Beyond 'Fake it 'till you make it': Impostor Phenomenon in Archivists

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Abstract: In December 2022, members of the College and University Archives Section of the Society of American Archivists conducted a survey that examined the prevalence of impostor phenomenon (IP) among archivists. This study, the first to specifically focus on archivists, measures the prevalence of IP in the professional archival community. Using demographic data and the Clance Survey, the authors seek to identify factors that may lead to increased IP in archivists. This paper will review literature related to IP in the information sciences profession, detail the survey results, and suggest personal approaches and workplace initiatives to combat the phenomenon.

Introduction

Have you ever felt unprepared or lacked the skills needed to do your job? Perhaps an overly knowledgeable patron made you doubt your research skills, a colleague asked you to co-present a difficult topic, or your supervisor questioned your decision-making. When asked about your educational accomplishments, you joke that you fooled the school into giving you a degree. As these repeated moments of self-doubt build, you begin questioning whether you truly belong in your chosen profession. These feelings are connected to a pattern of thought known as impostor phenomenon (IP) and, in a clinical setting, impostor syndrome (IS). Though IP has been studied in the library profession and specific fields of library science, it has never been studied in archivists. This study seeks to identify the prevalence of IP in archivists and the factors that may contribute to its frequency. The data was collected in a December 2022 study conducted by members of the College and University Archives Section (C&UA) of the Society of American Archivists (SAA). The study surveyed 325 participants who answered a series of demographic questions and completed the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale to determine their level of IP. While the 2022 survey data showed some similarities to previous IP studies among librarians, this survey found demographic differences in IP levels. The survey also shows the stark difference in IP levels among archivists at institutions that support their archival workers.

Literature Review

In their groundbreaking 1978 article, "The Impostor Phenomenon in High Achieving Women: Dynamics and Therapeutic Interventions," Pauline Rose Clance and Suzanne Imes described a subset of patient encounters in their psychotherapeutic practice. Clance and Imes noted working with 150 high-achieving women, many with PhDs and accomplished in their fields and classrooms, who described feelings of fraudulence among their peers. These women often felt they had faked

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their way to success and were worried about being found out. Clance and Imes described these patients as "Women who experience the impostor phenomenon maintain a strong belief that they are not intelligent; in fact, they are convinced that they have fooled anyone who thinks otherwise."[1] The study participants included "primarily white middle- to upper-class women between the ages of 20 and 45." They included professional fields such as "law, anthropology, nursing, counseling, religious education, social work, occupational therapy, and teaching."[2] The authors did acknowledge the lack of men in their study. They noted that "the phenomenon occurs with much less frequency in men and that when it does occur, it is with much less intensity," though their male counterparts had mixed opinions of this theory.[3]

In her 1969 dissertation "Sex Difference in Achievement Motivation and Performance in Competitive and Noncompetitive Situations," psychologist Matina Souretis Horner studied gender differences in achievement motivation, something she defined as "fear of success."[4] Horner's later work focused on competitiveness in the workplace and gender disparity, particularly for women who worked in male-dominated fields. Many of those women, Horner found, did not want to seem aggressive to their male counterparts and often avoided situations deemed competitive. This research tied back into Horner's original work with "fear of success" to highlight perceived societal norms for women in the workplace and its effect on their professional success and mental health.[5]

Horner's work later segued into the study of the intersection of class and race with gender and IP. In her research, Horner theorized that societal constraints hindered non-white women's ability to attain success, and they were more likely than white women to experience IP. This discriminatory approach was common for the era, something historian Dana Simmons has described as two categories of thinking: researchers that only focused on high-achieving women and those that were achievement motivators. Because of this one-or-the-other research philosophy, many women who were likely suffering from IP were simply lumped into "treatable" categories that supported false stereotypes and did not address the root cause.[6]

Impostor Phenomenon in the Library Science Profession

Studies on the prevalence of IP in the library profession did not exist until 2014 when Melanie Clark, Kimberly Vardeman, and Shelley Barba conducted their own research. Utilizing the Harvey IP Scale, the study examined 352 librarians located in the United States and Canada. The participants reported having obtained a library degree (or equivalent) and were holding academic employment. Despite the high female response rate, the authors did not find a difference in gender and those experiencing IP. In fact, the survey indicated that one in eight participants reported feeling significant instances of IP. Those participants were typically younger, new tenure track professionals, librarians in a non-tenure track position, and/or early career librarians.[7]

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[1] Pauline Rose Clance and Suzanne Ament Imes, "The Imposter Phenomenon in High Achieving Women: Dynamics and Therapeutic Intervention," *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research & Practice* 15, no. 3 (1978): 1.

