and stressed the importance of the researcher's understanding the intended goal of the questions in deciding which type to use. For example, descriptive questions are intended to elicit descriptions of things or events, which can lead to further lines of researcher inquiry. On the other hand, structural questions can help a researcher organize and categorize things while helping define relationships between them. Finally, contrast questions provide a researcher with definitions of terms. This study utilized open-ended, descriptive semistructured interview questions to explore how the participants coped with any of the nine IP characteristics discussed in the study's literature review. Further, questions explored what impact their sexual orientation had on their leadership roles.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Several studies have noted the discriminant validity of the CIPS as measuring characteristics associated with negative affectivity, including anxiety and neuroticism (Chae et al., 1995; Chrisman et al., 1995; Holmes, Kertay, Adamson, Holland, & Clance,

1993). The primary use of the scale in this study was to identify prospective participants based upon their CIPS scores, as reported via Survey Monkey, to contribute to the study's qualitative strand.

Yin (2014) noted that case study research is subject to four tests to ensure its quality. Establishing construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability supports case study research and requires specific actions to be taken "throughout the subsequent conduct of a case study, not just at its beginning" (Yin, 2014, p. 45). The researcher used data triangulation of primary sources of collected evidence to support the construct validity of this study. Verifying internal validity was unnecessary in this descriptive case study as there was no attempt to explore causal links between events.

### **Expert Validity**

Kimberlin and Winterstein (2008) described content validity as the means for addressing whether a set of items "adequately covers a content area or adequately represents a construct" (p. 2279) by relying on the judgment of experts. In order to establish external content validity of the interview questions used during the study, the researcher consulted with Dr. Richard Sinicola. Dr. Sinicola is a licensed psychologist who specializes in depression, anxiety, and sexual orientation issues. The researcher made adjustments to the initial set of interview questions based upon Dr. Sinicola's recommendations prior to conducting a field test of the interview protocol.

### **Field Test**

The researcher contacted five gay men in nonprofit or civic leadership roles and asked them to complete the CIPS to support a field test of the interview protocol. One of the five men reported a score of 45 or higher to satisfy the study's quantitative data

parameters and agreed to participate in a face-to-face interview conducted at his employment site. The participant received the set of interview questions ahead of the meeting. The researcher included an independent observer who had earned her doctorate and was familiar with qualitative interviewing during the field testing to collect her critical feedback about the process. The observer offered the researcher critical insight about the pace and structure of the interview, feedback about the researcher's verbal and nonverbal communication skills, and suggestions to consider for adjusting the interview protocol. Further, the field test confirmed that the number of questions was not excessive and provided the researcher with an opportunity to revise two terms included in four of the questions that the individual reported were unclear. Finally, Dr. Sinacola reviewed the revised list of final questions following the field testing and provided no additional feedback.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection process did not begin until the researcher completed several steps to protect the human subjects who participated in this study. The researcher sought and received approval from the Brandman University Institutional Review Board (BUIRB) to conduct this study by submitting the following documents for review: the CIPS and the approval from Dr. Pauline Rose Clance to use the instrument (Appendix B), a letter of invitation (Appendix C), consent forms for both the quantitative (Appendix D) and qualitative (Appendix E) data collection processes, and a participant bill of rights (Appendix F). Yin (2014) noted the importance of obtaining institutional review board approval prior to commencing research to assure participants of their confidentiality, their safety, and their full knowledge of the research.

Upon receiving BUIRB approval, the researcher identified an initial group of prospective study participants using his own personal and professional network of contacts. The initial recruitment and screening of participants included only the need for the individuals to be self-identified gay men working in nonprofit or civic agencies within the state of California. Further, the researcher asked each prospective participant to suggest names and provide contact information for other potential study participants. Patton (2015) noted that this snowball sampling technique “generates a chain of interviewees based on people who know people who know people who would be good sources given the focus of inquiry” (p. 298). Once the participants signed and returned the informed consent form, the researcher contacted them by telephone to determine their leadership roles within their organizations. Those who did not satisfy the study’s leadership criterion were thanked for their interest and dismissed from further consideration.

### **Quantitative Data**

Multiple studies have reported the reliability of the CIPS and its capacity to help individuals self-identify the extent to which they experience the IP, further supporting its inclusion in this study (Holmes et al., 1993; Jostl et al., 2012). The researcher instructed each participant to complete the CIPS with his professional life in mind within 1-3 days of receipt of the instrument while assuring each individual of the confidentiality of his score. Those whose CIPS scores fell below the identified threshold for this study (a total score of 45) were thanked for their participation and dismissed from further consideration. The researcher protected the confidentiality of each respondent by identifying each individual with a generic code (Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.)

identifiable only by the researcher. Further, the researcher invited those individuals who had CIPS scores of 45 or higher to participate in interviews.

### **Qualitative Data**

Interviews allow researchers to “find out what is in and on someone else’s mind to gather their stories” and to “enter into the other person’s perspective” (Patton, 2015, p. 426). Further, Yin (2014) defined reliability as “demonstrating that the operations of a study—such as the data collection procedures—can be repeated with the same results” (p. 44). This study’s researcher followed a consistent approach when arranging and conducting the case study interviews. For example, the researcher contacted each prospective participant by e-mail or telephone when he learned of the individual’s potential interest in the study in order to answer any initial questions. The participants received a copy of the interview questions ahead of time, and the researcher posed the questions in the same order during each interview. The researcher conducted a face-to-face interview at the individual’s work site with each participant included in the study. Each interview included semistructured, open-ended questions and appropriate prompts and lasted approximately one hour. The list of questions and prompts approved by the BUIRB is included as Appendix G. Finally, the researcher created and maintained a case study database. The database included electronic files using a Google share drive that included reported CIPS scores.

### **Data Analysis**

Several key decisions, including determining the level of interaction between the quantitative and qualitative strands as well as the priority and timing of each strand, are critical to the success of mixed-methods research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This

mixed-methods case study used an interactive level of interaction whereby the collection of qualitative data relied heavily upon the initial collection of quantitative data. Further, the qualitative data assumed a greater level of priority and were collected only after collecting the quantitative data that helped identify the participants. Lastly, Yin (2014) noted the importance of identifying an analytic strategy prior to collecting data and offered four general strategies. This researcher chose to use an inductive strategy in this descriptive case study, allowing his review of the collected data to lead him “farther into [the] data and possibly suggesting additional relationships” (Yin, 2014, p. 136).

### **Quantitative Analysis**

The CIPS is scored on a scale of 1-100, with each of the 20 questions having a maximum Likert-scale score of 5. Participants completed the scale via Survey Monkey, and the researcher maintained a spreadsheet with each participant listed along with his CIPS score. Each participant was assigned a code known only to the researcher in order to protect his confidentiality. An analysis of this quantitative information allowed the researcher to identify 14 individuals who satisfied the minimum CIPS score for inclusion in the qualitative phase of data collection that followed.

### **Qualitative Analysis**

The qualitative data in the form of transcribed interviews, observation field notes, and artifacts assisted the researcher with identifying emerging themes that supported seeking answers to the research question guiding this study.

Each interview participant agreed to allow the researcher to record the interview using a handheld tape recorder and backup audio recording unit to capture the full conversation. Further, the researcher kept a journal of written notes highlighting key

interview discussion points and also the notes related to the direct observations made throughout the course of the site visits. The researcher reviewed and enhanced the notes just after completing the site visits to be more complete and comprehensive than was possible during each visit. These notes were transcribed into a Microsoft Word document. It became clear that having both an audio and written copy of the discussions was vital in order to capture the words spoken during the interviews and to remind the researcher about the nonverbal cues noted during the discussions, including laughter and facial gestures.

Once the text of the interviews, notes from the observations, and artifacts were uploaded into QSR International's NVivo 11 software, the researcher took additional time to review all of the notes and reflected on the research question guiding the study. Statements made during the interviews provided a deeper understanding of the participants and how they described their own personal experiences as gay leaders dealing with the IP. After this additional reflection, many possible codes to make sense of the data emerged, with several codes attributed to each of the behavioral characteristics ultimately identified as the best way to present the information.

### **Interrater Reliability**

Patton (2015) noted that interrater reliability in qualitative research allows multiple individuals analyzing the same data to “discuss what they see in the data, share insights, and consider what emerges from their different perspectives” (p. 667). In order to support the interrater reliability of the researcher's coding process, an individual who successfully completed a doctoral qualitative study completed an independent review of the collected data and created her own codes associated with them. The ensuing

discussion allowed the researcher to compare the two perspectives and make minor adjustments to his existing codes, resulting in more robust and descriptive emerging themes. The following chapter presents the final themes that emerged from the data analysis in greater depth.

### **Limitations**

Case study research is defined as an empirical inquiry that helps a researcher understand a real-world case within its contemporary context when the boundaries between the case and the context are not clear (Yin, 2014). As with other types of empirical research, this study included several limitations.

First, the self-scoring and self-reporting nature of the CIPS produced results that were subjective based upon the participants' own behaviors and could have been influenced by uncontrollable contextual factors. Further, the scale offers no clear direction about whether the respondents should consider their personal or their professional context when responding to the questions. Second, the small purposeful sample of participants was drawn only from individuals who lived in California, limiting the generalizability of the results to a larger population. Third, the sample only included gay men and not other members of the LGBT community. Finally, the sample of prospective participants was limited to those working in civic or nonprofit agencies who were defined as leaders based upon their agency's organizational chart.

### **Summary**

This chapter reviewed the study's purpose statement and research question prior to describing the descriptive, mixed-methods case study research design used for the research process. The study's target population and sample were outlined along with the

instruments used for data collection. The chapter concluded by including a thorough description of the data collection and analysis processes and the limitations of this study. The following chapter provides a comprehensive review of the data collected for this study.

## CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

### **Overview**

This chapter examines the findings of the research to describe how gay male leaders affected by the impostor phenomenon cope with the phenomenon's behavioral characteristics. The chapter summarizes the data collected from 14 interviews of self-identified gay men serving in civic or nonprofit leadership roles. This chapter reviews the purpose of the study, the primary research question, and the research methodology. Next, the chapter includes a set of tables illustrating the themes and patterns of the data collected and analyzed for each interview. Finally, a summary analysis of the themes and patterns of all 14 interviews completes the chapter.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this descriptive, mixed-methods case study was to explore and describe the coping skills used to overcome nine behavioral characteristics by gay men serving in civic or nonprofit leadership roles who are identified as experiencing the impostor phenomenon (IP) by the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS; Clance, 1985).

### **Research Question**

What coping skills do gay men serving in civic or nonprofit leadership roles who are identified as experiencing the IP, using the CIPS (Clance, 1985), use to overcome nine behavioral characteristics associated with the IP?

1. Anxiety
2. Lack of self-confidence
3. Depression

4. Perfectionism
5. Procrastination
6. Self-presentation
7. Emotional exhaustion
8. Fear of failure
9. Fear of success

### **Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures**

This descriptive, mixed-methods case study captured both quantitative and qualitative data to help identify participants and to explore and describe how they cope with the behavioral characteristics associated with the IP. While earlier studies explored whether the IP affects a variety of specific populations of individuals, prior research did not include the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) population. Therefore, gay male leaders identified as experiencing the IP were the subjects of this research.

The quantitative data collection process involved prospective study participants completing the 20-item CIPS (Clance, 1985). The CIPS is designed to determine to what extent individuals experience the IP. Participant responses helped the researcher identify individuals who were moderately affected or had frequent impostor experiences as determined by their total scores. The researcher invited these participants to participate in the qualitative data collection process.

A total of 14 participants completed an interview that used 10 open-ended, semistructured interview questions developed to explore each individual's experience with nine behavioral characteristics associated with the IP. The researcher used additional probing questions as needed during each interview. An opening question

designed to set the participants at ease asked the individuals to describe their decision to pursue civic or nonprofit employment. The researcher chose to focus on civic and nonprofit agencies to support further exploration about how impostorism influences individuals in a specific career field similar to his own. The next eight interview questions specifically addressed the nine behavioral characteristics associated with the IP. Each question encouraged the participants to consider a specific characteristic and discuss how they coped with the characteristic in their professional life. The researcher did not disclose the characteristic's connection with the IP in advance of the interviews. A final question encouraged the participants to reflect on the role they believed their family played in their career choices and/or identity development. The interview protocol including the 10 questions is found in Appendix G. Table 1 summarizes the nine behavioral characteristics and the interview question associated with each.

Table 1

*Alignment of Interview Questions With Behavioral Characteristics*

Behavioral characteristic	Interview question
1. Anxiety	Question 4
2. Lack of self-confidence	Question 6
3. Depression	Question 5
4. Perfectionism	Question 9
5. Procrastination	Question 8
6. Self-presentation	Question 7
7. Emotional exhaustion	Question 3
8. Fear of failure	Question 2
9. Fear of success	Question 2

Before data collection began, prospective participants received an e-mail letter of invitation regarding the nature of the study (Appendix C), a link to complete an electronic informed consent form (Appendix D), the CIPS (Appendix B), and a participant bill of rights (Appendix F). Those participants who scored 45 or higher on the CIPS received a second invitation to participate in a 45- to 60-minute interview and the interview protocol (Appendix G).

