

2015

# I'm not all that: a look at the imposter phenomenon in intimate relationships

Chante Alvarado

*Eastern Washington University*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://dc.ewu.edu/theses>



Part of the [Psychology Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Alvarado, Chante, "I'm not all that: a look at the imposter phenomenon in intimate relationships" (2015). *EWU Masters Thesis Collection*. 277.

<http://dc.ewu.edu/theses/277>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research and Creative Works at EWU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in EWU Masters Thesis Collection by an authorized administrator of EWU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [jotto@ewu.edu](mailto:jotto@ewu.edu).

Running head: I'M NOT ALL THAT

---

I'm Not All That: A Look at the Imposter Phenomenon in Intimate Relationships

---

A Thesis  
Presented To  
Eastern Washington University  
Cheney, WA

---

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree  
Master of Science in Clinical Psychology

---

By  
Chanté Alvarado  
Spring 2015

Thesis of Chanté Alvarado Approved By

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Theresa Martin, Graduate Study Committee

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Mr. Dennis Anderson, Graduate Study Committee

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Robert Sauders, Graduate Study Committee

## MASTER'S THESIS

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a master's degree at Eastern Washington University, I agree that the JFK Library shall make copies freely available for inspection. I further agree that copying of this project in whole or in part is allowable only for scholarly purposes. It is understood, however, that any copying or publication of this thesis for commercial purposes, or for financial gain, shall not be allowed without my written permission.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

### Abstract

This study was conducted to examine the possible relationships between individuals experiencing the imposter phenomenon and their attachment styles within intimate relationships. The hypothesis was that individuals who score high on the Clance Imposter Phenomenon (IP) Scale (Clance, 1985) would perceive their relationship as less stable and that they were unworthy of their partner. Individuals who score high on the Clance IP Scale would also show an insecure attachment style. The sample population consisted of Eastern Washington University students who filled out several questionnaires that pertain to the imposter phenomenon, attachment styles, and relationship experiences. Results suggested that individuals with a fearful or preoccupied attachment style have experienced more fear of rejection, and abandonment, in intimate relationships than individuals who have a secure or dismissive attachment style. It was also found that individuals who have a preoccupied or fearful attachment endorse the imposter syndrome more than individuals who have a secure or dismissive attachment style. This suggests that individuals with an insecure attachment style endorse feelings of the imposter phenomenon and also have also experienced more fear of rejection, or abandonment, in intimate relationships, thus feeling unstable and possibly unworthy.

## Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract.....	iv
Theoretical research.....	1
The Imposter Syndrome.....	2
Partner Idealization.....	4
Attachment Theory.....	6
Current Study.....	8
Method.....	9
Design.....	9
Participants.....	9
Materials.....	11
Clance Imposter Phenomenon Scale.....	11
The Relationship Questionnaire.....	12
Experiences in Close Relationship-Revised.....	12
Demographics.....	13
Procedure.....	13
Results.....	13
Relationship Style and Attachment.....	13
Relationship Style and the Imposter Syndrome.....	15
Correlations.....	16
	Imposter syndrome and attachment..... 16
	Attachment..... Self-esteem and..... 17
Discussion.....	18
Conclusion.....	21
References.....	24
Tables, figures, etc.....	27
Table 1.....	27
Table 2.....	28
Table 3.....	28
Table 4.....	29
Table 5.....	29
Table 6.....	30
Vita.....	31

### I'm Not All That: A Look at the Imposter Phenomenon in Intimate Relationships

“Luck is not something you can mention in the presence of self-made men.” E.B White (1899-1985) said not knowing that men or women can feel as if all of their worth, and everything they have accomplished, is all because of luck. It is actually not uncommon for women, more often than men, to feel as if their accomplishments are achieved through luck or chance rather than them feeling like they earned their accomplishments. These accomplishments can range from an individual’s education, job, or possibly even the intimate partner they have. This is known as the *imposter phenomenon*. It was originally defined based on observations of high achieving women who reported an internal experience of feeling like a phony or that they have fooled people into believing they are actually intelligent, successful, or have earned their status in life (Clance & Imes, 1978).

The current study was designed to investigate how the imposter phenomenon can affect intimate relationships. It is a commonly held belief that couples who recognize each other’s weakness and strengths have longer and happier marriages compared to couples that have a quick, passionate relationship (Huston, Caughlin, Houts, Smith, & George, 2001). In actuality, having a positive illusion about your partner creates a better relationship. This is referred to as partner idealization, and it allows an individual to overlook aspects, or flaws, that their partner has and see them in a favorable light. This can create a happier relationship because the individual essentially does not see their partner’s flaws (Murray, Griffin, Derrick & Leder, 2011). Partners may do this within their relationships, but what if the individual is in a relationship with someone who is

relationship. This is referred to as partner idealization, and it allows an individual to overlook aspects, or flaws, that their partner has and see them in a favorable light. This can create a happier relationship because the individual essentially does not see their partner's flaws (Murray, Griffin, Derrick & Leder, 2011). Partners may do this within their relationships, but what if the individual is in a relationship with someone who is experiencing the imposter phenomenon? The purpose of this study is to look at if individuals who experience the imposter phenomenon are more likely to have an insecure attachment style and seek self-esteem by trying to live up to an idealized image of how they should be for their partner, to compensate for feelings of insecurity and self-doubt.

### **The Imposter Syndrome**

It has been found that some high achieving women, despite their earned degrees, scholastic honors, high achievement on standardized tests, received praise, professional recognition from colleagues and authorities, do not feel successful internally (Clance & Imes, 1978). They tend to think of themselves as "imposters." Women who experience the imposter phenomenon hold onto a strong belief that they are not intelligent and have come across their successes in life by luck or chance. They actually believe that they have fooled people into thinking they are intelligent and successful. People who have self-declared themselves as imposters fear that eventually a significant person, or possibly significant other, will find out they are an imposter.