[2] Clance and Imes, "The Imposter Phenomenon," pg 2.

[3] Clance and Imes, "The Imposter Phenomenon," pg 1.

[4] Matina Souretis Horner, "Sex Differences in Achievement Motivation and Performance in Competitive and Non-Competitive Situations" (Ph.D., United States -- Michigan, University of Michigan), accessed July 21, 2023.

[5] Matina S. Horner, "Toward An Understanding of Achievement-Related Conflicts in Women," *Journal of Social Issues* 28, no. 2 (April 1972): 157–75.

[6] Dana Simmons, "Impostor Syndrome, a Reparative History," *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society* 2 (2016): 117.

[7] Melanie Clark, Kimberly Vardeman, and Shelley Barba, "Perceived Inadequacy: A Study of the Imposter Phenomenon among College and Research Librarians," *College & Research Libraries* 75, no. 3 (2014): 258.

A 2019 study of health science librarians found that one in seven out of 703 respondents reported experiencing some level of IP. Like the Clark et al. study, researchers Jill Barr-Walker, Michelle B. Bass, Debra A. Werner, and Liz Kellermeyer found that those with less experience with health science librarianship tended to experience higher levels of IP: "In these personal reflections, librarians share observations of self-doubt, minimization of their accomplishments, and the importance of recognizing impostor phenomenon."[8]

Information Technology/Systems librarians are also often subject to IP due in part to the rapidly changing technology environment. As Rachel Singer Gordon notes, many systems librarians enter library service through other professions. Or, librarians may find themselves in charge of technology services with no formal training. The lack of formal training leads to fear of exposure for being a fraud: "When those with an official IT background proclaim that there is but one true standard of expertise and education that defines systems librarianship, this only exacerbates the feeling that they fail to measure up."[9]

In recent years, researchers have turned their efforts toward studying students and new professionals suffering from IP during the COVID-19 pandemic. The ideal of the perfect job, home, or lifestyle was questioned as the world faced quarantines. Historian Dana Simmons surmises that the timing of research into IP is what formed the basis for current thinking on the phenomenon. Feminism, Civil Rights, and postwar ideals set the stage for what many Americans believed was the perfect life. This 'dream' could not be achieved, argues Simmons, without fundamentally struggling with the reality that, for most, the dream could never happen. The "discomfort with the Dream" is what Simmons believes is at the core of modern IP research.[10]

Research Propositions

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the role of IP experiences across different demographic and professional factors in a sample of archivist professionals. Therefore, we seek to explore if IP scores differ based on categorical distinctions such as age, gender, career stage, perceptions of institutional support, and personal caregiving responsibilities.

Proposition 1: IP scores will vary significantly among the four IP categories, indicating that these classifications effectively distinguish different levels of IP.

Proposition 2: IP scores will vary significantly across the six age groups.

Proposition 3: IP scores will vary significantly across the six primary role tenure groups.

Proposition 4: IP scores will vary significantly between males and females.

Proposition 5: IP scores will vary significantly between individuals who perceive their institution as providing adequate support and those who do not.

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[8] Jill Barr-Walker, Michelle B. Bass, Debra A. Werner, and Liz Kellermeyer, "Measuring Impostor Phenomenon among Health Sciences Librarians," *Journal of the Medical Library Association* 107, no. 3 (2019): 324.

[9] Rachel Singer Gordon, "Overcoming the Systems Librarian Imposter Syndrome," *LIBRES: Library and Information Science Research Electronic Journal* 13, no. 2 (2003), https://doi.org/10.32655/LIBRES.2003.2.3.

[10] Gordon, "Overcoming," 107 & 123.