At the beginning of each interview, the participant was asked to complete another informed consent form (Appendix E) agreeing to be audio recorded during the interview. Each interview included in the study took place in person and was recorded using a recording application on the researcher's iPhone in addition to a handheld backup recording device. Recorded interviews were sent using the iPhone recorder application for immediate professional transcription. The researcher uploaded each interview transcript into NVivo coding software and coded it to elicit themes and patterns. Gorden (1992) noted that the process of coding data permits a researcher to derive a summary of the responses collected from multiple interviews exploring a common topic and to demonstrate how frequently similar information appears. The coding process included an individual who also completed a qualitative study as part of earning her doctorate in education, who coded the same transcripts as the researcher to ensure interrater reliability. A comparison of the interrater's and researcher's coding results revealed a high percentage of consistency between the two, providing a strong measure of interrater reliability.

## **Population and Sample**

The 14 participants included in this study were all self-identified gay men who were employed as civic or nonprofit leaders in California at the time of the study. Each participant shared his leadership role with the researcher and confirmed his current employment status as a leader within his organization. For the purposes of this study, the researcher defined a leader as an individual whose name or job title appeared on an organizational chart denoting some level of decision-making authority within his organization. This group of 14 men satisfied the criteria and the quantitative threshold of 45 on the CIPS needed to participate in this study.

In order to find the type of participant needed for this descriptive, mixed-methods case study, the researcher used a nonprobability, purposeful snowball sampling technique. Patton (2015) noted that the nonprobability, purposeful sampling technique produces the identification of “information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (p. 230). Further, the snowball strategy used to obtain this sample allowed the researcher to identify a sufficient number of study participants by asking other individuals, well-connected informants, and the participants to suggest names of other potential study participants.

Selection of the sample participants started with the researcher identifying and contacting potential participants known to him personally or through his own personal and professional network of contacts. The researcher asked each potential study participant to consider his own personal and professional network of contacts who satisfied the initial set of participant criteria and to provide the researcher with the

potential participants' contact information. As additional potential participants emerged, the researcher contacted each to confirm his possible interest.

The researcher contacted a total of 34 individuals regarding the study. A total of 31 individuals responded expressing interest in participating. Of those 31, 14 individuals satisfied all of the study criteria and took part in the full study. The researcher disqualified 11 of the 31 who responded either because they did not satisfy the quantitative threshold for study participation or because they were not currently employed. The remaining six individuals either did not complete the CIPS or never responded to the invitation to participate in an interview.

The 14 participants who completed the CIPS earned an average score of 65 on a scale of 100. There were two participants who scored higher than 80, indicating they had intense impostor experiences. An additional six of the 14 participants scored between 61 and 80 on the CIPS, indicating they had frequent impostor experiences. The remaining six participants scored between 41 and 60, indicating moderate IP experiences. Table 2 summarizes the CIPS scores of the 14 individuals who participated in the full study.

## **Presentation and Analysis of Data**

### **Data Analysis by Participant**

**Participant 1.** Participant 1 was a coproducer and technical director of a local nonprofit theater company. His CIPS score of 68 indicated he frequently had impostor experiences. Table 3 summarizes Participant 1's responses in themes and patterns related to how he coped with the nine behavioral characteristics associated with the IP.

Table 2

*Description of Participants*

Participant	Job title	CIPS score	Industry
Participant 1	Coproducer	68	Nonprofit
Participant 2	Chair	61	Nonprofit
Participant 3	Educator	70	Nonprofit
Participant 4	Director	48	Nonprofit
Participant 5	Chief academic officer	90	Nonprofit
Participant 6	Deputy director	59	Civic
Participant 7	Lead human resources specialist	81	Civic
Participant 8	Environmental manager	61	Civic
Participant 9	Executive director	51	Nonprofit
Participant 10	Psychiatrist	58	Nonprofit
Participant 11	Associate dean	60	Nonprofit
Participant 12	Director	72	Nonprofit
Participant 13	Principal	48	Nonprofit
Participant 14	Educator	75	Nonprofit

Participant 1 expressed overarching themes of “pushing through” and redirecting his line of thinking as his coping methods for many of the IP characteristics he experienced in his professional life. Practicing or preparing as much as possible reduced his anxiety in advance of uncomfortable situations like public speaking or projects on which he knew he was likely to procrastinate. Participant 1 also reported a need to make others feel comfortable and described this reaction as a sense of humility and as a way to compensate for his lack of self-confidence in some situations. Further, his desire to avoid potential conflict and to compensate for his self-described positive sense of perfectionism inspired him to look for situations where he could help make things better.

Table 3

*Participant 1: Themes in Response to Behavioral Characteristics*

Behavioral characteristic	Themes identified
1. Anxiety	• Practice, research, or study as much as possible
2. Lack of self-confidence	• Demonstrate humility
3. Depression	• Make the other person happy
4. Perfectionism	• Push to work through the feelings
5. Procrastination	• Determine what is believed should be done and reach for that outcome
6. Self-presentation	• Work on a project where success is assured
7. Emotional exhaustion	• Determine how to successfully manage an additional task
8. Fear of failure	• Become immersed in the project to overcome not feeling as smart
9. Fear of success	• Overcompensate and prepare earlier
	• Bend over backwards to avoid conflict
	• Focus on doing good things
	• Switch gears and do something else
	• Take over and try to manage things
	• Ensure control over the situation
	• Look for things that can be improved
	• Reflect on what impression is made
	• Reflect on past successes

Participant 1 described an intentional way of redirecting his thoughts to more positive thinking when facing stressful situations that would take a toll on his personal well-being. Advance planning, taking control of situations, and focusing on doing his best when taking on additional tasks helped him overcome feelings of “not being as smart as others” or a need “to do it all.” Participant 1 discussed the importance of self-reflection when facing new projects to help remind himself about his past successes. Similarly, he described being acutely aware of the impression he made as “a projection of me, and if it is not as good as it can be, then it reflects back on me as a person and that I’m somehow not as good.” Participant 1 stressed the importance of pursuing projects he

knew would be successful alongside those that were more challenging as a way to remind himself of his ability to succeed despite a measure of insecurity. Participant 1 noted,

I like to have something I can do, and then it's done and I can say, "This is what I did." I think I probably feel insecure that if I do a project really well that it reflects . . . I'm doing good because I look at what a good project it is. I think that's how I process them.

**Participant 2.** Participant 2 was a council chairperson providing direction to a local art museum. His CIPS score of 61 indicated he frequently had impostor experiences. Table 4 summarizes Participant 2's responses in themes and patterns related to how he coped with the nine behavioral characteristics associated with the IP.

Table 4

*Participant 2: Themes in Response to Behavioral Characteristics*

Behavioral characteristic	Themes identified
1. Anxiety	• Evaluate and modify all parts of life
2. Lack of self-confidence	• Pace life as if it is a marathon
3. Depression	• Create daily rituals and routines
4. Perfectionism	• Take time to process thoughts internally
5. Procrastination	• Reflect positively on accomplishments
6. Self-presentation	• Look for opportunities for progress and movement within an organization
7. Emotional exhaustion	• Remain mindful of physical well-being
8. Fear of failure	• Turn things down that bring no joy or sense of value
9. Fear of success	• Evaluate fit within an organization to support success
	• Seek a sense of control
	• Train others to provide more personal time
	• Create systems to reduce stress
	• Look for alternative ways to solve issues
	• Set time aside for processing
	• Negotiate around societal expectations of behavior
	• Present an authentic self
	• Develop systems that work to find success
	• Choose the right opportunities/have a vision
	• Celebrate unique perspective on life

Participant 2 stressed the importance of his personal value system and his outlook on life as contributing factors to coping with the IP's behavioral characteristics. Further, he attributed developing successful coping skills to his age and the lessons he had learned throughout life.

Participant 2 emphasized the importance of remaining mindful about what creates stress and the need to establish daily rituals and routines that create time for personal reflection. More importantly, his focus on remaining mindful helped guide the actions he took to deal with anxiety and moments when he doubted his self-confidence. He considered life a marathon that required him to pace himself and to evaluate what impact new challenges had on his life. In contrast to some who believe procrastination is a negative characteristic, Participant 2 noted, "Procrastination gives me that timeframe to reflect and come up with the best solution."

Participant 2 highlighted the importance of celebrating the unique perspective he added to the world around him while recognizing that the perception others had of him may differ. He described an early need to present a "good boy" image to the outside world but suggested it forced him to create a public persona that made him feel inauthentic. He credited his success as a leader to his ability to integrate all parts of his personality and weave them into one cohesive unit, noting,

Who knows what that is perceived by the other person as; but I would say that, for me anyway, it tends to be as authentic as I can be so that I'm not trying to put on a face for something that I'm not.

**Participant 3.** Participant 3 was a local educator. His CIPS score of 70 indicated he frequently had impostor experiences. Table 5 summarizes Participant 3's responses in

themes and patterns related to how he coped with the nine behavioral characteristics associated with the IP.

Table 5

*Participant 3: Themes in Response to Behavioral Characteristics*

Behavioral characteristic	Themes identified
1. Anxiety	• Make lists that force action
2. Lack of self-confidence	• Complete one task at a time
3. Depression	• Reduce overwhelming feelings to concrete tasks
4. Perfectionism	• Hide internal feelings and persevere
5. Procrastination	• Internalize constant reminders that everyone makes mistakes
6. Self-presentation	• Avoid putting tasks off
7. Emotional exhaustion	• Remain mindful of actions to avoid attention
8. Fear of failure	• Prioritize to avoid being overwhelmed
9. Fear of success	• Celebrate every success
	• Seek the value of every action
	• Determine what benefit a task will offer
	• Worry less about the time it takes to succeed

Participant 3 stressed that the specific actions he took every day to cope with the IP's behavioral characteristics helped address the ongoing struggle he faced with self-confidence. Rather than surrendering to feelings of being overwhelmed, he took concrete steps to make lists of tasks that needed to be accomplished as a way to hold himself accountable even for those tasks he preferred to avoid. Further, he expressed the importance of breaking down large projects into smaller steps to offer him the chance to celebrate small successes along the way.

Participant 3 believed in the power of self-reflection as an opportunity to realize that everyone makes mistakes. He was equally mindful that his external reactions to situations contributed to how he believed others perceived him. As a result, Participant 3

worked hard to maintain his composure to avoid any attention that triggered feelings of being judged by others.

Participant 3 highlighted his need to find value in every action he took as the way to overcome his fear of failing. He focused on finding some intrinsic value in everything he did as a strong way to motivate his ability to persevere. Further, Participant 3 noted the importance of reminding himself to worry less about how long it took for him to complete a project or task to avoid comparing himself with others. Participant 3 noted,

As I have gone through my life doing everything, I always think, “I am going to fail, I’m going to fail, I’m not going to make it, I’m not going to make it.” But I have always made it. It might take me a little longer, but I have always made it.

**Participant 4.** Participant 4 was the director of a local nonprofit agency serving the LGBT community. His CIPS score of 48 indicated he had moderate impostor experiences. Table 6 summarizes Participant 4’s responses in themes and patterns related to how he coped with the nine behavioral characteristics associated with the IP.

Participant 4 repeatedly mentioned the importance of finding value in any situation and recognizing his commitments as the most critical coping mechanisms he used to address the IP’s behavioral characteristics. He attributed this approach to the way he was raised and the fact that he had been HIV positive for the past 30 years. Participant 4 described the series of challenges he had encountered in life and noted, “I’m going to work as hard as I have to [in order to] get it [project] done because that’s just the way I was raised and my work ethic. It may not be pleasant, but I’m committed to finish it.”

Table 6

*Participant 4: Themes in Response to Behavioral Characteristics*

Behavioral characteristic	Themes identified
1. Anxiety	• Seek opportunities that provide personal value
2. Lack of self-confidence	• Force action to realize success is possible
3. Depression	• Recognize that initial fear will be replaced by feeling of success
4. Perfectionism	• Celebrate being valued by others
5. Procrastination	• Meditate or do some other form of exercise to relax
6. Self-presentation	• Pursue opportunities where success is likely
7. Emotional exhaustion	• Understand personal limitations
8. Fear of failure	• Internally reinforce own attributes
9. Fear of success	• Find strength to be authentic in every situation
	• Identify any lessons to be learned from experiences
	• Recognize and embrace that perfection is not possible
	• Never lose passion for things that bring happiness

Participant 4 stressed that the environment in which he found himself proved to be a key factor in coping with his IP feelings. He emphasized how important it was to surround himself with individuals who recognized his contributions and who offered positive feedback. Furthermore, he acknowledged the need to be authentic and remain mindful about internally reinforcing his own attributes in every situation.