According to Deaux (1976), men tend to own their success and attribute it to a quality that they possess. Women, on the other hand, are more likely to say their success stemmed from an external cause, like luck, or a temporary internal quality, like effort, which they do not consider an ability they possess as an individual (Clance & Imes, 1978). Clance and Imes (1978) have suggested the imposter phenomenon would be more common in women because of the societal stereotyping that women are less capable than men. This belief is internalized and can result in the feelings of being an imposter, even when great feats are accomplished (Langford & Clance, 1993). There are some differences between men and women in terms of how they experience the imposter phenomenon. Women with imposter feelings showed low correlations with impulsivity and need for change. Men with imposter feelings showed high correlations with impulsivity, need for change, and low need for order (Beard, 1990).

There are two different groups of imposters (Clance & Imes, 1978). The first group is usually women who have a sibling, or close relative, that have been deemed to be the "intelligent one" or the "golden child" of the family. The individual not deemed as the "golden one" has been told that they are the socially inept one. It is then implied that they will never live up to the other sibling or close relative. This creates a conflict within that individual. On one side they believe the family myth because it is all that they have been exposed to, while at the same time they want to prove everyone wrong and show that they are just as good, or better, as the "golden one". The individual then throws themselves into their education, or job, and receives high accolades, but it never seems to be enough for the family and they continue to praise the other sibling or relative. The individual continues to strive to gain validation and acceptance by being successful, but also starts to believe that maybe they are not intelligent or successful, and their family's beliefs are correct. They begin to doubt their abilities and the imposter phenomenon begins to blossom.

The second group contains individuals upon whom the family continually projects the idea that the individual is superior. The family believes that they are perfect in every way possible and can accomplish anything effortlessly. The individual experiences situations where they cannot accomplish tasks or situations effortlessly though and realize they cannot always do what they want to. They feel obligated to achieve these tasks to satisfy their family's expectations, and they must be able to do it effortlessly on top of it all. The individual knows that they cannot keep this up forever. However, the family continues to praise the individual, and the individual begins to doubt their family's perceptions, and thus begins to doubt their own self.

When an individual experiences the imposter phenomenon they often have feelings of worry, depression, and anxiety that occur from the pressure to live up to one's successful image (Langford & Clance, 1993). There is a constant fear the individual will be revealed as unworthy and/or incompetent. In our society, people often view personal worth as how much one has accomplished within their lifetime. These accomplishments

feelings of worry, depression, and anxiety that occur from the pressure to live up to one's successful image (Langford & Clance, 1993). There is a constant fear the individual will be revealed as unworthy and/or incompetent. In our society, people often view personal worth as how much one has accomplished within their lifetime. These accomplishments are often visible to others and seem to prove that they are worthy. Individuals who experience impostor feelings are also motivated by the need to look intelligent to others. This causes them to be concerned with others' impressions of them, and thus they shape themselves to fit those expectations. They may heavily invest in attempting to live up to an idealized self-image in attempt to get validation and feel good about their own self. Approval from others must be present and helps the individual maintain feelings of worth. When they are not validated their self-worth, and good self-feeling, will plunge because it is based on external feedback from others.

### **Partner Idealization**

Langford and Clance (1993) have found that individuals who experience the impostor phenomenon have more difficulty trusting others enough to reveal their weaknesses and risk criticism from others. This may ultimately cause problems within a relationship. Women and men with higher self-esteem project a more positive light onto their partner and see their partners becoming a mirror image of their own self-image as time goes on. Partners thus start to mirror each other's strengths and weaknesses (Baldwin, 1992; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). This may allow for partners to be more forgiving and offer optimism to help cope (Murray et al, 2011). Kelley (1979) suggested that as interdependence increases, partners might be more prone to acting selfishly and start to disappoint one another more often. Individuals who view their partner in a more favorable light are therefore more likely to forgive these behaviors (Arriaga, Slaughterbeck, Capazza, & Hmurovic, 2007; Miller, Nichuis, & Huston, 2006; Murray et al, 1996).

Murray, Holmes, and Griffin (1996), in a cross-sectional study, showed that individuals were more satisfied in their relationships when they saw virtues in their partner that their partner did not see in themselves. These projected illusions, or positive illusions, give a temporary sense of security and enhances well-being. It may provide a false sense of security and can lead to disappointment down the road if the positive illusion is too grandiose and therefore shattered. These grandiose positive illusions may hide real difficulties or incompatibilities the individuals have within the relationship (Christensen & Harvey, 1993). These extremely high ideals, or positive illusions, may lead to disappointment when increased interdependence reveals how the partner does not meet the expectations that the other partner holds. This is when the positive illusion is shattered, and therefore no longer adaptive to the relationship.

Idealizing a partner predicts a greater sense of well-being and stability over time. Partners who have more positive perceptions of their intimate partner have the most stable relationships. If the positive illusion is too grandiose, then the partner may not be able to live up to the expectation and the positive illusion is shattered. Idealizing one's partner may have protective factors because people can shape their romantic fate through behavior. Believing one's partner reflects one's ideals may predict continued satisfaction because it creates optimism that is needed to cope with the challenges of a romantic relationship (Murray et al., 2011).