Proposition 6: IP scores will vary significantly between individuals who are caregivers and those who are not.

Methodology

To examine the prevalence of IP among workers in the archives profession, three members of SAA's C&UA Section Steering Committee launched the IP survey in the fall of 2022 using the Qualtrics platform. All survey coordinators completed IRB training through their respective institutions before launching the survey. The survey was open from November 9 through December 16, 2022, and was shared widely with SAA and MARAC membership listservs. Beyond listserv distribution, the survey link could be shared directly with interested parties but was not shared via social media at the request of Pauline Rose Clance. The anticipated time to complete the survey was 15 minutes, and all respondents completed the informed consent agreement before beginning the survey. The survey was entirely voluntary, and respondents could choose to exit the form at any time. There were a total of 325 participants who completed the survey, and there were an additional 55 participants whose responses were not included in the final analysis due to being incomplete (i.e., not answering the full Clance survey). In the summer of 2023, a graduate student, funded by an Illinois State University research grant, joined the team of survey coordinators to distill the survey responses and compile the data accordingly.

While Clance's 20-item Likert-based survey is the most commonly used of its kind, other IP surveys exist and were considered for this project. Psychologist Joan C. Harvey developed a survey to identify IP in college students. Developed in 1981, the Harvey scale used a 14-item survey instrument to measure IP among students enrolled in college courses. The Perceived Fraudulence Scale, introduced in 1991, and the Leary Impostor Scale, introduced in 2000, brought two more measures of IP to the scene. All four were recently studied to determine which was the most accurate predictor of IP, though none stood out as a top predictor of IP.[11] The authors selected the Clance IP scale due to its ubiquity and use in other fields of IP scholarship.

The distributed IP survey comprised all 20 statements from the Clance scale and demographic questions relating to age, race, gender, employment status, geographic location, supervisory responsibilities, managerial duties, caregiving responsibilities outside of the workplace, and opportunities for IP support. By gathering demographic information, the survey coordinators intended to track the presence of IP across people groups and draw conclusions based on that information. Survey takers responded to each of the Clance IP scale statements on a scale of one (not at all true) to five (very true), resulting in a possible score ranging from 20 to 100. Survey takers were encouraged, per the Clance survey instructions, to respond to the statements with their initial reaction rather than taking time to mull over the statement and their response. In accordance with the Clance survey instructions, respondents were assigned to one of four levels of IP based on their total scores for the IP portion of the survey: 20 to 40 (few impostor characteristics), 41 to 60 (moderate impostor experiences), 61 to 80 (frequently has impostor feelings), and 81 to 100 (intense IP).

The above-stated methodology is not without its limitations. While the authors were pleased with a survey response of 325 participants, given that the total membership of SAA and MARAC is over 7,000 individuals - though there is membership overlap between the two organizations - a higher response rate would have yielded additional findings. For context, the A*CENSUS II All Archivists Survey received

[11] Karina K. L. Mak, Sabina Kleitman, and Maree J. Abbott, "Impostor Phenomenon Measurement Scales: A Systematic Review," *Frontiers in Psychology* 10 (2019).

5,699 unique responses.[12] Additionally, responses to the Clance IP scale portion of the survey are inherently subjective and may have resulted in response bias.

Results

Participants

Of the 325 survey respondents, participants were mostly white (89.20%), female (82.20%), and over the age of 35 (68.30%). Most participants obtained a graduate, professional degree, or PhD (96.60%), have been working in their current role between 0-5 years (60.30%), work full-time (91.40%), and work between 35-39 (40.60%) or 40 hours or greater (32.30%) per week. Around 51.50% reported they worked in academia (i.e., 25.20% in a public institution and 26.30% in a private institution). Other common facilities include government (12.30%), museums (8.00%), and private business (5.80%).