Participant 4 stated that he sought to find a lesson in every experience he had in life. Equally important, he constantly reminded himself that perfection was not possible and how to appreciate his own limitations. Participant 4 summed up his feelings as follows:

Now I don't want to have failures even though I realize, too, that from some of the failures I've had, I've learned something, and that's helped me, too. I think I have this fear of failure, which is probably not a real good thing to have because sometimes when we fail we actually learn more than when we succeed.

**Participant 5.** Participant 5 was the chief academic officer of a local school district. His CIPS score of 90 indicated he often had intense IP experiences. Table 7 summarizes Participant 5's responses in themes and patterns related to how he coped with the nine behavioral characteristics associated with the IP.

Table 7

*Participant 5: Themes in Response to Behavioral Characteristics*

Behavioral characteristic	Themes identified
1. Anxiety	• Have confidence that outcome will be recognized
2. Lack of self-confidence	• Focus on being authentic
3. Depression	• Do things for others
4. Perfectionism	• Express emotions
5. Procrastination	• Take control of situations
6. Self-presentation	• Consider and implement solutions
7. Emotional exhaustion	• Be more process oriented while remaining creative
8. Fear of failure	• Be willing to propose ideas and seek feedback
9. Fear of success	• Seek direction as needed
	• Understand and react to behavioral expectations
	• Celebrate being chosen
	• Appreciate challenges
	• Value self and others

Participant 5 focused on his desire to retain control of situations and valuing feedback as his primary forms of coping with the IP's behavioral characteristics. Further, he acknowledged that his current position and age allowed him to do things for other people more frequently and cited this as an opportunity to operate in a more authentic manner than he felt was permitted in earlier stages of his personal and professional lives.

Participant 5 highlighted several early professional experiences that inspired him to value the opportunity to provide professional advice and direction for others. Further, he learned the importance of proposing new ideas while having the humility to seek and accept direction from others. Participant 5 stated that the ability to remain both process

driven and creative reinforced a level of self-confidence and personal achievement that others recognized about him.

Participant 5 also shared the importance of taking pride in accepting new challenges and working with others. He stressed the significance of focusing on being selected to lead projects or teams while reminding himself that the outcomes were the most important and would be recognized. He added, “I have to be more OK when people do something because you have to value people. I think that’s part of me, too. I have to value myself and be all right.”

**Participant 6.** Participant 6 was the deputy director of a county social service agency. His CIPS score of 59 indicated he had moderate IP experiences. Table 8 summarizes Participant 6’s responses in themes and patterns related to how he coped with the nine behavioral characteristics associated with the IP.

Table 8

*Participant 6: Themes in Response to Behavioral Characteristics*

Behavioral characteristic	Themes identified
1. Anxiety	• Seek an encouraging atmosphere
2. Lack of self-confidence	• Look for challenges
3. Depression	• Recognize personal achievements
4. Perfectionism	• Be willing to make sacrifices, knowing they are not permanent
5. Procrastination	• Submit the best that can be produced
6. Self-presentation	• Focus on building strong relationships
7. Emotional exhaustion	• Seek solutions to problems rather than relying on others
8. Fear of failure	• Develop self-awareness and respond appropriately in situations
9. Fear of success	• Recognize the danger of placing personal expectations on others
	• Identify situations that call for perfectionism
	• Appreciate the gap you fill in situations
	• Make lists and prioritize

Participant 6 described the importance of self-reflection and implementing the lessons he had learned in life as the primary coping methods he used to address many of the IP's behavioral characteristics. In addition, he highlighted his willingness to acknowledge his strengths and his appreciation for the relationships he sought to create with others as important factors in his life.

Professionally, Participant 6 noted how important it was for him to pursue supportive atmospheres in which to work. However, he remained committed to seeking opportunities that allowed him to challenge himself as a way to demonstrate his capability. Participant 6 stressed the importance of taking time to recognize each success along the way and the importance of involving family members in critical decisions before making them. Finally, Participant 6 commented on the value of taking risks and making personal sacrifices, knowing decisions can be reversed and replaced by others.

Participant 6 described the importance of relationship building and self-reflection. He celebrated the role he had assumed as a problem solver in both his professional and personal lives, noting how that approach had helped support his sense of self-confidence. Further, Participant 6 recognized that his inclination to seek "a polished final product" or to avoid procrastinating was not an expectation he could place on others. Instead, he had learned to acknowledge and value how others operated, stating, "I'm not going to stop being ambitious, but I can dial it back in recognition of other people."

**Participant 7.** Participant 7 was a lead human resources specialist for a government agency. His CIPS score of 81 indicated he often had intense IP experiences. Table 9 summarizes Participant 7's responses in themes and patterns related to how he coped with the nine behavioral characteristics associated with the IP.

Table 9

*Participant 7: Themes in Response to Behavioral Characteristics*

Behavioral characteristic	Themes identified
1. Anxiety	• Find an environment that supports values
2. Lack of self-confidence	• Make choices that support current and future needs
3. Depression	• Acknowledge the need to adapt
4. Perfectionism	• Prepare in advance to feel more confident in the moment
5. Procrastination	• Find humor in stressful situations
6. Self-presentation	• Follow and act upon instincts
7. Emotional exhaustion	• Find ways to be unique
8. Fear of failure	• Read and react to situations
9. Fear of success	• Reflect on what is most important in life
	• Accept positive feedback

Participant 7 suggested that his focus on following his instincts and reflecting on the way he was raised supported his ability to cope with the IP's behavioral characteristics. While he acknowledged the importance of attempting to lead his life as authentically as possible, he recognized that specific situations required adjustments. However, he described adaptations including how he interacted with his children during school events and how he acted during evenings out with friends who he knew were uncomfortable with his sexual orientation as examples of how he felt he could connect more fully with those around him.

Participant 7 spoke about the importance of creating an environment that allowed him to focus on his priorities including family and his current and future needs. He emphasized, "In your fight to be that way or to be perfect, you get lost and do not pay attention to other things that are important, too, because you have one goal." Participant 7 noted that finding humor, following his instincts, and seeking every opportunity to

approach each new situation with his own unique perspective were essential in finding success.

The need to adjust to the environment around him forced Participant 7 to consider how he managed his internal feelings without compromising his personal values. He described the importance of knowing his strengths and how he prepared in advance to feel more confident about those situations that challenged him. Participant 7 noted,

You learn to live with those things, with those feelings, and you master those feelings, and that's part of who you are. You go to PTA with your kids, or you go to a bar with your friends, you expect friends. . . . All the time, you have that background that you cannot just strip it off. It's part of you.

**Participant 8.** Participant 8 was the environmental manager of a local city's public works division. His CIPS score of 61 indicated he had frequent impostor experiences. Table 10 summarizes Participant 8's responses in themes and patterns related to how he coped with the nine behavioral characteristics associated with the IP.

Participant 8 traced the way he coped with the IP's behavioral characteristics to how he was raised and the lessons he learned while growing up. He mentioned that the emphasis his parents placed on forging a better and more secure way of life influenced the choices he made along the way. Further, Participant 8 described an awareness of using certain coping skills to address challenges with which he continued to struggle.

Participant 8 emphasized the importance of seeking mentors and taking steps like pursuing additional training or education as a way to be prepared for new opportunities. Instead of this representing a sense of personal ambition, he described it as a way to

Table 10

*Participant 8: Themes in Response to Behavioral Characteristics*

Behavioral characteristic	Themes identified
1. Anxiety	• Focus on knowing strengths
2. Lack of self-confidence	• Take steps to support future success
3. Depression	• Identify and maintain mentors
4. Perfectionism	• Remain open to new opportunities
5. Procrastination	• Prepare for situations in advance
6. Self-presentation	• Process feelings/thoughts with others
7. Emotional exhaustion	• Learn to identify and address anxiety
8. Fear of failure	• Relate and take prior successful steps to address new challenges
9. Fear of success	• Honor why there is a need to be perfect
	• Avoid making assumptions
	• Respect boundaries of others
	• Anticipate implications of actions
	• Recognize the expertise others possess
	• Accept those things that can't be controlled
	• Check the reality of situations

position himself for new challenges for which he might otherwise feel underprepared to accept. In addition, Participant 8 emphasized how important advance preparation was, including reflecting on what supported past successes, in reducing his level of anxiety about new situations.

Participant 8 celebrated his perfectionist tendencies but acknowledged his willingness and benefit of accepting imperfection, noting, “There’s a point now I can go, ‘I can reword this sentence a little better, but it’s not going to make enough of a difference. It’s still good.’” Further, he confessed that his sense of perfectionism may contradict experts in his workplace, and he learned what value there may be in deferring to the judgment of others.

Participant 8 described his typical interaction with others as guarded and something he continued to focus on addressing. He stressed the importance of “giving

people my best” while reducing assumptions he made about the expectations others had of him, noting,

All that stuff’s in my head, and it’s like, “Really? Nobody cares. Nobody’s going to notice. It’s a blue shirt. Nobody cares.” I know that in my head, but it still just manifests itself in that I worry about that kind of stuff sometimes.

**Participant 9.** Participant 9 was the executive director of a local nonprofit agency. His CIPS score of 51 indicated he had moderate IP experiences. Table 11 summarizes Participant 9’s responses in themes and patterns related to how he coped with the nine behavioral characteristics associated with the IP.

Table 11

*Participant 9: Themes in Response to Behavioral Characteristics*

Behavioral characteristic	Themes identified
1. Anxiety	• Reflect on issues creating negative feelings
2. Lack of self-confidence	• Seek the value of the work being done
3. Depression	• Consider the personal impact of making certain decisions
4. Perfectionism	• Pursue the best options available for each situation
5. Procrastination	• Take one step at a time
6. Self-presentation	• Identify solutions versus wallowing in dissecting the problem
7. Emotional exhaustion	• Seek feedback
8. Fear of failure	• Think through situations in advance and prepare for them
9. Fear of success	• Always seek to put the best foot forward
	• Draw on past successful experiences
	• Have confidence to restart or reevaluate a project
	• Get ideas out of the head and onto paper
	• Recognize the many ways people define perfection

Participant 9 described a sense of optimism and belief that lessons he learned early in life played an important role in learning how to cope with the IP’s behavioral

characteristics. He reflected on the consequences of the actions he took throughout his life while maintaining a focus on the need to keep moving forward versus wallowing in a decision-making process that could have paralyzed him.

Participant 9 stressed the importance of assessing each situation one at a time and identifying the value it could offer while relating it to past successful experiences. Instead of allowing himself to get overwhelmed, Participant 9 emphasized the need to consider the many alternatives of each situation along with the willingness to “just identify the issues and then move on.” Further, he highlighted the positive effect of taking time to develop a plan before moving forward and determining what steps were critical to be taken first. He admitted to setting high expectations of himself while noting, “Yeah, I mean the expectation is that I’m going to succeed in every one of them [situations]. Do I? No. Do I beat myself up about it if I don’t? No. You do the best you can do.”

Participant 9 recognized that his desire to reach perfection was not always shared by others. In addition, he mentioned how important it was to “realize that the way I would do something isn’t necessarily the right way. It’s just the way I’d do it.” Participant 9 stressed that his drive for perfection included the confidence to reevaluate or restart projects in order to feel confident about the final product. He noted,

I’ve learned that life happens. While we’re going on doing this stuff that we call work and all this stuff, life happens. Ultimately, I think it really is those core values that impact our own lives and give us our own personal satisfaction and worth.

**Participant 10.** Participant 10 was a psychiatrist employed by a government agency. His CIPS score of 58 indicated he had moderate IP experiences. Table 12 summarizes Participant 10's responses in themes and patterns related to how he coped with the nine behavioral characteristics associated with the IP.

Table 12

*Participant 10: Themes in Response to Behavioral Characteristics*

Behavioral characteristic	Themes identified
1. Anxiety	• Look at organizational mission statements to determine fit
2. Lack of self-confidence	• Recognize and honor commitments
3. Depression	• Find a level of comfort in the willingness to work hard
4. Perfectionism	• Focus on the motivation anxiety produces
5. Procrastination	• Rely on skills when faced with adversity
6. Self-presentation	• Clarify expectations others possess
7. Emotional exhaustion	• React to the environment and demonstrate a willingness to adapt
8. Fear of failure	• Seek and evaluate the perspectives of others
9. Fear of success	• Find the passion for doing something that ensures success
	• Recognize when one part of life is impacting another

Participant 10 cited his focus on the way he reacted to situations in his personal and professional lives as the key to coping with the IP's behavioral characteristics. Through a combination of research and self-reflection, Participant 10 developed the confidence to successfully navigate any situation. In addition, his willingness to observe his reactions and adjust his frame of mind further reinforced his ability to manage his impostor experiences.