### **Attachment Theory**

From an attachment standpoint, viewing a partner as ideal may create a sense of internal peace or security. It may also lessen the concerns about the relationship's vulnerabilities or acceptance of their flaws. Attachment traditions argue that perceptions of the self as worthy of love and caring are correlated to the beliefs about available partners and their dispositions within the relationship (Murray et al., 1996). Overall, partners that are more secure in their attachment styles have more stable and satisfying relationships, while individuals with insecurities, or an insecure attachment, may bring in vulnerabilities to the relationship. Their self-doubt does not allow them to see their partners in a generous light. Individuals that are less sure in their self-worth may have more difficulty sustaining an idealized perception of their partner because the demands of trying to boost a low-self-esteem partner's self-image is too strenuous over time (Murray et al., 1996; Brickman, 1987).

more difficulty sustaining an idealized perception of their partner because the demands of trying to boost a low-self-esteem partner's self-image is too strenuous over time (Murray et al., 1996; Brickman, 1987).

Attachment behavior is any form of behavior that results in an individual being close to, or maintaining proximity to, another individual (Bowlby, 1982). It is the most obvious when the individual is frightened, fatigued, or sick and is looking for comfort or security. Knowing a caregiver is responsive and loving allows security to develop within the recipient, and forms a bond between the two individuals who are in the relationship. Knowing a caregiver is unresponsive, and possibly neglectful, creates insecurities within the individual who is in need of comfort and care, but who is not receiving it. Attachment develops in early childhood, usually with the main caregiver, but continues to function throughout an individual's lifespan. The type of attachment that is formed thus affects relationships with everyone the individual interacts with throughout their life.

According to Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991), there are four basic types of adult attachment styles: secure, preoccupied, dismissive-avoidant, and fearful-avoidant. The *secure attachment* style suggests that individuals have a sense of worthiness, or lovability, and that others are going to be responsive and caring. These individuals are usually able to function well within relationships with others. The next three attachment styles are considered insecure attachment styles. The *preoccupied attachment* style suggests that an individual has a sense of unworthiness, or un-lovability, but they view others positively. This can cause a preoccupied individual to try to gain self-acceptance by gaining the acceptance of others. The third attachment style is the *dismissive-avoidant* style. Individuals with this style have a sense of worthiness or lovability, but have a negative outlook towards others. Individuals in this style avoid relationships to avoid disappointment and maintain a sense of independence so that they can also avoid feeling vulnerable. The last attachment style is the *fearful-avoidant* type, which consists of individuals who have a sense of unworthiness and believe that others will be untrustworthy and/or rejecting. These individuals often avoid relationships with others to avoid being rejected or hurt (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

Individuals that have insecurities, and possibly have an insecure attachment style, bring vulnerabilities into the relationships, and one of these vulnerabilities could be the imposter phenomenon. Previous research has shown that the imposter phenomenon creates feelings of anxiety, worry, and unworthiness. The individuals experiencing these feelings do not attribute their success to themselves and often attribute it to external factors. They also seek approval from others in attempt to gain self-worth. In a relationship, an individual experiencing the imposter phenomenon will most likely try to live up to what their partner's ideals are to create a sense of security. An individual with a possible secure attachment might have more self-worth, and therefore might not suffer from the imposter phenomenon and not bring more vulnerability into the relationship. This would then essentially create a happier, and possibly longer, relationship.

### **Current Study**

To see how the imposter phenomenon may correlate with attachment style, I am going to use the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS) to measure if an individual is experiencing the imposter phenomenon, the Experience in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) Questionnaire to measure how an individual generally experiences intimate relationships, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Questionnaire to measure self-esteem and support previous research indicating individuals experiencing the imposter phenomenon have lower self-esteem, an attachment style questionnaire to categorize an individual's attachment style, collect demographics, and general information on relationship experiences. Specifically, I investigated if there are any correlations between the CIPS, attachment style, and relationships experiences. I hypothesize that individuals who score high on the CIPS (i.e., are higher in imposter characteristics) will perceive their relationship as less stable and that they are unworthy of their partner. I also predict that individuals who also score high on the CIPS will also show an insecure attachment style. Unrealistic thoughts that their partner has about them will make them feel even less unworthy because they do not view themselves positively.

### **Method**

#### **Design**

In this study I examined how the imposter phenomenon interacts with attachment

unworthy because they do not view themselves positively.

## **Method**

### **Design**

In this study I examined how the imposter phenomenon interacts with attachment style. It was a multi-level, single factor design and I used a one-way analysis of variance to investigate if there was any variance in the means between the groups in the Relationships Questionnaire (RQ), the Clance Imposter Phenomenon scale (CIPS) and the subscales in the Experience in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) Questionnaire. I also collected demographics on general information and on relationship experiences. When sufficient data was collected, it was analyzed using Pearson's  $r$  correlation to investigate the relationships between the scores on the CIPS and ECR-R and the scores on the CIPS and the Rosenberg Questionnaire to back up previous research and help support my research. A one-way between subjects ANOVA was also performed to investigate which attachment style was more likely to be present on high CIPS and ECR-R scores.

### **Participants**

Two hundred forty-one participants were from Eastern Washington University through the Department of Psychology's SONA Research Management System where they gained access to an online questionnaire. Students on campus were offered a certain amount of extra credit points for certain classes by participating in the study. Thirty-two participant's information was removed from the sample due to incomplete information. One participant's information was removed because they indicated they were not 18 years of age. The final sample was comprised of 208 college students (161 female and 45 males) ranging in age from 18 to 58. There were 94 freshmen, 32 sophomores, 53 juniors, 24 seniors, and 5 post-baccalaureate. Sixty-nine point seven percent of participants identified as Caucasian, while the remaining identified as Asian, African American, Hispanic, Native Indian/Hawaiian, or mixed race.