After participants completed the Clance survey, each participant's score was summed to create a total IP score for each participant. The average total IP score was 65.60, with a median of 67. The minimum score was 25, and the maximum score was 99. The mean indicates that, on average, participants fall into the "frequently experiences impostor phenomenon" category. Based on each participant's summed score and Clance's criteria for the four different categories of IP, 29 participants had few impostor characteristics (8.92%), 84 participants had moderate impostor experiences (25.85%), 149 participants frequently have impostor feelings (45.85%), and 63 participants have intense IP (19.38%) (see Figure 1). The mean total IP score for the 29 participants in the few impostor characteristics category was 33.45, the mean for the 84 participants in the moderate impostor experience category was 50.67, the mean for the 149 participants in the frequent level was 70.67, and the mean for the 63 participants in the intense feelings category was 88.33.

[12] Makala Skinner and Ioana Hulbert, "A*CENSUS II All Archivists Survey Report." Ithaka S+R. Last Modified 22 August 2022, https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.317224.

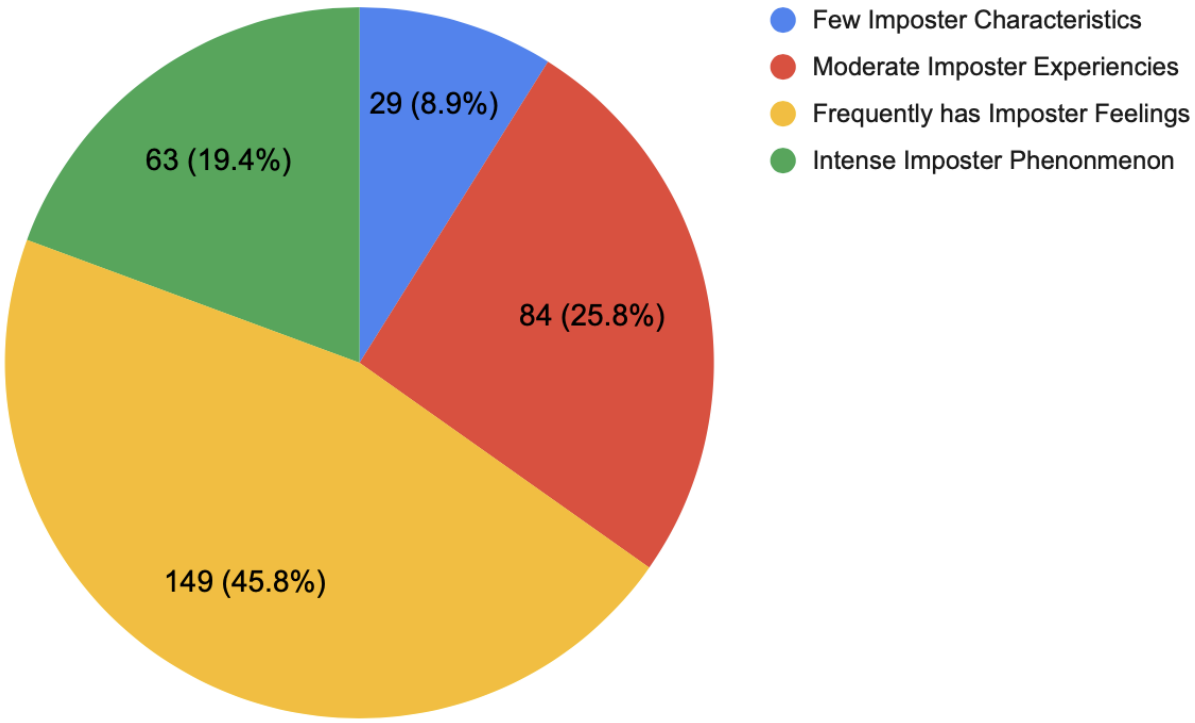

Figure 1. Pie Chart of Frequency of the IP Categories

Statistical Analysis

The following sections will report means (*M*) and standard deviations (*SD*) of our research propositions. A one-way between-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) will be used when we are testing the difference between three or more groups, while an independent sample t-test will be used when we are comparing two groups. Specifically, we are testing to see if there are any statistically significant differences between groups to understand any variations that may be present in the data. When we are interpreting the results of an ANOVA, we will look at the *F*-statistic to see the ratio of variance between our different group means to the variance within the groups. When we are interpreting the results of the independent sample t-test, we look at the *t*-statistic to see the ratio of the difference between our two group means to the variability of the group. Both tests will provide a *p*-value to report if there are significant differences between groups. Our *p*-value threshold is set at $p < 0.05$, indicating that a *p*-value less than 0.05 is statistically significant.