Participant 10 highlighted the importance of always seeking an environment that supported his values. Taking the time to research new opportunities and clarifying what others expected of him in advance supported Participant 10's desire to ensure he

understood the significance of his contributions before moving forward. Further, he stressed the need to remind himself how important it was to honor commitments he made by harnessing the anxiety those situations created as a way to “get your juices flowing to be able to perform well in any venue.”

Participant 10 conveyed how important self-reflection and remaining open to new experiences were to him. He described the need to evaluate new situations while reflecting on what personal adjustments he needed to make in his work style along with a willingness to seek feedback from others to ensure success. Additionally, he acknowledged learning how important it was to counterbalance his inclination to work hard at his own expense. Participant 10 noted, “I want my work to be done because if my work is not done, that takes precedence over my personal life.”

**Participant 11.** Participant 11 was an associate dean of student affairs at a nonprofit private college. His CIPS score of 60 indicated he had moderate IP experiences. Table 13 summarizes Participant 11’s responses in themes and patterns related to how he coped with the nine behavioral characteristics associated with the IP.

Participant 11 described the attention he placed on developing an inner sense of motivation as his way of dealing with the IP’s behavioral characteristics. He highlighted the focus he placed on envisioning his future while appreciating the existing challenges and the role they played in supporting his long-term goals. Furthermore, Participant 11 stressed the importance of taking time to reflect on his own accomplishments while acknowledging influential factors that kept him motivated.

Table 13

*Participant 11: Themes in Response to Behavioral Characteristics*

Behavioral characteristic	Themes identified
1. Anxiety	• Recognize and act upon the desire to give back
2. Lack of self-confidence	• Listen to mentors or others who offer advice
3. Depression	• Seek a sense of inspiration when making every decision
4. Perfectionism	• Find a willingness to follow instincts
5. Procrastination	• Maintain a long-term vision for success
6. Self-presentation	• Question how the current environment is supporting future goals
7. Emotional exhaustion	• Seek environments where personal learning occurs
8. Fear of failure	• Acknowledge the need for affirmation
9. Fear of success	• Work hard to exceed expectations
	• Admit when help is needed
	• Identify internal boundaries
	• Create time for personal reflection
	• Take time to research the unknown
	• Honor personal expertise
	• Anticipate how success repositions personal standing
	• Celebrate high standards
	• Focus on accomplishments versus “still to do”

Participant 11 emphasized the beneficial role mentors played in his life. He noted the importance of seeking guidance from others and developing a sense of humility to seek help when he needed it. More importantly, Participant 11 illustrated how he had learned to trust his instincts when he described one specific experience, stating, “There’s all these voices going on both externally and internally, but at the end of the day, I knew that it was the right choice for me because my gut told me I know I can learn a lot.”

Participant 11 also conveyed how important it was to include time for self-reflection and to visualize the future. He described the need to celebrate the high standards he set for himself but to honor the internal boundaries he maintained to avoid feeling overwhelmed. Further, Participant 11 expressed that self-reflection was a

powerful way to focus on his accomplishments and how they positioned him with others and, more importantly, how they supported his success. He stated,

That's what I continuously think about even today when I work in my day-to-day job. I think about what I am doing, not just to be of service to students and my colleagues, but what am I doing to even help myself grow professionally and grow in my knowledge base?

**Participant 12.** Participant 12 was a director of a nonprofit agency serving the local LGBT community. His CIPS score of 72 indicated he frequently experienced IP feelings. Table 14 summarizes Participant 12's responses in themes and patterns related to how he coped with the nine behavioral characteristics associated with the IP.

Table 14

*Participant 12: Themes in Response to Behavioral Characteristics*

Behavioral characteristic	Themes identified
1. Anxiety	• Review and honor personal values
2. Lack of self-confidence	• Establish clear self-expectations
3. Depression	• Determine a personal mission statement
4. Perfectionism	• Question the personal value of every action
5. Procrastination	• Have confidence to follow instincts
6. Self-presentation	• Recognize destructive self-talk
7. Emotional exhaustion	• Evaluate priorities and recognize personal limitations
8. Fear of failure	• Separate personal feelings from unpleasant responsibilities
9. Fear of success	• Think and act strategically based upon past experiences
	• Find opportunities to delegate
	• Recognize times when it is best to reduce visibility, to quit pushing
	• Define the difference between perfect and what is acceptable

Participant 12 emphasized that experiences he had as a child guided the way he coped with the IP's behavioral characteristics. These experiences inspired him to

evaluate every situation he faced while determining the value each might add to his life before deciding what next steps to follow. Further, Participant 12 described the influence a personal mission statement he created as a young professional had in helping him learn how to identify his own limitations and priorities. He reported that the mission statement positively impacted his ability to lead a fulfilling life.

Participant 12 emphasized how learning to trust his own intuition helped him recognize and learn how to overcome the inclination to let self-doubt overwhelm his self-confidence in his abilities. He stated, “It’s like a gut feeling: ‘Does this feel right?’ Most of the time, I have an absolute definitive gut feeling, and I just know which one I want or what I want to do.” Participant 12 described the importance of reflecting on steps he had taken to achieve past successes while thinking strategically in the moment to determine the relevancy of taking similar steps versus making faulty assumptions.

Participant 12 stated that he attributed his feelings of success to a well-developed sense of self-expectations while recognizing the mistake of placing those expectations upon others. He further expressed the importance of defining the difference between perfect and acceptable when trying to be the best he could be, realizing, “You have to accept the realities and limits of a situation.” Similarly, Participant 12 noted the value of humility and the ability to interpret situations in life. He still followed advice an early mentor offered:

When you’re out there, like way out in front, really pushing something forward, you’re going to make enemies. You’re inevitably going to get resistance. So, when you are way out there and you have a huge success, go back to your office

for a while. Be quiet, get work done, don't be out there. Wait until you feel like it's time, and then come back out there with something else.

**Participant 13.** Participant 13 was an elementary school principal in a local school district. His CIPS score of 48 indicated he had moderate IP experiences. Table 15 summarizes Participant 13's responses in themes and patterns related to how he coped with the nine behavioral characteristics associated with the IP.

Table 15

*Participant 13: Themes in Response to Behavioral Characteristics*

Behavioral characteristic	Themes identified
1. Anxiety	• Believe success is possible if others have been able to succeed
2. Lack of self-confidence	• Obtain a clear sense of what is expected
3. Depression	• Remain mindful of purpose and values of actions
4. Perfectionism	• Demonstrate an appreciation of others
5. Procrastination	• Create a plan for approaching unpleasant situations
6. Self-presentation	• Reflect on past successes
7. Emotional exhaustion	• Develop a determination to succeed
8. Fear of failure	• Recognize personal limitations
9. Fear of success	• Accept being a perfectly flawed human being
	• Identify patterns of success and seek opportunities to replicate them

Participant 13 emphasized the importance of remaining mindful about every action he took as his key to coping with the IP's behavioral characteristics. He stressed that assessing whether the actions offered value to the professional and personal goals he hoped to achieve in life was an essential part of deciding what to do. Further, creating a mindset of success helped him reduce his inclination to compare himself to others unless doing so supported his belief that he was equally capable of achieving the same outcomes.

Participant 13 admitted that his willingness to confront unpleasant situations represented a challenge for him to remain committed to presenting an authentic appreciation of others. Additionally, these situations offered him an opportunity to reflect on patterns of past successes and the steps he took to achieve them. Participant 13 said he had learned to appreciate his limitations without letting them pose obstacles to future success, stating,

I know that we all have limits and we can only do what we can do. I'm willing to do everything I can do during that time and be mindful of how I do it. I just hope that that's acceptable and that I'm doing my best.

**Participant 14.** Participant 14 was a local educator. His CIPS score of 75 indicated he frequently had impostor experiences. Table 16 summarizes Participant 14's responses in themes and patterns related to how he coped with the nine behavioral characteristics associated with the IP.

Table 16

*Participant 14: Themes in Response to Behavioral Characteristics*

Behavioral characteristic	Themes identified
1. Anxiety	• Take matters under control regardless of obstacles
2. Lack of self-confidence	• Welcome and seek opportunities for change
3. Depression	• Plan three steps ahead for what needs to be done
4. Perfectionism	• Recognize what brings happiness
5. Procrastination	• Understand the expectations others have
6. Self-presentation	• Remain clear about personal and professional goals
7. Emotional exhaustion	• Appreciate and apply personal knowledge and expertise
8. Fear of failure	• Identify when perfection is not necessary
9. Fear of success	• Learn from and emulate role models
	• Maintain internal pride about strengths

Participant 14 stressed how important it was for him to pursue actions he believed would ensure his happiness as his way to cope with the IP's behavioral characteristics. He emphasized his belief in never apologizing for expressing pride in the strengths he offered to his chosen career path while remaining committed to the choices he made in life. For example, Participant 14 described sharing his extensive professional background and training in the arts during job interviews for teaching positions, confidently stating, "I'm better than the average schmuck that walks out of the interview." In addition, he noted the importance of remembering the lessons that role models taught him throughout his life and his responsibility for sharing those with others.

Participant 14 described specific actions he took in order to achieve his personal and professional goals. He stressed how important it was to learn how to appreciate his unique talents and apply them to his chosen career path. However, Participant 14 also expressed knowing how important it was for him to value the impact he had on his students and shared,

Yeah, I feel when it's not good enough, I feel crushed. In real time, super crushed, but I'm a really good actor, so they [students] never see my internal dialogue. In fact, that is my job: to stay consistent for young people.

### **Data Analysis by Common Themes Related to Behavioral Characteristics**

The following section presents the collected participant data analyzed according to each of the nine IP behavioral characteristics. The number of participants offering responses to each characteristic highlights how individuals experience the characteristics in different ways or not at all. Further, the frequency of responses noted by characteristic demonstrates the varying levels of intensity with which individuals reported experiencing

each characteristic. The researcher examined all 14 study participants' responses and identified common themes related to each behavioral characteristic emerging from the data that addressed the study's research question. The research question asked, "What coping skills do gay men serving in civic or nonprofit leadership roles who are identified as experiencing the IP, using the CIPS (Clance, 1985), use to overcome nine behavioral characteristics associated with the IP?"

**Anxiety.** Table 17 presents the common themes shared by the study participants regarding what coping skills they used to address anxiety.

Table 17

*Anxiety: Common Themes in All Participant Responses*

Behavioral characteristic	Theme	Number of respondents	Frequency of responses
Anxiety	1. Anticipate what needs to be done	12	30
	2. Seek alternative solutions	10	20
	3. Engage in positive self-talk	9	12
	4. Take one step at a time	7	14

***Common Theme 1: Anticipate what needs to be done.*** A majority of the participants (86%) described trying to anticipate what steps to take in advance of big projects or situations that they knew would create anxiety as the most common way to cope with it. Several participants mentioned making lists as the way to anticipate steps they needed to take and offered specific techniques including using whiteboards or simple pencil and paper to create their lists.

In addition, participants expressed the importance of doing advance research as an opportunity to feel more confident and prepared. One participant shared, "I reduce my

anxiety tremendously if I feel like I've researched, studied, prepped for it [situation] as best as I possibly can." Another participant added, "I know the first thing I need to do is get my research together, identify what it is, what is my plan? Identify it. Make sure that I know it in my head, inside out and backwards."

***Common Theme 2: Seek alternative solutions.*** Approximately 71% of the 14 participants mentioned their commitment to seeking alternative solutions as their method for coping with anxiety-provoking problems or situations. Examples of these alternative solutions included temporarily modifying their way of life, establishing routines to accommodate to new situations, approaching each situation with a slightly different perspective, and remaining focused on a final outcome regardless of the circumstances creating anxiety. One participant recalled a specific situation he faced and described his reaction as follows: "I've been evaluating what other sides of my life need to be modified in order for me to manage this because it's going to go on for another year."

***Common Theme 3: Engage in positive self-talk.*** Roughly 64% of all participants admitted to engaging in positive and reinforcing self-talk as their method for coping with anxiety. Participants described this internal dialogue as the way to remind themselves of positive contributions they had made, as their own form of a reality check, and as an opportunity to remind themselves to assess their own mental state. One individual shared,

I try not to be so hard on myself and realize, "OK, I can do this." I'm going to do a good job, but I'm not going to beat myself up and say, "Oh you're not doing the best job you could."

**Common Theme 4: Take one step at a time.** Exactly 50% of all participants stressed the importance of handling things one at a time as a positive way to cope with anxiety. Participants expressed the importance of breaking large projects or difficult situations down into smaller tasks as the opportunity to avoid overwhelming feelings of anxiety. One individual mentioned the significance of learning how to pace himself by comparing life to a marathon. Similarly, another participant added, “It [the situation] maybe takes my breath away, it maybe knocks me on my ass for a minute, and then you just start working at it by asking myself, ‘What do I do first?’”