When the questionnaire was taken, 93.8% of participants identified as being heterosexual while the remaining identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or other (i.e. asexual, etc.). Eighty-eight percent of students reported that their marital status was single, never married, 10.6% reported being married or in a domestic partnership, 1% was divorced, and 0.5% was widowed. Sixty-three point nine percent of people identified as being in a committed relationship while 6.7% of people reported they had a friends with benefits relationship, 3.8% have casual hookups, and 25.5% of people are not dating or "hooking up" with anyone.

The most endorsed number of committed relationships was one to two relationships with 60.6% of participants. Twenty-two point six percent of participants indicated that they have had three to four committed relationships, 2.4% of participants have had five to six committed relationships, and 1.9% of participants endorsed having seven to eight committed relationships. Twelve point five percent of participants indicated that they have had no committed relationships. When asked, "Who initiates the 'break-up' within the relationship," 44.2% of participants indicated that they mostly initiate the break-ups within relationships. Thirty-three point eight percent of participants indicated that the break-ups were mutually agreed upon and 20.4% participants endorsed their partner initiated most the break-ups.

### **Materials**

**The Clance IP Scale.** The Clance IP Scale (CIPS) is used to clinically observe attributes or feelings associated with the imposter phenomenon (Clance & O'Toole, 1989). It is a 20-item questionnaire that consists of a Likert scale ranging from 1=not at all true to 5=very true. Some examples of questions are: "I can give the impression that I'm more competent than I really am" and "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." It is worded to help avoid social desirability effects

all true to 5=very true. Some examples of questions are: "I can give the impression that I'm more competent than I really am" and "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." It is worded to help avoid social desirability effects and was originally created to measure the experience of phoniness in high achievers. Individual item scores were added together to produce a CIPS total score and no reverse scoring was needed.

Another scale called the Harvey Imposter Phenomenon (IP) Scale was created in 1981 to validate the imposter phenomenon as an actual construct. When the CIPS was compared to Harvey's IP Scale the scores on each were correlated, and showed that individuals who have experienced the imposter phenomenon scored higher on each scale, thus supporting the imposter phenomenon as an actual construct (Chrisman et al., 1995). The CIPS is a more sensitive measure though and should be used to correctly identify imposters and non-imposters. The CIPS has a high internal consistency with a reported alpha ranging from .84 (Prince, 1989) to .96 (Holmes et al., 1993). Therefore, I used the CIPS to measure if individuals have the imposter phenomenon.

Ten questions were modified based off of the Clance Imposter Phenomenon Scale (CIPS), but adapted to intimate relationships. They were modified to measure imposter feelings that an individual may have within an intimate relationship, instead of achievement. Question examples are: "I worry that my partner will discover that I'm not 'all that,'" "my partner seems to think I am better than I actually am," and "I give the impression that I'm more confident in my relationship than I really am." Like the CIPS, individual item scores were added together to produce a total score and no reverse scoring was needed.

**The Relationships Questionnaire.** The Relationships Questionnaire was used to measure an individual's attachment style. It is a 4-item questionnaire that was originally based off of Hazan and Shaver's (1987) Three-Category Measure of adult attachment. The individual selects a general relationship style that usually describes their relationships and then rates each relationship style and how each of the descriptions corresponds to them on a scale of 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). The Relationships Questionnaire has a strong reliability ranging from .72 to .96 (Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994).

**Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised.** To measure how individuals feel emotionally in intimate relationships, the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) Questionnaire will be used. The first 18 items measure attachment-related anxiety, and items 19-36 measure attachment-related avoidance (Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000). Individuals are encouraged to respond to generally how they feel in relationships, and not just in their current relationship. The items range from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree. Several questions are reversed scored, and the questions are randomly presented in the questionnaire given to participants. Each subscale's item scores were added together to produce a total score. The higher the total score on each subscale, the more anxious or avoidant an individual endorsed feeling within their intimate relationships.

**Demographics.** Demographics were also collected from participants. They included the participant's age, gender, race, year in college, marital status, current relationship status, current relationship duration, how old they were when they first started dating, number of serious relationships, how long those serious relationships generally lasted, and person who generally initiates the "break-up" in their relationships. These questions were used to describe the general nature of participants in the study.

### **Procedure**

The questionnaires were combined into a comprehensive survey through the Qualtrics Survey Software system. This system allows surveys to be built and then distributed via the SONA system at Eastern Washington University for participation by the student respondents. The students gave informed consent by choosing to participate in the taking the questionnaire, and were informed they could stop participating at anytime. The students that participated were offered extra credit in certain psychology classes.

## **Results**

### **Relationship Style and Attachment**

The hypothesis was that individuals who endorse the imposter syndrome (i.e., score higher on the CIPS) will perceive their relationship as less stable, and that they are unworthy of their partner. I also predicted that individuals who also score high on the

## Relationship Style and Attachment

The hypothesis was that individuals who endorse the imposter syndrome (i.e., score higher on the CIPS) will perceive their relationship as less stable, and that they are unworthy of their partner. I also predicted that individuals who also score high on the CIPS would also show an insecure (preoccupied, fearful, or dismissive) attachment style. A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted with the independent variable being an individual's general relationship attachment style ( $M=2.12$ ,  $SD= 1.056$ ) and the dependent variable being the ECR-R Anxiety Scale ( $M=59.27$ ,  $SD= 20.409$ ). There was a significant effect of an individual's general relationship style and whether they fear, or are anxious about, rejection or abandonment at the  $p<.05$  level for the four conditions [ $F(3, 178) = 16.063$ ,  $p = .000$ , partial  $\eta^2=.213$ ] (see Table 1).