IP Category	*n*	*M*	*SD*	Minimum	Maximum
Few	29	33.45	3.77	25	39
Moderate	84	50.67	5.96	40	60
Frequent	149	70.67	5.74	61	80
Intense	63	88.33	5.5	81	99

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Impostor Phenomenon Category on Impostor Phenomenon Scores

Our first research proposition was to test if there were any significant differences between the four IP categories. The results of the one-way ANOVA were significant and Table 1 provides the means and standard deviations for each of the four IP categories. The results indicate that there were significant

differences between the four groups, which aligns with how the categories were defined, $F(3, 321) = 901.50$, $p < .001$. Thus, the categorization of the four different IP levels is meaningful to classify varying levels of IP.

Our second research proposition was to test if there were any significant differences between our 6 age categories on IP scores. These age groupings match those used in A*CENSUS II. The results of the one-way ANOVA were significant and Table 2 provides the means and standard deviations of the six age categories, $F(5, 319) = 16.38$, $p < .001$. Specifically, as age increased, the average IP score decreased. This finding suggests that IP may decrease with age, potentially reflecting increased experience, confidence, and resilience.

Age	*n*	*M*	*SD*	Minimum	Maximum
18 -24	5	80.4	15.03	63	93
25 - 34	98	72.58	12.98	44	98
35 - 44	102	68.57	16.99	25	99
45 - 54	67	61.01	15.91	31	96
55 - 64	40	53.28	16.45	28	84
65+	13	45.62	13.19	28	75

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Participant Age on Sum of Impostor Phenomenon Scores

Our third research proposition was to test if there were any significant differences between years in a current role and IP scores. A one-way ANOVA was significant and Table 3 provides the means and standard deviations for the six years in primary role categories, $F(5, 318) = 8.70$, $p < .001$. Specifically, as years in the role increased, IP decreased. This may suggest that as individuals spend more time in their position, they may feel more confident in their abilities, thus experiencing decreased IP.

Years in Current Role	*n*	*M*	*SD*	Minimum	Maximum
0 - 5	196	69.81	15.75	28	99
5 - 10	59	62.97	16.92	25	94
10 - 15	25	58.96	16.36	32	91
15 - 20	17	58.12	16.81	29	96
20 - 25	15	52.53	16.79	31	80
25+	12	49.92	18.54	30	94

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Participant Years in Current Primary Role on Impostor Phenomenon Scores

Next, we ran a series of independent sample t-tests to test differences between two groups. Due to having unequal sample sizes in our groups, we had to check the assumption of equal variances. We interpreted the results of the Levene's test for the equality of variances. If the *p*-value was nonsignificant, we continued with the standard independent samples t-test because it indicates that the assumption of equal variances was met.

Our fourth research proposition was to test if there were any significant differences between females (n = 267) and males (n = 47) in IP experiences. Levene's test for equality of variances was not significant, therefore we proceeded with the standard independent samples t-test, $F(1, 312) = .33$, $p = .568$. The results indicated that there were significant differences in IP scores between females and males, $t(312) = -2.01$, $p = .045$, $d = -.32$. Specifically, females had higher IP levels ($M = 66.12$, $SD = 17.15$) than males ($M = 60.72$, $SD = 15.68$). It should be noted that there were nine participants who indicated that their gender was neither female nor male, and two participants preferred not to say, but due to a small sample size within both categories, they were not analyzed in the t-test. See Table 4 for the full descriptive statistics for all of the gender categories on scores of IP.

Our fifth research proposition was to test if there were any significant differences between participants who felt that their current institution provided adequate support (n = 226) and those who felt that their institution did not provide support (n = 96). The results of the Levene's test was nonsignificant, therefore an independent samples t-test was conducted, $F(1, 320) = 2.63$, $p = .106$. The results indicated that there was a significant difference in IP scores between those who had institutions that supported them and those who felt their institution did not support them, $t(320) = -2.62$, $p = .009$, $d = -.32$. Specifically, those who reported they did not have adequate support had higher IP levels ($M = 69.42$, $SD = 15.66$), and those who had support ($M = 63.98$, $SD = 17.61$). See Table 5 for the full descriptive statistics.