**Lack of self-confidence.** Table 18 presents the common themes shared by the study participants regarding what coping skills they used to address their lack of self-confidence.

Table 18

*Lack of Self-Confidence: Common Themes in All Participant Responses*

Behavioral characteristic	Theme	Number of respondents	Frequency of responses
Lack of self-confidence	1. Continue striving for success	8	21
	2. Celebrate unique perspective	8	14
	3. Embrace positive feedback	6	6

**Common Theme 1: Continue striving for success.** Approximately 57% of all participants noted how important they felt it was to remain committed to the idea of finding success to help them cope with their lack of self-confidence. One participant described the feeling as “this pushing that I’ve always felt I need to do in my life.” Others related it to the work ethic their families had instilled in them along with a belief that “there’s always things that you can manipulate and change and develop that will

make things better.” Participants described relying on internal forms of motivational encouragement to overcome self-confidence issues. A participant shared an example of his willingness to listen to himself, stating, “I remember standing in front of Cal State Fullerton and looking at those buildings and thinking, ‘OK. I’m coming in. I’m going to get my bachelor’s. I’m going to get my teaching credential.’”

***Common Theme 2: Celebrate unique perspective.*** Roughly 57% of all participants also highlighted intentional techniques they chose to celebrate the unique perspective they added to situations as the way they coped with a lack of self-confidence. Participants indicated that taking time to remind themselves of the expertise they possessed, positioning themselves to draw upon the talents they knew they possessed, and not apologizing for personal style all represented examples of the unique perspectives supporting their self-confidence. One participant shared, “I accepted the fact that I would process information in a different format than what the average person would, and I think that is kind of being true to myself.” Similarly, another participant expressed greater self-confidence after being told, “I like your conference calls because you talk from the heart.”

***Common Theme 3: Embrace positive feedback.*** Approximately 43% of all participants noted the importance of learning how to accept and embrace positive feedback as a way to cope with self-confidence issues. Participants highlighted that it was easier to recognize direct feedback, as one participant shared, “The vice president was constantly commenting about my ability, my knowledge based around legal issues, or conduct stuff that I didn’t realize that my own skills and capabilities was beyond what she had experienced prior.”

Similarly, participants also mentioned how they learned to identify and recognize that indirect comments could be just as powerful. One participant noted,

He [my supervisor] said to the other person, “If you can’t learn to work with him [participant], then you need to leave because he’s not leaving.” I have to tell you, that did something for me. I always felt like it was my fault when something happened, and I really appreciated he made me feel like I was OK the way I was.

**Depression.** Table 19 presents the common themes shared by the study participants regarding what coping skills they used to address feelings of depression.

Table 19

*Depression: Common Themes in All Participant Responses*

Behavioral characteristic	Theme	Number of respondents	Frequency of responses
Depression	1. Remember priorities	11	18
	2. Assess situations and personal mindset	7	13
	3. Celebrate being valued by others	4	4

***Common Theme 1: Remember priorities.*** Approximately 79% of all participants expressed a need to focus on their identified priorities to cope with feelings of depression. Some described these priorities as values, and others regarded them as goals. Participants noted that the purpose was to reduce any potential for feeling overwhelmed or unsatisfied. One participant explained, “You turn down asks for things because if I don’t enjoy it, if it doesn’t trigger some creative juices in me, or some kind of idealism or value system in me, then there’s no sense in me doing it.” Another participant related the importance of recognizing personal limitations, stating, “I’ve learned over my life to realize I’m only one person, and I can only do what one person can do.”

***Common Theme 2: Assess situations and mindset.*** Exactly 50% of all participants explained the importance of proactively assessing their needs as an opportunity to address situations that could produce feelings of depression. Participants explained the critical nature of approaching situations in an organized manner and anticipating what steps needed to be taken. One participant described that his approach to situations included asking himself,

How am I going to fit this in? What do I need to do to get ready for it? It's really about how am I going to manage another task and what do I give up to take the time to do this new task?

Further, one participant highlighted his need to slow down and assess his mindset, sharing,

I realize that it's more my setting it aside and processing it more. During the course of whatever period of time, it will come into my head, I'll noodle on it for a while, and then it will go away.

***Common Theme 3: Celebrate being valued by others.*** Approximately 29% of all participants shared that learning to celebrate how much others valued them helped them cope with feelings of depression. One participant suggested that feeling valued differed from accepting positive feedback, noting, "It definitely impacts the feeling about myself and my self-worth; I realize I'm somebody that's valued." Gestures like a boss taking time to unexpectedly acknowledge him led another participant to realize, "Holy God, wow! In my head, I'm feeling like I'm not getting things done. I'm not prioritizing appropriately. There are things I just can't get on top of. But he doesn't see all that. He sees something different."

**Perfectionism.** Table 20 presents the common themes shared by the study participants regarding what coping skills they used to address perfectionism.

Table 20

*Perfectionism: Common Themes in All Participant Responses*

Behavioral characteristic	Theme	Number of respondents	Frequency of responses
Perfectionism	1. Accept adversity	9	13
	2. Celebrate success	8	10

***Common Theme 1: Accept adversity.*** Roughly 64% of all participants agreed that learning there were situations when they needed to acknowledge that their perfectionism was adding no value was an important coping mechanism. One participant shared, “I think you have to look at all situations individually and question, When is perfectionism a good thing? When does it add to versus when does it take away? There’s times, for me, I know it takes away.” Another participant mentioned, “There’s a point now [where I know] I can reword [a] sentence a little better, but it’s not going to make . . . a difference. It’s still good.” Similarly, recognizing his internal belief that “it’s never going to be right” allowed one participant to moderate his inclination to always be perfect.

***Common Theme 2: Celebrate success.*** Approximately 57% of all participants mentioned the importance of appreciating their sense of perfectionism as the way to cope with perfectionism. Whereas some may see perfectionism as a negative characteristic, one participant highlighted, “I think people appreciate my perfectionism because they’re not having to redo my work.” Similarly, another participant noted, “I can’t ever think in my professional career when I’ve received criticism or even feedback that ‘No, we wish

you would dial this back a little.’” One participant explained how he had learned how to manage his perfectionism and still find success, sharing,

With winter programs, it doesn’t have to be perfect, it just has to be. The parents are going there just to see their kid get up and have a good time and to sing and enjoy the moment. I just need to make sure that moment’s going to happen.  
That’s my job.

**Procrastination.** Table 21 presents two common themes shared by the study participants regarding what coping skills they used to address procrastination.

Table 21

*Procrastination: Common Themes in All Participant Responses*

Behavioral characteristic	Theme	Number of respondents	Frequency of responses
Procrastination	1. Identify lessons learned	10	13
	2. Thoroughly evaluate projects	7	12

***Common Theme 1: Identify lessons learned.*** Close to 72% of all participants described that the lessons they learned over time had helped them learn how to cope with procrastination. One participant learned the impact his procrastination had on others and noted, “I always know you can’t let it go too long because that makes them even more angry when nobody gets back to them.” Another participant noted the personal sense of accomplishment he felt by learning to manage his procrastination, stating, “I pride myself on being responsive and making things happen. They’re [other employees and supervisors are] like, ‘I need this,’ and then you stop what you’re doing, and you do that.” Further, one participant realized the negative effect procrastination had on him, sharing,

“I like to have things done before they are due or way before the deadline. That feeling of the last minute is not good for me.”

**Common Theme 2: Thoroughly evaluate projects.** Roughly 58% of all participants mentioned taking time to think through projects in advance as a way to cope with procrastination. Participants suggested that setting time aside allowed for a better final product. One participant said planning ahead “gives me time and space to ruminate about it, reflect, and to come up with the best solution.”

Several participants described specific actions they took to avoid procrastination on big projects. One participant offered, “I’ll just have a Word document sitting on my desktop about the project. If I think of something in the middle of doing something else, I’ll open that document and write myself a little note for later.” Another participant shared his strategy, stating,

I’ve had a rough draft in my head for a number of months and on paper for about the last 2 weeks. I want to make sure the letter is really, really good, and so I worked more on it a little bit earlier this week.

**Self-presentation.** Table 22 presents three common themes shared by the study participants regarding what coping skills they used to address their self-presentation.

Table 22

*Self-Presentation: Common Themes in All Participant Responses*

Behavioral characteristic	Theme	Number of respondents	Frequency of responses
Self-presentation	1. Present an authentic self	11	25
	2. Negotiate based upon expectations	11	17
	3. Respect boundaries	8	9

***Common Theme 1: Present an authentic self.*** Approximately 79% of all participants mentioned the importance of representing themselves as authentically as possible. One participant shared, “I don’t think I give people my best when I’m not giving them all of me.” Another expressed the importance of finding a supportive environment and shared, “I can totally be myself. Yeah, I was not being my authentic self for many, many years.” Participants described a journey they followed to recognize their authentic self. One participant shared,

Working through lots of different aspects of your own personal life, you come to that perspective about how other people perceive you. Then, you still have to turn some of that off and say, “It’s not me; it’s their perspective of me.”

***Common Theme 2: Negotiate based upon expectations.*** Roughly 79% of all participants also described developing an appreciation for different situations that called for adjusting their self-presentation. Participants agreed that it was a necessary skill to possess, with one noting, “You renegotiate that with yourself as to what society tells you you should be . . . what is good behavior.” Another participant added, “It’s just a matter of what is necessary information, verbally, nonverbally, to say, to get out there at the time. I think anyone who is successful in any career is always going to change.” One participant stressed that personal adjustments should not be considered disingenuous but rather stated,

There’s one thing to have meeting etiquette; there’s another to just be really conscious of how I speak, what I say, when I’m speaking. That when I do speak, something that comes out of my mouth is valued or meaningful. That I’m not just talking for the sake of talking.

**Common Theme 3: Respect boundaries.** Approximately 57% of all participants highlighted learning how to respect the boundaries others had and how that affected their approach to self-presentation. One participant explained that learning how to navigate relationships with others was important and stated, “We all had to be on the same page. That was an adjustment. It wasn’t negative. It was something I had to learn.” Another participant shared, “He’s still the city manager, so I’m not going to be cutting up with him and stuff. But I have a little less of a guard up with him.” Further, another participant learned the importance of respecting others when addressing them under unpleasant circumstances as a supervisor and noted,

People have real feelings. They’re real people. Even though you may not feel they’re doing their job effectively, it doesn’t mean that they don’t think they’re doing their job effectively. They’re doing the best that they possibly can. I always try to be respectful of the person I am talking to.

**Emotional exhaustion.** Table 23 presents the common themes shared by the study participants regarding what coping skills they used to address emotional exhaustion.

Table 23

*Emotional Exhaustion: Common Themes in All Participant Responses*

Behavioral characteristic	Theme	Number of respondents	Frequency of responses
Emotional exhaustion	1. Realign thoughts and actions	12	26
	2. Focus on values	11	28
	3. Regain power	9	20

***Common Theme 1: Realign thoughts and actions.*** Nearly 86% of all participants expressed a process they followed to realign their internal thought processes and actions they took as a way to cope with emotional exhaustion. Participants noted the need to reflect on their willingness to reduce the number of hours they worked without compromising their work ethic. One participant described the conscious effort he made and said, “I think that discipline has helped me because I started saying, ‘OK. I’m only going to work until 5:00 or 6:00, and then that’s it. What doesn’t get done doesn’t get done.’” Another participant added, “I realized I had gone beyond that threshold. Then I chopped off a bunch of things and canceled it and knew that I wasn’t doing enough to take care of myself.”

Several participants described a willingness to make personal sacrifices, realizing the long-term benefits. One participant explained his decision to pursue his master’s degree and shared, “I’m not going to retire for 25 years. Do I want to have options in the future? How can you not do it? It’s annoying, and I don’t want to have to do it, but how do you not?” Similarly, another participant considering a promotion opportunity said, “OK, so instead of commuting for 20 minutes, I’m going to commute for an hour and 15 minutes but knowing that that wasn’t going to be permanent for me.”

***Common Theme 2: Focus on values.*** Roughly 79% of all participants expressed the importance of considering their values as a way to cope with emotional exhaustion. Participants mentioned that finding meaning in projects or work tasks was important, with one stating, “I want to do it [work] because of its creative potential and to make delight in the world.” Similarly, another participant shared, “I guess really underneath it all, I wanted to be able to kind of give back what was given to me in education.”