Post hoc comparisons using the Games-Howell test (see Table 1) indicated that fear of rejection or abandonment in people securely attached ( $M=49.74$ ,  $SD=18.740$ ) differed significantly ( $p<.05$ ) from fear of rejection or abandonment in individuals who have a fearful attachment ( $M=67.46$ ,  $SD=19.582$ ,  $p=.000$ ). Tests also indicated that fear of rejection or abandonment in securely attached ( $M=49.74$ ,  $SD=18.740$ ) individuals was significantly different from individual's fear of rejection and abandonment in individuals who have a preoccupied attachment ( $M=70.46$ ,  $SD=15.319$ ,  $p=.000$ ). However, individual's fear of rejection and abandonment in secure attachment ( $M=49.74$ ,  $SD=18.740$ ) and dismissive attachment ( $M=50.03$ ,  $SD=14.896$ ) was not significantly different ( $p=1.000$ ). In other words, this indicates that individuals with a fearful or preoccupied attachment style have more fear of rejection and abandonment than individuals who are have a secure or dismissive attachment style.

A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted with the independent variable being an individual's general relationship attachment style ( $M=2.12$ ,  $SD=1.056$ ) and the dependent variable being the ECR-R Avoidant scale ( $M=50.64$ ,  $SD=17.832$ ). There was a significant effect on an individual's general relationship style and whether they endorsed finding discomfort in intimacy and seek independence (avoiding relationships) at the  $p<.05$  level for the four conditions [ $F(3, 169) = 4.763$ ,  $p = .003$ , partial  $\eta^2=.078$ ] (see Table 1).

Games-Howell post hoc comparisons (see Table 3) indicated that avoiding relationships in people securely attached ( $M=44.03$ ,  $SD=17.700$ ) differed significantly ( $p<.05$ ) from avoiding relationships in individuals who have a fearful attachment ( $M=55.81$ ,  $SD=16.537$ ,  $p=.002$ ). The post hoc comparison also suggested that avoiding relationships in securely attached ( $M=44.03$ ,  $SD=17.700$ ) individuals was not significantly different from avoiding relationships in individuals who have a preoccupied ( $M=50.93$ ,  $SD=13.062$ ,  $p=.194$ ) or dismissive attachment ( $M=52.24$ ,  $SD=20.110$ ,  $p=.256$ ). This highlights that individuals with a fearful attachment style may avoid relationships because of discomfort with being intimate with others. This may indicate they are less likely to trust others and seek independence to not get hurt. Individuals who have a secure, preoccupied, or dismissive attachment style may not avoid relationships as much.

## Relationship Style and Imposter Syndrome

A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted with the independent variable being an individual's general relationship attachment style ( $M=2.12$ ,  $SD= 1.056$ ) and the dependent variable being the CIPS ( $M=60.33$ ,  $SD=14.195$ ). There was a significant effect on an individual's general relationship style and whether they endorsed feeling like an imposter at the  $p<.05$  level for the four conditions [ $F(3, 175) = 7.568$ ,  $p = .000$ , partial  $\eta^2=.115$ ] (see Table 1).

Post hoc comparisons using the Games-Howell test (see Table 4) indicated that feeling like an imposter in people securely attached ( $M=54.59$ ,  $SD=13.612$ ) differed significantly ( $p<.05$ ) from feeling like an imposter in individuals who have a fearful attachment ( $M=63.92$ ,  $SD=13.109$ ,  $p=.001$ ). Results suggested that individuals who are securely attached ( $M=54.59$ ,  $SD=13.612$ ), and feel like an imposter, were significantly different from individuals who have a preoccupied attachment ( $M=67.16$ ,  $SD=11.679$ ) and have feelings of being an imposter ( $p=.000$ ). An individual's feeling of being an imposter in secure attachment ( $M=54.59$ ,  $SD=13.612$ ) and dismissive attachment ( $M=58.10$ ,  $SD=15.345$ ) was not significantly different ( $p=.713$ ). This suggests individuals who have a preoccupied or fearful attachment identify with feeling more like an imposter than individuals who have a secure or dismissive attachment style.

A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted with the independent

imposter in secure attachment ( $M=54.59$ ,  $SD=15.012$ ) and dismissive attachment ( $M=58.10$ ,  $SD=15.345$ ) was not significantly different ( $p=.713$ ). This suggests individuals who have a preoccupied or fearful attachment identify with feeling more like an imposter than individuals who have a secure or dismissive attachment style.

A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted with the independent variable being an individual's general relationship attachment style ( $M=2.12$ ,  $SD= 1.056$ ) and the dependent variable being the added imposter relationship questions ( $M=46.63$ ,  $SD=9.014$ ). There was a not significant effect on an individual's general relationship style and whether they endorsed feeling like an imposter within intimate relationships at the  $p<.05$  level for the four conditions [ $F(3, 182) = 2.443$ ,  $p = .066$ , partial  $\eta^2=.039$ ] (see Table 1).

### Correlations

**Imposter syndrome and attachment.** A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between the CIPS (endorsing feelings of being an imposter) and ECR-R Anxiety scale (whether individuals fear, or are anxious about, rejection or abandonment). There was a moderate positive, but significant, correlation between the two variables ( $r=.492$ ,  $N=167$ ,  $p=.000$ , two-tailed) with 24% of the variation explained. This suggests that as individuals endorse more feelings of being an imposter that they have more fear, or are more anxious about, being rejected or abandoned. When the CIPs was correlated with the ECR-R Avoidant scale (whether individuals feel discomfort in relationships and seek independence) there was a small positive, but significant, correlation between the two variables ( $r=.245$ ,  $N=162$ ,  $p=.002$ , two-tailed) with six percent of the variation explained. This suggests that as individuals endorse more feelings of being an imposter they may feel discomfort in seeking intimacy in a relationship and seek independence instead.