Gender	*n*	*M*	*SD*	Minimum	Maximum
Male	47	60.72	15.68	31	96
Female	267	66.11	17.15	25	99
Other	9	74.89	20.84	33	98
Prefer Not to Say	2	71	12.73	62	80

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Gender on Impostor Phenomenon Scores

Institutional Support	*n*	*M*	*SD*	Minimum	Maximum
Yes	226	63.98	17.61	25	98
No	96	69.42	15.66	31	99

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for Perceived Institutional Support on Impostor Phenomenon Scores

Our sixth research proposition was to test if there were any significant differences between those who were caregivers and those who were not on IP experiences. An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare individuals who were caregivers (n = 88) and non-caregivers (n = 234). The results of the Levene's test was nonsignificant, $F(1, 320) = .00$, $p = .999$, therefore the standard independent samples t-test was conducted. The results indicated that there was not a significant difference in IP scores between caregivers and non-caregivers, $t(320) = -.13$, $p = .90$, $d = -.02$.

Exploratory Analysis

We wanted to see if participants were correct in self-selecting their IP experiences before taking the IP survey. After completion of the demographic questions and before the Clance survey, participants were asked to indicate if they believed they had experienced an IP in the past. Response options for this question were "Yes-I am currently" (64.81%), "Yes- in the past, but not currently" (21.61%) "No" (11.11%), and "I am unsure" (2.47%). These self-assessments were then compared to the IP category assigned based on their survey scores. Some notable trends include that those who thought they were currently experiencing IP, had survey results that were consistent with their belief; of the 210 participants who believed they were currently experiencing IP, 31 of them had survey results that placed them in the moderate category, 119 in the frequent category, and 60 in the intense category.

As for the 36 individuals who believed they had not experienced the IP, 20 participants had results consistent with the few category, 14 for moderate, and 2 for the frequent category. As for the 70 individuals who reported they had previously experienced IP, but were not currently, 8 had results consistent with the few category, 35 were in the moderate category, 24 were in the frequent category, and 3 were in the intense category. Lastly, for the 8 participants unsure if they were currently or had experienced IP in the past, 1 had results consistent with the few category, 4 in the moderate category, and 3 in the frequent category. Overall, despite minimal inconsistencies, participants were relatively correct in their interpretations of their IP before they took the survey. See Table 6 for the full table of self-reported IP beliefs and participants' actual IP scores.

Self-Reported IP	Few		Moderate		Frequently		Intense	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes - Currently	0	0	31	9.57	119	36.73	60	18.52
Yes - In the Past	8	2.47	35	10.8	24	7.41	3	0.93
No	20	6.17	14	4.32	2	0.062	0	0
I am Unsure	1	0.31	4	1.23	3	0.93	0	0

Table 6: Frequencies for Self-Reported Impostor Phenomenon and Obtained Impostor Phenomenon Scores (Category)

Discussion

Prevalence of IP in Our Community

Our survey showed that there were significant differences between the categories we used to measure the frequency of IP feelings. It showed that IP is prevalent among our respondents, with a mean total IP score of 65.60 and a median of 67 corresponding to the "frequently experiences IP" category (61-80). This is not directly comparable to the 2014 study of IP in librarians or the 2019 study of IP in health science librarians due to their use of a different scale; the 2014 study reports that scores around 42 (on the Harvey IP scale of 0-84) "indicate possible troubles due to imposter feelings, and scores in the upper range suggest significant anxiety" – their results showed that 12.78% of their respondents scored over 42, indicating 1/8th of their population had "significant" IP feelings, whereas the 2019 study indicated that 1/7th of their respondents fell into the over-42 score category.[13] Comparatively, 65.20% of our respondents fell into either the "frequently has impostor feelings" or "intense impostor feelings" categories, with nearly 1/5th of respondents in the "intense" category. While the two scales cannot be compared apples to apples, our results suggest a higher level of IP feelings in archivists. It is also worth noting that the world of our respondents and general stress levels changed a lot – both of the librarian-focused studies were conducted before the global COVID-19 pandemic, and our results were collected at the end of the pandemic. We do not know if that could affect impostor feelings. A post-COVID-19 survey could provide a point of comparison.