Participants noted that satisfying their personal values reduced their feelings of stress or unhappiness in life. One participant, despite his true passion for more creative opportunities, shared how he continued working in the field of accounting because he acknowledged the contribution he was making to his current organization. He noted, “Here I don’t even mind accounting because it’s the whole thing that I’m doing here that makes me feel good. It’s not what I would call a job. It’s doing something good.” Similarly, one participant stressed that knowing his skill set and what would ultimately make him happy was a critical factor in deciding what to do. He stated,

I’m not the kind of person that sells myself well, so I don’t want to be a consultant where I have to go out and say, “Look at me. I can do all this great work for you, and I’ll do it better than this person can.” That’s just not who I am. It’s nice to know I don’t have to compete for my work.

***Common Theme 3: Regain power.*** A little over 64% of all participants suggested that their willingness and confidence to take control of situations helped them cope with emotional exhaustion. Rather than relinquishing control to others, one participant noted, “I did that so that I had control of my time in a way that allowed me to do my community work and still have some part of my time for my business life.” Another participant noted, “I don’t want a life on hyperdrive where everything I do and say and every decision I make is scrutinized.” One participant, reflecting on whether taking control could be a negative step to take, said,

It works for me because I can be in control of it [project]. It’s knowing that this is what you expect, this is the date, and then really taking a look at your markers that

you put in. So if you plan you can do x, y, and z, then you know you need to do x, then y, and then z.

**Fear of failure.** Table 24 presents the common themes shared by the study participants regarding what coping skills they used to address fear of failure.

Table 24

*Fear of Failure: Common Themes in All Participant Responses*

Behavioral characteristic	Theme	Number of respondents	Frequency of responses
Fear of failure	1. Reframe the thought process	14	40
	2. Strive to make the best of a situation	11	20
	3. Follow instincts	10	14

***Common Theme 1: Reframe the thought process.*** Unanimously, 100% of the participants mentioned the need to work hard to reframe their thoughts in order to cope with their fear of failure. Several participants stressed the importance of looking at the greater impact they had on a project. One participant reminded himself of the impact he made and said, “Because it is giving back. It is helping other people who can’t always stand up and don’t have a voice to speak for themselves, don’t have the ability or the wherewithal.” Similarly, another participant shared, “I realized I wouldn’t have had the impact and made the difference that I did. That felt good for me.”

Recognizing the personal impact of risking failure was also mentioned by several participants as a way to cope with their fear of failure. One participant consciously reminded himself, “I don’t want to have failures even though I realize, too, that from some of the failures I’ve had, I’ve learned something, and that’s helped me, too. . . . We actually learn more than when we succeed.” Further, another participant mentioned the

personal impact of ignoring his fears and said, “This is what inspires me, this is what’s powerful to me. It is what I know I’m going to be happy doing versus doing something that my family thinks is successful because it makes money.”

***Common Theme 2: Strive to make the best of a situation.*** Approximately 79% of all participants made references to reconsidering situations they faced and making the best out of them as the way to cope with a fear of failure. One participant noted that his need to position himself for the future served as his motivation to override his fear of pursuing an advanced degree and said, “I knew I needed that if I’m going to show people that I want to move up.” Another participant described his willingness to work hard to honor his commitments and noted, “Whatever I have to do, give it that little extra, and that’s a plus, I guess.”

Other participants suggested that their goal of surpassing the expectations others had of them helped them cope with the fear that they might fail. One participant described the holiday decorations he used for his conference room and noted, “I want them to be as brilliant, bold, and just bodacious as they can be because I want people to come into something like this room, and I want them to feel like, ‘Wow!’” Another participant conveyed how important understanding his boss’s expectations was to help him reduce his fears and shared, “When I present things to her, it’s in a packaged way: ‘OK, so we had this problem and here was the solution. What do you think?’”

***Common Theme 3: Follow instincts.*** Nearly 72% of all participants highlighted how much they listened to their own instincts as a way to cope with any fear of failing. A participant described his willingness to trust his feelings as an opportunity to find “a level of comfort that I know what I’m going into.” Another participant explained,

A lot of it's visual, intuitive stuff that's going on. Then it stews around and usually comes out in a logical way that I can communicate it. It's not instantaneous. It takes a lot of stewing and working it through.

Another participant explained that his commitment to his chosen career path helped him disregard discouraging comments feeding into his fear of failure and allowed him to focus on his professional goals. He noted, "I knew at some point I want to be a dean of students, maybe a VP [vice president]. I didn't let that comment get to me because I really thought it was a very limiting comment." One participant highlighted, "You kind of get to the point where you go, 'OK, I'm more confident about the fact that, yeah, that's pretty good.'"

**Fear of success.** Table 25 presents the common themes shared by the study participants regarding what coping skills they used to address fear of success.

Table 25

*Fear of Success: Common Themes in All Participant Responses*

Behavioral characteristic	Theme	Number of respondents	Frequency of responses
Fear of success	1. Seek balance	7	9
	2. Appreciate challenges	5	8
	3. Seek valuable colleagues	5	6

**Common Theme 1: Seek balance.** Exactly 50% of all participants described the attention they paid to their environment as a way to cope with the fear of success. One participant described that the relationship he developed with his colleagues was a critical element to feeling successful and said, "I think I've worked in, especially with the county, a very encouraging atmosphere." Another participant mentioned the research he

did before considering new professional opportunities and said, “I look for the mission statement, what the actual job would entail, and whether it’s something I would want to do.”

Other participants focused on the kind of impact they had as a key factor in coping with their fear of success. One participant remembered a time when he questioned why he chose to remain in nonprofit work, knowing he could make more money elsewhere. He realized, “That was something that I can look back at and say, ‘You know what? That was meaningful. That was interesting. That was exciting.’” Similarly, another participant explained, “I’m at the right place for me. I get to run a department and work with a great team of people to make a difference and to bring education, knowledge, testing, and linkage to care for people.”

***Common Theme 2: Appreciate challenges.*** Nearly 36% of all participants described how important it was for them to learn to appreciate challenges as a way to cope with their fear of success. One participant expressed that his willingness to take risks and recognize the benefits of doing so proved to be important to his professional and personal growth. He said, “I take that task on and say, ‘OK, this allows me to further prove myself to this group on how amazing I am.’” Another participant shared the belief in forcing himself to take challenges and added,

Your strengths are your weaknesses, and your weaknesses are your strengths. I think it’s good that you can do it [accept challenges]. I think what you have to go through sometimes to get it, to make it happen, it’s difficult for those around you and for you, too.

Participants mentioned an inclination to question their willingness to pursue challenging opportunities but expressed how much easier it became each time they did so. One participant described doubting his knowledge when deciding whether to accept new responsibilities but said, “I don’t have any of that, but if it was presented to me, I don’t know that I would say no. It’s what’s the best thing at the time for me.” Another participant expressed the importance of trusting himself to listen to words of encouragement and said,

I had all these things in my head, but I went ahead and went for it [a new job] because somebody said, “You should do it; we think you’d be great; we know your quality of work, we know that there’s going to be things you absolutely don’t have direct experience in, but there’s a lot of experiences you do have that we think would be helpful.”

***Common Theme 3: Seek valuable colleagues.*** Approximately 36% of all participants mentioned the important role that valuable colleagues played in helping them cope with their fear of success. Participants mentioned supervisors, peers, and colleagues in other organizations as influential individuals who made a difference.

One participant mentioned the relationship he developed with his supervisor and said, “She’s been very much a mentor person to me, so she’s always, at least for the last 3 or 4 years, been trying to groom me to take that position.” Similarly, another participant added how much he appreciated others inspiring him to follow his passion and said, “My direct supervisor was always encouraging me to take the next step.”

Participants also stressed the importance of building strong internal and external professional relationships beyond those in a direct supervisory role. A participant

described a difficult situation working with someone from an outside agency and said, “They hashed it out at their level, and then I called her back the next week just to . . . [encourage] relationship building.” Equally important to another participant was identifying trusted peers within an organization to support him. He shared, “I want to do it, and I want to be involved with people that I respect, that I can learn from, and that are doing it for the same reason I’m doing it.”

### **Summary**

This chapter presented a summary of responses collected from 14 study participants. Each participant responded to a set of open-ended, semistructured interview questions designed to explore how he coped with nine behavioral characteristics associated with the IP.

The 14 participants were all leaders in civic or nonprofit agencies in California and completed an initial survey to determine the extent to which each of them had impostor experiences. Once a participant was identified as an individual who had moderate to intense impostor experiences, the researcher interviewed him in person. The researcher recorded all 14 interviews using a handheld recording device as well as a recording application on an iPhone to ensure accurate transcription of each conversation.

The researcher analyzed all of the collected data and identified two to four common themes among participants within each of the nine behavioral characteristics. First, participants stated that anticipating what needed to be done, seeking alternative solutions, engaging in positive self-talk, and taking one step at a time effectively helped them cope with feelings of anxiety. Second, participants cited learning to celebrate their unique perspectives, demonstrating a willingness to keep striving for success, and

embracing positive feedback as factors that helped them cope with low levels of self-confidence. Third, participants stressed that reminding themselves of their priorities, assessing situations and their mindset about them, and celebrating being valued by others assisted them in coping with feelings of depression. Fourth, participants described that learning to accept adversity and identifying when it was time to celebrate their success made a difference in how they coped with feelings of perfectionism. Fifth, participants shared the impact of identifying what lessons they had learned and the importance of thoroughly evaluating projects and tasks as effective methods for coping with their inclination to procrastinate. Sixth, participants believed in the importance of presenting an authentic self, learning to negotiate situations based upon expectations, and respecting the boundaries of others as well as their own to help them cope with any concerns about their self-presentation. Seventh, participants felt it was important to take time to realign their thoughts, to focus on their values, and to regain power over situations in order to cope with emotional exhaustion. Eighth, participants described that their efforts to reframe how they thought about situations, to make the best out of each one, and to follow their instincts helped them cope with the fear of failure. Finally, participants expressed that their focus on seeking balance, recognizing valuable colleagues, and learning to appreciate challenges helped them cope with the fear of success.

## CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A summary of the study's findings is presented in this final chapter. The chapter begins by reiterating the purpose, research question, and methodology that guided the study, followed by the descriptions of the population and sample of participants. Next, the chapter describes the findings and conclusions based upon the research question. The chapter also includes implications for action as well as the researcher's recommendations for further research. Finally, the researcher concludes the chapter by sharing his personal reflections and comments.

### **Summary of the Study**

#### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this descriptive, mixed-methods case study was to explore and describe the coping skills used to overcome nine behavioral characteristics by gay men serving in civic or nonprofit leadership roles who are identified as experiencing the impostor phenomenon (IP) by the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS; Clance, 1985).

#### **Research Question**

This study was designed to answer the following research question:

What coping skills do gay men serving in civic or nonprofit leadership roles who are identified as experiencing the IP, using the CIPS (Clance, 1985), use to overcome nine behavioral characteristics associated with the IP?

1. Anxiety
2. Lack of self-confidence

3. Depression
4. Perfectionism
5. Procrastination
6. Self-presentation
7. Emotional exhaustion
8. Fear of failure
9. Fear of success

### **Methodology**

This mixed-methods, descriptive case study included several steps to gather the quantitative and qualitative data reported in the study. First, the researcher contacted a number of gay men who were serving in leadership positions at the time of the study and were willing to complete the CIPS without the researcher disclosing what the CIPS was measuring. Next, the researcher invited those with CIPS scores higher than 45 to participate in an interview conducted in person that included semistructured, open-ended questions. The researcher recorded each interview using both a handheld recording device and a recording application on his iPhone that allowed the recorded conversation to be submitted for professional transcription. Next, the researcher and each interview participant reviewed his individual transcript to ensure accurate recording of his responses. The researcher uploaded all transcripts into NVivo coding software in order to elicit themes and patterns. An individual with her doctorate in education reviewed and analyzed the same transcripts and initial coding that the researcher completed. The two compared results and adjusted a few codes to ensure they agreed. Consequently, they

found a high percentage of consistency and accuracy between their coding results and satisfied interrater reliability.

### **Population and Sample**

The participants for this study were self-identified gay men currently serving in civic or nonprofit agency leadership roles in California. The focus on civic and nonprofit agencies supported the researcher's interest in exploring how impostorism influences individuals in a specific career field similar to his own. The criteria used to identify the study sample required prospective participants to score at least 45 out of 100 on the CIPS, indicating they had either moderate, frequent, or intense IP experiences. The sample for this mixed-methods, descriptive case study consisted of 14 participants. This group of gay men met all of the criteria required to participate in this study.

### **Major Findings**

The research question that guided this study analyzed the skills that gay men in civic or nonprofit leadership roles use to cope with nine behavioral characteristics associated with the IP. The research question and data collected from 14 interviews reflected a number of common approaches that different individuals used to cope with each of the characteristics that affected them. The major findings of this study are presented according to each of the nine behavioral characteristics.