The Pearson's  $r$  test also assessed the relationship between the CIPS (endorsing feelings of being an imposter) and the modified imposter relationship questions (whether individuals feel like an imposter within relationships). There was a moderate positive correlation between the two variables ( $r=.525$ ,  $N=171$ ,  $p=.000$ , two-tailed) with 28% of the variation explained. This suggests that as individuals endorse more feelings of being an imposter they may also endorse feeling like an imposter within their intimate relationships as well.

When the added imposter relationship questions was assessed with ECR-R Anxiety scale a moderate positive correlation was found ( $r=.498$ ,  $N=176$ ,  $p=.000$ , two-tailed) with 25% of the variation explained. When the added imposter questions were assessed with ECR-R Avoidant scale though no significant correlation was found ( $r=-.005$ ,  $N=167$ ,  $p=.949$ , two-tailed). These results suggest at when individuals are fearful or anxious about rejection or abandonment they may have more feelings of being an imposter within an intimate relationship.

**Self-esteem and attachment.** When the ECR-R Anxiety scale was assessed with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale there was a moderate negative correlation ( $r=-.519$ ,  $N=176$ ,  $p=.000$ , two-tailed) with 26% of the variation explained. This suggests that as individuals become fearful or anxious about rejection or abandonment their self-esteem goes down. When the ECR-R Avoidant scale was assessed with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale there was a small negative correlation ( $r=-.271$ ,  $N=168$ ,  $p=.000$ , two-tailed) with seven percent of the variation explained. This result may indicate that when an individual avoids relationships their self-esteem may drop. When Pearson's  $R$  was used to assess the CIPS and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, there was a strong negative correlation between the two variables ( $r=-.670$ ,  $N=177$ ,  $p=.000$ , two-tailed) with 44% of the variation explained. Similar results were also found when a Pearson's  $R$  correlation was used to assess the relationship between the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and the added imposter relationships questions (whether individuals feel like an imposter within relationships). There was moderate negative correlation between the variables ( $r=-.422$ ,  $N=182$ ,  $p=.000$ , two-tailed) with 17% of the variance explained. This suggests that as individuals endorse more feelings of being an imposter, either in general or within an intimate relationship, their self-esteem may go down.

### Discussion

In this study I wanted to examine if the imposter phenomenon could have an effect on intimate relationships. I hypothesized that individuals who endorse the imposter syndrome (i.e., score higher on the CIPS) would perceive their relationship as less stable, and that they are unworthy of their partner. I also predicted that individuals who endorse

In this study I wanted to examine if the imposter phenomenon could have an effect on intimate relationships. I hypothesized that individuals who endorse the imposter syndrome (i.e., score higher on the CIPS) would perceive their relationship as less stable, and that they are unworthy of their partner. I also predicted that individuals who endorse the imposter syndrome would have an insecure (fearful, preoccupied, or dismissive) attachment style.

Results suggested that individuals with a fearful or preoccupied attachment style have experienced more fear of rejection, and abandonment, in intimate relationships than individuals who have a secure or dismissive attachment style. Results also indicated that individuals with a fearful attachment style might elude relationships because they feel uncomfortable being intimate with others. Because they are uncomfortable around others they may seek independence and avoid relationships. Individuals who have a secure, preoccupied, or dismissive attachment style may not avoid relationships as much. Correlations suggested that individuals who view their relationship as less stable due to fear of rejection, or abandonment, may avoid relationships altogether. Another view of this suggests that as individuals avoid relationships they become more fearful, or anxious, about being rejected or abandoned within a relationship.

Self-esteem was also investigated, and results suggest that when individuals view their relationship as less stable and are fearful, or anxious, about rejection or abandonment their self-esteem goes down. It also appears when individuals avoid relationships their self-esteem goes down as well.

It was also found that individuals who have a preoccupied or fearful attachment endorse the imposter syndrome more than individuals who have a secure or dismissive attachment style. Correlations suggest that individuals who endorsed the imposter syndrome have more fear, or are more anxious about, being rejected or abandoned. It also suggested that individuals who endorse the imposter syndrome might feel uncomfortable with intimacy in relationships and seek independence instead. These results circle back to the ANOVA results that suggest individuals who are fearful, or anxious, about rejection or abandonment are also more likely to have a preoccupied or fearful attachment style. It also indicates that individuals who endorse the imposter syndrome and avoid relationships may have a fearful attachment style. These results help support the hypothesis that individuals who endorse the imposter syndrome have an insecure attachment style. Specifically, an individual with a preoccupied attachment style view themselves negatively and others, such as an intimate partner, as positively. This can relate back to an individual feeling unworthy of their partner because of how they view themselves in comparison to their partner.

Correlations were used to examine the relationship between individuals endorsing the imposter syndrome and whether individuals felt like an imposter within their relationships. A moderate positive correlation suggests as individuals endorse the feeling like an imposter that they also endorse feeling like an imposter within their intimate relationships. The relationship between feeling like an imposter within relationships was also assessed with an individual's fear, or anxiety, about being rejected or abandoned and a moderate positive correlation suggests when individuals are fearful, or anxious, about being rejected or abandoned they may have more feelings of being an imposter within an intimate relationship. No correlation was found between feeling like an imposter within relationships and avoiding relationships.