Factors Leading to Increased IP

Age and time in role: Our results showed that as age increased, IP score decreased, and as years in role increased, IP decreased. The means for each age and time-in-role group spanned the "moderate" and "frequent" categories. This reflects agreement with the results of the 2014 and 2019 studies, except in the 2014 study where respondents with 6-10 years of experience had a mean score lower than both cohorts above and below them (3-6 and 10-20 years).[14] It is also worth noting that the 2014 and 2019 studies both asked about years of experience, whereas our study asked about years in a primary role, which means years at a specific job/employer rather than years in archives altogether. As noted in the 2014 study, IP feelings can start afresh when an experienced archivist moves to a new job. A systematic review conducted by Bravata et al.[15] covered studies that report instances of IP by age. Out of the six studies, two reported that an increase in age was related to a decrease in impostor syndrome experiences, one reported

[13] Clark et al., "Perceived Inadequacy," 258-259; Barr-Walker et al., "Measuring Impostor Phenomenon," 324.

[14] Clark et al., "Perceived Inadequacy," 259-260; Barr-Walker et al., "Measuring Impostor Phenomenon," 326-328.

[15] Dena M. Bravata et al., "Prevalence, Predictors, and Treatment of Impostor Syndrome: A Systematic Review." *Journal of General Internal Medicine : JGIM* 35, no. 4 (2020): 1271, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-019-05364-1. Note that this review did not include the two librarian studies.

that finding in working professionals but not undergraduates and the other three studies found no effect for age.

Sex: Our survey results indicated that there *were* significant differences in IP scores between females and males, with a mean IP score of 66.11 vs. 60.72. While statistically significant, this still puts males and females relatively close to each other, with the means in the same "frequently" category. However, the literature on the differences of IP feelings between genders/sexes shows more mixed results. The literature does indicate a history of hypotheses and results that women will experience more frequent and/or intense IP feelings[16] due to things like "fear of success" and social norms for women in the workplace,[17] though both the Clance and Imes article and the Horner article are from the 1970s when social norms for women in the workplace were different than today. The more recent 2014 and 2019 librarian studies did not find significant differences in IP feelings based on gender.[18] In the systematic review conducted by Bravata et al., reviewing studies from 1990-2018, 33 articles compared impostor syndrome by gender. 16 of those studies found that women reported higher instances of impostor syndrome compared to males, while 17 studies did not find any statistically significant differences. When restricting the articles to populations of workers (e.g., removing students), four articles found significant differences and six articles did not find significant differences between gender and impostor syndrome.[19] Analyzing this is a more complicated task than can be accomplished by this paper. While social norms around women in the workplace have changed since the 1970s, it is generally accepted that expectations for the behavior of women and men in the workplace still differ, pay equity has not yet been achieved, etc. It should also be noted that the Bravata review spanned many professions, some of which are more male-dominated than librarianship and archives, and we are not sure how the dominant gender of a profession might affect that gender's frequency of IP feelings.

Support: Our survey asked, "Do you feel like you have the institutional support to perform your duties in your current role?" as one of our assumptions was that a supportive work environment might lead to lower IP feelings frequency. The mean IP score for archivists who said yes (70% of respondents) was 63.98 vs. 69.42 for those who said no (30%) – while this leaves both sets with a mean in the same "frequently" group, it indicates that delving deeper into the type and quantity of support from one's institution may be an avenue for further investigation.

We wanted to investigate what support archivists were receiving and how that might impact IP feelings. Only 16 participants (4.90%) indicated receiving some sort of preparation (e.g., workshops or seminars) in their graduate education to help address IP. The 16 participants who indicated that they received support or preparation had a mean of 68.25 (*SD* = 14.90), 278 individuals reported not receiving support and had a mean of 66.06 (*SD* = 16.93), and 30 individuals reported they were unsure if they received support and had a mean of 59.28 (*SD* = 19.79). Future research is needed to determine whether these differences are statistically significant and to explore potential factors that influence these outcomes.