#### **Major Finding 1**

The first major finding was that 86% of gay men serving in civic or nonprofit leadership roles who were identified as experiencing the IP identified the importance of anticipating what needed to be done as their primary way of coping with feelings of anxiety. Further, 71% of them outlined alternative solutions they explored to address

situations that created anxiety for them, further supporting a proactive approach to reducing or eliminating anxiety as a hindrance to their success. One participant described this proactive approach as fixing anything that could possibly go wrong ahead of time and, therefore, taking control of a situation that would otherwise create self-doubt.

### **Major Finding 2**

The second major finding indicated that 57% of gay men serving in civic or nonprofit leadership roles who were identified as experiencing the IP expressed the importance of learning how to identify internal factors that motivated them along with honoring their unique outlook on situations as a way to cope with low levels of self-confidence. Participants described accepting challenges with a willingness to push as hard as it took to find success while recognizing the possibility of encountering limitations over which they had no control. Further, participants described feeling more confident about their actions after acknowledging their past accomplishments.

### **Major Finding 3**

According to 79% of gay men serving in civic or nonprofit leadership roles who were identified as experiencing the IP, focusing on priorities was essential in coping with depression. Participants shared examples of both personal and professional priorities that remained critical to remember as they learned to manage the expectations they set for themselves. For instance, identifying the personal value that involvement in a project offered, remembering the reason for choosing a particular career path, and recognizing their need to work in a supportive environment all contributed to feelings of self-worth and competence.

#### **Major Finding 4**

According to 64% of gay men serving in civic or nonprofit leadership roles who were identified as experiencing the IP, acknowledging the extent to which achieving perfection was important to the success of a project helped them cope with their tendency to be perfectionists. While participants appreciated the benefits of their willingness to strive for perfection, learning to understand that others defined success in additional ways also helped participants embrace imperfection when perfection was unnecessary. Further, learning how to accept imperfection if it allowed the participants to complete a project or to realize the lack of negative impact imperfection would have on others reinforced the value of accepting the thought one participant shared of being a “perfectly flawed human being.”

#### **Major Finding 5**

The fifth major finding indicated that 77% of gay men serving in civic or nonprofit leadership roles who were identified as experiencing the IP cited learning from prior experiences when they procrastinated as the key to learning to cope with the inclination to keep doing it. While often considered a negative characteristic, participants shared the value of controlling procrastination and using that time to pursue a thoughtful approach to tasks or projects. In addition, participants reflected on what impact their procrastination had on others that could circle back to the participants, causing distress or feelings of inadequacy.

#### **Major Finding 6**

According to 79% of gay men serving in civic or nonprofit leadership roles who were identified as experiencing the IP, authentically presenting themselves was a critical

factor to consider when coping with questions about their self-presentation. In addition, remaining attentive to the circumstances of their situation, including who else was present, the expected level of professional conduct, and even their speech patterns, was an equally important factor concerning their self-presentation. The participants described finding a level of comfort regarding how to be transparent with others about their feelings. Further, worrying less about how they were perceived and being more concerned about remaining true to their personal values helped minimize feelings of fear or distress. Nevertheless, participants also suggested that the need to recognize how to navigate different situations reinforced the impression of being a genuine person that they wished others to have of them.

### **Major Finding 7**

The seventh major finding indicated that 86% of gay men serving in civic or nonprofit leadership roles who were identified as experiencing the IP stressed the importance of internally adjusting their thoughts and actions as a way to cope with feelings of emotional exhaustion. In an effort to break a cycle of feeling overwhelmed or overextended, participants detailed specific steps including reevaluating their priorities, renegotiating commitments, and recognizing unhealthy situations that provided no intrinsic value to the participants. Participants noted that these concrete steps allowed them to focus on what values they had while retaining a sense of control over situations that might be detrimental to their own sense of personal well-being.

### **Major Finding 8**

Another key finding revealed that 100% of gay men serving in civic or nonprofit leadership roles who were identified as experiencing the IP described intentional

approaches they took to reconsider how they coped with the fear of failure. Actively considering the contributions that they could make to new challenges helped participants overcome the fear of taking risks despite knowing one possible outcome might be failure. Further, taking time to reflect on prior successes and acknowledging the lessons learned from prior failures supported the participants' willingness to continue to follow their instincts when considering future opportunities. Moreover, the desire to make a difference or to honor commitments they made contributed to the participants' willingness to overcome their fear of failing.

### **Major Finding 9**

The final major finding was that 50% of gay men serving in civic or nonprofit leadership roles who were identified as experiencing the IP suggested that their focus on finding a supportive environment surrounded by encouraging colleagues helped them cope with the fear of success. Participants noted that they sought environments that celebrated and appreciated their contributions without the need to feel competitive. Further, learning to appreciate new challenges as opportunities to excel and demonstrate their value to an organization represented an ideal mindset for the participants versus worrying about what might happen. Similarly, participants described supportive environments as offering the chance to explore new opportunities that could provide long-term support of future career aspirations.

### **Unexpected Findings**

The data collected, transcribed, and coded for this study explored how gay male leaders experiencing feelings of impostorism coped with nine behavioral characteristics associated with the IP. The findings suggested that these leaders invested a significant

amount of time in reflecting on their prior accomplishments as a primary way to cope with each characteristic. Further, the time devoted to self-reflection offered an opportunity to focus on their personal and professional priorities, their values, and how to successfully navigate future challenges. The researcher was not surprised about the importance of positive self-reflection but did identify some unexpected findings during the data collection process.

### **Unexpected Finding 1**

The researcher hesitated to include depression as one of the behavioral characteristics, recognizing his lack of formal training in diagnosing or identifying signs of depression. The researcher was concerned this lack of training would prohibit his ability to pose questions that would elicit the types of responses that a nonclinician could comfortably classify as linked to feelings of depression. As data collection continued, the participants unknowingly and frequently offered specific coping skills they used to manage their concern over an inability to reach self-imposed expectations without specifically mentioning feelings of depression.

### **Unexpected Finding 2**

The level of confidence participants expressed in how they presented themselves coupled with minimal concern over how others perceived them was unexpected. Contrary to the IP literature suggesting that impostors present themselves negatively to seek support from others, this study's participants described drawing strength from establishing their own set of criteria for how they wished to be perceived by others.

### **Unexpected Finding 3**

Despite having moderate to intense impostor experiences, the participants expressed an unexpected level of optimism and self-confidence. The focus the participants placed on reframing their mindsets when experiencing doubt, seeking challenges as a way to demonstrate their capabilities, and remaining mindful of how to manage stressful situations demonstrated the value they placed on positive coping and self-reflection.

## **Conclusions**

### **Conclusion 1**

Individuals coping with impostor experiences should seek work environments that encourage and offer an opportunity to accept challenges but that also offer regular and specific feedback to help them gauge their progress. Clance (1985) noted that impostors “know intellectually that failure is a necessary part of living” but will “avoid it at all costs” (p. 63). Unlike impostors who remain paralyzed and unwilling to challenge themselves, this study’s participants demonstrated their willingness to accept the possibility that they could find success and build greater levels of self-confidence. As Participant 2 noted, “You kind of get to the point where you go, ‘OK, I’m more confident about the fact that, yeah, that’s pretty good.’”

### **Conclusion 2**

Individuals who have moderate to intense impostor experiences should take time to evaluate their personal and professional values. Further, the decisions they make and actions they take should align to support those values. Participants highlighted that the positive outcomes of doing so included an opportunity to experience the professional

fulfillment that supported their willingness to work hard. As Participant 13 noted, “It’s really that their [his students’] lives ultimately are a response of what it is that you do every day. The reality, the hard truth of that, never leaves me.” However, remaining mindful not to sacrifice relationships with family and friends represented an example of critical social support used to manage emotional exhaustion (Whitman & Shanine, 2012).

### **Conclusion 3**

Individuals dealing with moderate to intense impostor experiences need to have the confidence to trust their instincts to a greater extent than they may feel comfortable doing. Whether applied to managing feelings of anxiety or the need to be perfect, participants expressed that their willingness to trust themselves more frequently helped them cope with impostor experiences. Participant 12 noted, “The only thing I can do is throw it [goals] all up on the whiteboard and then create some deadlines and hope that I can get there, but at least I have targets.” In the case of perfectionists, Clance (1985) noted, “The thought of easing up and expecting less of themselves creates almost immediate panic” (p. 87). Instead of succumbing to this panic, Participant 7 noted, “I always try to be unique; to give something to a task; to have a mini legacy on it.”

### **Implications for Action**

The conclusions drawn from this study suggest specific implications for action by individuals coping with impostor experiences as well as the organizations for which they work. The researcher recommends the following actions based upon the review of literature and data analysis presented in this study.

### **Implication 1**

Identifying and striving to support personal and professional values helps impostors redirect negative feelings associated with the IP. Individuals need to *develop a strategy that routinely reminds them of their values*, which could include writing them down on paper or maintaining some other record they routinely review and reevaluate.

### **Implication 2**

Those having moderate to intense impostor experiences need to *establish a clear set of personal expectations prior to beginning any new project*. Results from this study reflect that positive coping occurs when individuals set high goals but, in advance, also include what is acceptable to them regarding the final product or the expectations they have of the contributions others will make.

### **Implication 3**

Those experiencing impostor characteristics should *define a specific pathway of steps* they wish to follow to help minimize anxiety about the unknown and potential fear of failure. The series of steps may include making lists of tasks to accomplish for a particular project, what tasks they will complete in a given time period, or what actions they feel may be necessary to advance along a chosen career path.

### **Implication 4**

Individuals coping with impostor experiences should thoughtfully *observe the environment and consider what questions they should ask prospective employers during job interviews*. Examples might include exploring the frequency of feedback and the type of supervision to be expected. Further, asking questions about the pace of the

organization and what kind of projects or deadlines to expect would provide critical insight about the type of atmosphere they would encounter.

### **Implication 5**

As a deeply personal and often unspoken quality, impostors may remain invisible to those with whom they interact. For this reason, organizations should *develop awareness training* tailored to different constituencies like student groups, employee groups, or human resources officers. This would raise awareness about the IP for those in a position to support impostors. Further, it would provide an opportunity for individuals who have yet to acknowledge the reason behind their feelings to identify positive coping strategies to assist them as they manage their internal experiences.

### **Implication 6**

Organizations actively pursuing succession planning should *identify established leaders who experience IP characteristics and create opportunities for them to interact with pools of future leaders*. The goal of normalizing the IP experience will provide vehicles for establishing mentoring relationships and support diversity initiatives around inclusion.

## **Recommendations for Further Research**

The findings from this mixed-methods case study provide a frame for additional research about how individuals cope with characteristics associated with the IP. Recommendations for further study about coping with these characteristics include the following:

1. The current study included 14 gay men in civic or nonprofit leadership roles in California. In order to deepen this study, this research should be replicated in other parts of the United States and internationally.
2. A comparative study should be conducted between gay men and other members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community to explore and describe any differences or similarities regarding IP characteristics and their associated coping strategies.
3. Sexual orientation was used to define the specific population included in this study. A comparative study should be conducted between sexual minorities and heterosexual individuals to explore any differences that emerge regarding how each group copes with IP behavioral characteristics.
4. Leadership was used to define the specific population included in this study. A comparative study should be conducted between those in leadership roles and those in support roles to explore any differences that emerge regarding how each group copes with IP behavioral characteristics.
5. A comparative study should be conducted between gay men in civic and nonprofit leadership roles and gay men in corporate or for-profit leadership roles regarding the IP characteristics and the coping strategies they use.
6. The methodology of this study included minimizing disclosure of the IP as the primary focus prior to each participant's involvement. A study should be conducted that includes full disclosure of the IP with its participants to discover any alternative coping strategies that may emerge when there is full awareness of the primary construct.

7. A gap in research surrounding how some racial and ethnic groups cope with the IP still exists. Conducting a quantitative study that collects data through a survey or questionnaire regarding potential differences in IP coping strategies would increase the number of participants and backgrounds represented.

### **Concluding Remarks and Reflections**

The IP is a relatively new and unknown named construct dating back to 1978. At the time, the country was experiencing a shift in societal norms, including the advancement of women's rights and an increased focus on the gay rights movement. Research about the construct has been sporadic over the past 39 years and tended to focus on women. More recently, various professions have become a focus of research on how individuals are affected by the IP, with limited discussion about how individuals actually cope with the negative characteristics often associated with it. I believe that exploring the experiences of a group of men who have dealt with their sexual minority status and the IP will be the start of future research to help support healthy coping strategies by those who still face similar personal and, most often, unseen challenges.

The 14 men who participated in this study admitted that they still battle feelings of self-doubt in some part of their personal and professional lives on almost a daily basis. However, each has developed his own unique way to cope that has allowed him to find great success in his career while focusing on leading a personal life that keeps him in balance. Of the 14, only one participant struck me as someone who is still working to overcome some of his most difficult internal struggles. Nevertheless, he described other coping skills that allow him to present the optimistic and self-confident outlook all 14 exhibited. After realizing that the participants were typically responding to the questions

from their perspective as leaders, I wondered if their candid responses about the IP characteristics would have changed if they had known why the nine characteristics were specifically chosen.