Like before, self-esteem was also correlated with feeling like an imposter, in general. When individuals endorse feeling more like an imposter, their self-esteem goes down. This finding is consistent with characteristics identified with feeling like an imposter. One of these characteristics included lower self-esteem (Kertay, 1991; Chrisman et al., 1995). This also links with insecure attachment styles and lower self-esteem. Similar results indicated that lower self-esteem is prevalent when individuals identified feeling like an imposter within relationships (from the added relationship imposter questions). This suggests that as individuals endorse more feelings of being an imposter, either in general or within an intimate relationship, their self-esteem may go down.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, the hypotheses were supported. Results suggest that as individuals feel more like an imposter they perceive their relationships as less stable. They may be fearful, or anxious, about being rejected or abandoned. This may cause them to avoid relationships to avoid the fear of rejection or abandonment, or they are in a relationship

## Conclusion

Overall, the hypotheses were supported. Results suggest that as individuals feel more like an imposter they perceive their relationships as less stable. They may be fearful, or anxious, about being rejected or abandoned. This may cause them to avoid relationships to avoid the fear of rejection or abandonment, or they are in a relationship and are anxious about their current partner rejecting or leaving them.

The hypothesis of individuals having an insecure attachment was supported. Specifically, individuals that endorsed feeling like an imposter were more likely to have a fearful or preoccupied attachment style. Those individuals who had a fearful or preoccupied attachment style also feared, or were anxious about, being rejected or abandoned by their partner. When these individuals have these beliefs, there was an association with lower self-esteem. When there was lower self-esteem there was also an association with individuals feeling more like an imposter when they are succeeding or are in an intimate relationship.

Limitations are present in the research. The sample is constrained to a college campus and is relatively small. Leaving the questionnaire open for a greater amount of time could have expanded the sample size. Ideally, equal sizes in gender would have been preferred along with equal sample sizes in general relationship style. To determine equal sample sizes in general relationship style, participants would have to be pre-tested or screened and then given the questionnaire. Participants also represented a narrow range of ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation, with most participants being primarily Caucasian, heterosexual, and in their twenties.

A larger sample with a more diverse population would have benefited the research. Another limitation is that results are based off of participant's self-reports, and self-reports are not always accurate. Results with the section of intimate relationship imposter questions are questionable because the questions were not tested for validity or internal consistency. They were simply modified off of a previously tested, and valid, measure to identify if an individual endorsed the imposter syndrome. For future research, the limitations listed above should be addressed and adjusted. Another research avenue would be to investigate if the development of an insecure (preoccupied, fearful, or dismissive) attachment style leads an individual to develop the Imposter Phenomenon.

This research opens other doors into looking at what can make an intimate relationship succeed or fail. It may help explain why some individuals struggle in relationships and give guidance in helping individuals overcome both personal and relational issues. These results could potentially guide therapists or counselors in couples counseling. Clance & Imes (1978) suggests that multi-modal therapy that integrates several therapeutic techniques is the most effective when working with women who endorse feeling like an imposter. These techniques can include Gestalt chair work, role-play, and individuals recording positive feedback on their competence.

Particularly, group therapy sessions with other individuals who endorse imposter feelings is beneficial. Clance & Imes (1978) suggested that once an individual is willing to share their secret, about being an imposter, it will allow other individuals within the group to share their imposter feelings as well. This creates a feeling of not being alone and can also highlight the dynamics of the syndrome and how out of touch with reality individuals can be. All of these therapeutic techniques can be adapted and used within couples counseling to help an individual overcome feelings of being an imposter and help their partner understand what the "imposter" partner is experiencing.

## References

- Arriaga, X.B., Slaughterbeck, E.S., Capezza, N.M., & Hmurovic, J.L. (2007). From bad to worse: Relationship commitment and vulnerability to partner imperfections. *Personal Relationships, 14*, 389-409.
- Baldwin, M.W. (1992). Relational schemas and the processing of social information. *Psychological Bulletin, 122*, 461-484.
- Bartholomew, K. & Horowitz, L.M. (1991). Attachment styles among young adults: A test of a four-category model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 61*, 226-244.
- Beard, J. (1990) *Personality correlates of the imposter phenomenon: An exploration of gender differences in critical needs*. Unpublished masters' thesis. Georgia State University, Atlanta.
- Bowlby, J. (1982). Attachment and loss: Retrospect and prospect. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 52*, 664-678.
- Brickman, P. (1987). *Commitment, conflict, and caring*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Chrisman, S. M., Pieper, W. A., Clance, P. R., Holland, C. R., & Glickauf-Hughes, C. (1995) Validation of the Clance Imposter Phenomenon Scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 65*, 456-467.
- Clance, P.R., & Imes, S.A. (1978). The imposter phenomenon in high achieving women: Dynamics and Therapeutic interventions. *Psychotherapy: Theory Research and Practice, 241-247*.
- Clance, P.R., & O'Toole, M. (1989). Impostor phenomenon. In H. Tierney (Ed.), *Women's Studies Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Deaux, D. (1976). Sex and the attribution process. In J. H. Harvey, W. J. Ickes, & R. F. Kidd (Eds.). *New Directions in Attribution Research, 1*, 335-352, New York: Halsted Press Division.
- Fraley, R. C., Waller, N. G., & Brennan, K. A. (2000). An item-response theory analysis of self-report measures of adult attachment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 78*, 350-365.
- Griffin, D., & Bartholomew, K. (1994). Models of the self and other: Fundamental dimensions underlying measures of adult attachment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 67*, 430-445.
- Hazen, C., & Shaver, P. (1987). Romantic love conceptualized as an attachment process. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 52*, 511-524.
- Holmes, S.W., Kertay, L., Adamson, L.B., Holland, C.L., and Clance, P.R. (1993). Measuring the imposter phenomenon: A comparison of Clance's IP Scale and Harvey's I-P Scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 60*, 48-59.
- Huston, T. L., Caughlin, J. P., Houts, R. M., Smith, S. E., & George, L. J. (2001). The connubial crucible: Newlywed years as predictors of marital delight, distress, and divorce. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 80*, 237-252.
- Langford, J., & Clance, P. R. (1993). The imposter phenomenon: Recent research findings regarding dynamics, personality and family patterns and their implications for treatment. *Psychotherapy, 495-501*.
- Miller, P. J. E., Nichuis, S., & Huston, T.L. (2006). Positive illusions in marital relationships: A 13-year longitudinal study. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 32*, 1579-1594.
- Murray, S.L., Griffin, D. W., Derrick, J. L., Harris, B., & Leder, S. (2011). Tempting fate or inviting happiness?: Unrealistic idealization prevents the decline of marital satisfaction. *Psychological Science, 22*, 619-626.
- Murray, S. L., Holmes, J. G., & Griffin, D.W. (1996). The self-fulfilling nature of positive illusions in romantic relationships: Love is not blind but prescient. *Journal of*

- or inviting happiness?: Unrealistic idealization prevents the decline of marital satisfaction. *Psychological Science*, 22, 619-626.
- Murray, S. L., Holmes, J. G., & Griffin, D.W. (1996). The self-fulfilling nature of positive illusions in romantic relationships: Love is not blind, but prescient. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71, 1155-1180.
- Prince, T.J. (1989). *The imposter phenomenon revisited: A validity study of Clance IP Scale*. Unpublished master's thesis, Georgia State University, Atlanta.
- Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the adolescent self-image*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Scharfe, E., & Bartholomew, K. (1994). Reliability and stability of adult attachment patterns. *Personal Relationships*, 1, 23-43.

Table 1

*Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Between General Relationship Attachment Style and Variables*

Variable	SS	df	MS	F	p	Partial $\eta^2$
Perception of Relationship: Anxiety Scale	15,713.471	3	5,237.824	16.063	.000*	.213
Perception of Relationship: Avoidant Scale	4,183.206	3	1394.402	4.763	.003*	.078
Clance Imposter Phenomenon Scale	4,135.086	3	182.134	1378.362	.000*	.115
Added Imposter Relationship Questions	591.249	3	197.083	2.443	.066	.039

\* $p < .05$

Table 2

*Analysis of Variance (ANOVA): Games-Howell Post Hoc Between General Relationship Attachment Style and Perception of Relationship: Anxiety Scale*

		<i>MD</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Secure Attachment	Fearful Attachment	-17.720*	3.206	.000
	Preoccupied Attachment	-20.720*	4.219	.000
	Dismissive Attachment	-.293	4.062	1.000

\**p* < .05

Table 3

*Analysis of Variance (ANOVA): Games-Howell Post Hoc Between General Relationship Attachment Style and Perception of Relationship: Avoidant Scale*

		<i>MD</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Secure Attachment	Fearful Attachment	-11.779*	3.164	.002
	Preoccupied Attachment	-6.891	3.986	.312
	Dismissive Attachment	-8.207	3.891	.154

\**p* < .05

Table 4

*Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Games-Howell Post Hoc Between General Relationship Attachment Style and Clance Imposter Phenomenon Scale*

		<i>MD</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Secure Attachment	Fearful Attachment	-9.330*	2.424	.001
	Preoccupied Attachment	-12.570*	3.205	.001
	Dismissive Attachment	-3.510	3.009	.649

\**p* < .05

Table 5

*Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Games-Howell Post Hoc Between General Relationship Attachment Style and the Added Imposter Relationship Questions*

		<i>MD</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Secure	Fearful	-2.558	1.637	.404

*Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Games-Howell Post Hoc Between General Relationship Attachment Style and the Added Imposter Relationship Questions*

		<i>MD</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Secure Attachment	Fearful Attachment	-2.558	1.637	.404
	Preoccupied Attachment	-2.145	1.787	.629
	Dismissive Attachment	-2.436	2.096	.653

\**p* < .05

Table 6  
*Descriptive Statistics*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Perception of Relationship: Anxiety Scale	59.27	17.382	187
Perception of Relationship: Avoidant Scale	50.64	1.787	179
Clance Imposter Phenomenon Scale	60.33	14.194	184
Added Imposter Relationship Questions	46.63	9.014	192
General Relationship Attachment Style	2.12	1.056	201

## Vita

Author: Chanté C. Alvarado

Place of Birth: Ephrata, Washington

Undergraduate Schools Attended: Big Bend Community College, 2008-2009  
Eastern Washington University, 2010-2013

Degrees Awarded: Bachelor of Science, 2013, Eastern Washington University  
Masters of Science, Clinical Psychology, 2015, Eastern Washington University (Projected)

Honors and Awards: Dean's List, 2010-2013, Eastern Washington University  
Omer Pence Scholarship, 2010-2011, Eastern Washington University  
International Honor Society of Psychology (PSI CHI) Member, 2012-Present  
Trustee's Scholarship, 2012-2013, Eastern Washington University  
Graduated Summa Cum Laude, Eastern Washington University, 2013  
Graduate Assistantship, Psychology Department, 2013-2014, Eastern Washington University  
Alumni Scholarship, 2013-2014, Eastern Washington University  
Alumni Scholarship, 2014-2015, Eastern Washington University

Scholarly Activities: Western Psychological Association Conference, Reno, Nevada, April 25-28, 2013  
Eastern Washington University Symposium, Eastern Washington University, May 2013  
Western Psychological Association Conference, Las Vegas, Nevada, April 30-May 3, 2015

Professional Experience: Internship, Catholic Charities, Spokane, Washington, 2014-2015