As a fellow impostor and gay man, this study became an important personal journey for me even beyond the academic challenge it represented. It produced many opportunities to explore my childhood with my mother, to assure her that the term *impostor* is not a bad thing in this context, to dig deeper to find strength I never knew existed, and to normalize the feelings of doubt I, too, have experienced for as long as I can remember. Equally important, I had the chance to learn new strategies that others employ to successfully navigate some of the same challenges I face and how they can become part of my own coping skills.

Finally, when I came out of the closet as a gay man, I remember feeling like I had joined an exclusive club of individuals who were the only ones who knew what was going on in my head. As I approach the final words of this dissertation, I look forward to joining a second club of individuals who can understand the rollercoaster of emotions only a fellow dissertation student could ever describe. Most importantly, completing this study has allowed me to join a third club of people who, unfortunately, may or may not know each other exist but whom I hope this dissertation can somehow play a part in connecting in the future.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### Synthesis Matrix

	Anxiety	Lack of self-confidence	Depression	Perfectionism	Procrastination	Self-presentation	Emotional exhaustion	Fear of failure	Fear of success
American Psychiatric Association (2016)	x		x						
Bechtoldt (2015)		x							
Bernard, Dollinger, and Ramaniah (2002)			x						
Bieling, Israeli, and Antony (2004)				x					
Castro, Jones, and Mirsalimi (2004)	x								
Chae, Piedmont, Estadt, and Wicks (1995)	x								
Chrisman, Pieper, Clance, Holland, and Glickauf-Hughes (1995)	x		x						
Clance (1985)						x			
Clance, Dingman, Reviere, and Stober (1995)			x		x				
Clance and Imes (1978)	x	x	x				x		
Clark, Vardeman, and Barba (2014)					x				
Cokley et al. (2015)		x							
Conroy (2001)								x	
Conroy, Kaye, and Fifer (2007)								x	
Cozzarelli and Major (1990)								x	
Crawford, Shanine, Whitman, and Kacmar (2016)							x		
Cromwell, Brown, Sanchez-Huceles, and Adair (1990)	x								
Dudău (2014)				x					
Egan, Piek, and Dyck (2015)				x					

Ferrari and Thompson (2006)						x			
Fried-Buchalter (1992)								x	x
Fried-Buchalter (1997)									x
Frost, Marten, Lahart, and Rosenblate (1990)				x	x				
Fujie (2010)		x							
Gibson-Beverly and Schwartz (2008)		x							
Henning, Ey, and Shaw (1998)				x					
Hewitt et al. (2003)				x					
Hirschfeld (1985)							x		
Hobfoll (1989)								x	
Horner (1972)									x
Horney (1936)									x
Hutchins (2015)	x						x		
Ivers and Downes (2012)									x
Jones and Berglas (1978)					x				
Jostl, Bergsmann, Luftenegger, Schober, and Spiel (2012)		x							
Kets de Vries (2005)					x	x			
Kumar and Jagacinski (2006)								x	
Langford and Clance (1993)		x							
Leary, Patton, Orlando, and Funk (2000)						x			
Maslach and Jackson (1981)							x		
Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001)							x		
Mattie, Gietzen, Davis, and Prata (2008).		x	x						
McElwee and Yurak (2007)						x			
McElwee and Yurak (2010)						x			
National Institute of Mental Health (2016)	x								
Neureiter, Traut-Mattausch, Buse, and Di Fabio (2016)		x						x	x

Oriel, Plane, and Mundt (2004)			x						
Parkman and Beard (2008)				x					
Peteet, Brown, Lige, and Lanaway (2015)		x							x
Piedmont (1995)									x
Rohrmann, Bechtoldt, and Leonhardt (2016)	x		x		x				x
Ross and Krukowski (2003)	x		x						
Ross, Stewart, Mugge, and Fultz (2001)					x				
Rothman (1996)									x
Sakulku and Alexander (2011)				x					
September, McCarrey, Baranowsky, Parent, and Schindler (2001)		x							
Seritan and Mehta (2016)				x	x			x	x
Steel (2007)					x				
Stoeber and Otto (2006)				x					
Thompson (2004)		x			x				
Thompson, Davis, and Davidson (1998)					x			x	
Thompson, Foreman, and Martin (2000)				x					
Want and Kleitman (2006)		x			x				
Whitman and Shanine (2012)	x						x		
Yuen and Depper (1987)								x	

## APPENDIX B

### Permission to Use and Copy of the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS)

#### Permission To Use the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS)

Please find attached the requested Clance IP Scale and scoring instructions. This correspondence constitutes permission to use the scale. I request that on each CIPS you use/distribute, that you have the copyright and permission information printed on each page:

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

This clause is already on the attached CIPS copy.

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

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

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

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

Best,

Pauline Rose Clance, Ph.D., ABPP

### Clance IP Scale

For each question, please circle the number that best indicates how true the statement is of you. It is best to give the first response that enters your mind rather than dwelling on each statement and thinking about it over and over.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6. I'm afraid people important to me may find out that I'm not as capable as they think I am.

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

7. I tend to remember the incidents in which I have not done my best more than those times I have done my best.

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

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

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

9. Sometimes I feel or believe that my success in my life or in my job has been the result of some kind of error.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

20. I feel bad and discouraged if I'm not "the best" or at least "very special" in situations that involve achievement.

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

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

### Scoring the Impostor Test

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

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

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

## APPENDIX C

### **Informational Letter to Participants**

November 1, 2016

Dear Participant:

My name is Don Scott and I am a doctoral student at Brandman University conducting research to explore and describe the behavioral characteristics of gay men serving in civic or non-profit leadership roles. This study involves two steps.

First, I will send a link that will include a consent form and an electronic survey. I will invite you to complete the 20 question survey within 1-2 days of receiving it. The survey should take approximately 20 minutes to complete. I will receive your responses electronically and want to assure you that your name and responses will remain confidential and known only to me.

The second step of this study involves a 45-60 minute interview at a time that is convenient for you. All information shared during the interview will remain confidential and your name will not be attached to any notes or the interview transcript. All information will be stored in locked files accessible only to me. Further, you will be free to stop the interview and withdraw from the study at any time. Finally, you may be assured that the researcher is not in any way affiliated with your employer.

If you wish to participate, please contact me at [doscott@mail.brandman.edu](mailto:doscott@mail.brandman.edu). I am also happy to answer any questions you may have in advance of your participation.

Sincerely,

Donald B. Scott

## APPENDIX D

### Electronic Consent

**INFORMATION ABOUT:** Exploring the Impostor Phenomenon's Behavioral Characteristics: How Do Gay Male Leaders Cope?

**RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR:** Donald B. Scott, M.Ed.

#### **Introduction**

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Donald B. Scott, a doctoral student at Brandman University. The purpose of this study is to explore and describe the behavioral characteristics of gay men serving in civic or non-profit leadership roles.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate in this electronic survey, you can withdraw at any time.

The survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. Your responses will be confidential and each participant will be assigned a three digit code for identification purposes. The Researcher will keep the identifying codes safe-guarded in a locked file drawer to which the Researcher will have sole access. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only. Further, I may contact you after receiving your responses to arrange for a follow-up interview.

If you have any questions about completing this survey or any aspects of this research, please contact:

Don Scott, Researcher  
doscott@mail.brandman.edu  
or  
Dr. Douglas DeVore, Advisor  
ddevore@brandman.edu

### **Informed Consent Form**

No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent re-obtained. There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research. I understand that the Investigator will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes and research materials in a locked file drawer that is available only to the researcher.

I understand that I may refuse to participate in or I may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call:

Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs  
Brandman University  
16355 Laguna Canyon Road  
Irvine, CA 92618  
(949) 341-7641

**ELECTRONIC CONSENT:** Please select your choice below.

Clicking on the appropriate button below indicates you have read and understand the informed consent form.

☐ I wish to participate in the survey.

☐ I **decline** to participate in the survey.

## APPENDIX E

### Written Informed Consent Form

**INFORMATION ABOUT:** Exploring the Impostor Phenomenon's Behavioral Characteristics: How Do Gay Male Leaders Cope?

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY  
16355 LAGUNA CANYON ROAD  
IRVINE, CA 92618

**RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR:** Donald B. Scott, M.Ed.

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:** You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Donald B. Scott, a doctoral student at Brandman University. The purpose of this study is to explore and describe the coping skills gay men serving in civic or non-profit leadership roles and identified with the impostor phenomenon using the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale use to overcome behavioral characteristics associated with the impostor phenomenon

In participating in this study, I agree to be interviewed about my experiences as a leader. The one-on-one interviews will take approximately 45-60 minutes of your time.

I understand that:

- a) There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research. I understand that the Investigator will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes and research materials in a locked file drawer that is available only to the researcher.
- b) The possible benefit of this study is that my input may help add to the research regarding the impostor phenomenon and effective ways for individuals to cope with it. The findings will be available to me at the conclusion of the study and will provide new insights about the experiences gay men in leadership roles report having with the impostor phenomenon. I understand that I will not be compensated for my participation.
- c) If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Don Scott at doscott@mail.brandman.edu.  
You may also contact the Brandman University Advisor for this study, Dr. Douglas DeVore at ddevore@brandman.edu.
- d) My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide not to participate in the study and I can withdraw at any time. I can also decide not to answer particular questions during the interview if I so choose. I understand that I

may refuse to participate or may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the Investigator may stop the study at any time.

e) No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by the law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent reobtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the Research Participant’s Bill of Rights. I have read the above and understand it and hereby consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

_____ Signature of Participant or Responsible Party	_____ Date
_____ Printed Name of Participant or Responsible Party	_____ Date
_____ Signature of Witness (if appropriate)	_____ Date
_____ Signature of Principal Investigator	_____ Date

## APPENDIX F

### Participant Bill of Rights



#### BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

##### Research Participant's Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.

## APPENDIX G

### **Interview Protocol**

Good morning/afternoon:

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this interview. As I mentioned during our earlier conversation, I am conducting research as part of earning my doctorate degree in Organizational Leadership at Brandman University. The purpose of my research is to explore the experiences you have had as a leader working in a non-profit or civic agency. More specifically, as a fellow gay man in a leadership position who scores high on the impostor phenomenon scale, I am interested in the experiences of other gay male leaders who score high on the scale. The interview will take about 30-45 minutes and includes 9 questions. I may ask a few follow-up questions if I need further clarification.

#### **Informed Consent and Recording**

Before we begin the interview, I want to seek your Informed Consent about your participation. I also have a copy of the Brandman Bill of Rights I sent. Do you have any questions or need clarification about either document?

I would like to remind you that anything we have previously discussed and will discuss today will remain confidential. All of the data will be reported without making any reference to you or your employer. With your permission, I would like to tape record this interview so that I ensure accurate recording of your responses I will be recording this session only so I have the ability to capture our discussion so that I can transcribe it for review. After I transcribe the conversation, I will send it to you via email so that you can make sure I have accurately captured your thoughts and ideas.

Finally, at any point during the interview you may ask that I skip a particular question or stop the interview altogether.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

### **List of Questions and probe questions**

Question #1: Why have you chosen to work in the (non-profit or civic) arena versus a more corporate atmosphere?

Question #2: How would you describe your thought processes, i.e. your personal level of self-confidence, when reflecting on deciding to pursue career advancement opportunities?

- Probe: What are some of the pros and cons you consider when accepting new responsibilities?

Question #3: How have your work responsibilities or tasks been accomplished at the expense of your personal well-being?

- Probe: How would you describe any kind of stress you face and how have you learned to manage that stress?
- Probe: What kind of work responsibilities have cut into your personal life?

Question #4: Think of a work project or a task you led that created anxiety for you. How did you manage that anxiety?

- Probe: Why did you use that approach for dealing with the anxiety?

Question #5: How do you typically react when faced with a large or daunting task in the workplace? Could you give me an example.

Question #6: Give me an example when your own level of self-confidence has affected you in the workplace.

- Probe: How do you respond in those situations?
- Probe: What impact does positive feedback you receive have on your response?

Question #7: Can you describe a situation when you have adjusted your behavior based upon the way you believe others perceive you?

- Probe: Why does that happen?
- Probe: Do you consider the adjustment positive or negative and why?

Question #8: Can you describe circumstances that might lead you to procrastinate or avoid certain work tasks or projects?

- Probe: How do you typically respond when you realize you are procrastinating or avoiding those tasks?

Question #9: Has perfectionism ever been a concern in your professional life?

- Probe: Do you consider that a positive or negative characteristic and why?

### **Ending Interview question**

Question #10: I want to finish this interview by asking how you would describe the role your family played in your career choices or identity.

**Do you have any questions or additional thoughts you would like to share with me before we conclude?**