Caregiving: Overall, our results generally fell in line with expectations, though we were surprised to find that our survey results showed no significant difference between the frequency of IP feelings between people who do and do not provide direct care for people in their homes (i.e., caring for one's children or elderly parents). We had expected that caregiving responsibilities might have put additional pressure on the caregivers, leading to increased IP frequency, but the data does not support that conclusion. It is also

[16] Clance and Imes, "The Imposter Phenomenon," 1.

[17] Horner, "Toward An Understanding," 157–175.

[18] Barr-Walker et al., "Measuring Impostor Phenomenon."

[19] Bravata et al., "Prevalence, Predictors, and Treatment of Impostor Syndrome," 1271.

interesting to note that just over one-quarter of our respondents reported caregiving responsibilities, whereas A*CENSUS II showed that caregiving responsibilities affected at least 48% of respondents.[20] However, we have not found much literature regarding IP and caregiving responsibilities in order to compare our results.

Limitations

Due to the differences in sample size between groups, we were unable to determine whether race, level of education, job classification, primary functions, or supervisory responsibilities affected the prevalence of IP. For example, we had 290 white participants and 26 participants who reported a different race-ethnicity. If the groups were not close to equal, we used the Levene's test to determine if they could still be tested, and the results indicated that they could not. Because of this, we cannot make any assumptions for these categories that one group experiences more IP than another, that there are significant differences between the groups, etc., limiting the number of factors possibly affecting IP that we can analyze. This could be a potential future research topic for folks who want to look deeper, if they can recruit a more even pool, though it is possible that our pool was a representative sample of the target population, in which case the numbers may always be challenging to interpret.

Additionally, our survey may be subject to response bias if people did not answer the Clance IP questions honestly and to self-selection bias if specific groups of people (e.g., people who do not feel IP's effects, who do not find IP to be important, or who do not have the time or the drive to be actively engaged in professional listservs) chose not to participate in large enough numbers as to skew the results. This could potentially shift the prevalence of IP in either direction. For example, if more seasoned archivists who feel secure in their roles and professional expertise chose not to participate because they do not feel IP is relevant to them, then their loss would artificially inflate our mean IP score, while lack of participation from younger or less experienced archivists who experience enough IP feelings that they do not have time to fill out a survey would have decreased the mean IP score.

Discussion – Potential Interventions

Now that we have assessed the prevalence of IP within our field, we can explore what is being done about it and what could or should be done in the future. We looked at current actions within professional organizations and employer institutions, suggestions from our presentation audience, and literature around IP interventions.

Following our survey, we investigated what resources were available on IP from SAA and the American Library Association (ALA). As of summer 2024, SAA had no educational offerings mentioning IP or IS, and ALA only had one webinar in recent years, when the Library Leadership and Management Association (LLAMA) offered "Battling Impostor Syndrome in the Workplace," a 90-minute webinar in 2018. Anecdotally, educational offerings on IP at colleges and universities (the main employers of our survey respondents) are either non-existent, aimed at students but possibly still relevant, or infrequently offered. While some sessions use the terms IP and IS interchangeably, we should remember that clinical, personal impostor syndrome is separate from (but related to) the social phenomenon of IP. If you suffer from impostor feelings to the extent that it seriously affects your everyday life at work/home, please seek professional help from a licensed therapist.

When we presented our findings at SAA's Research Forum in 2024, we polled our audience, asking via Google Form: "What can we do to combat impostor phenomenon? How would you like to see your home

[20] Skinner and Hulbert, "A*CENSUS II All Archivists Survey Report."

institution, or your professional organization, address impostor phenomenon? Any other ideas?" One respondent suggested research into current efforts to combat IP and their levels of success to help us identify potential next steps for our field, which we investigated via the scoping and systematic reviews in the following paragraph. Another respondent suggested group therapy sessions for IP sufferers (a legitimate intervention, according to our research). The final respondent provided detailed suggestions for addressing managerial behavior. They asserted that respectful treatment of supervisees, especially in public, is critical. They suggested interventions, including supervisor training, guidelines for constructive feedback, accountability mechanisms for poor supervisor behavior, and developing a culture of support.

To examine briefly what interventions are being used in other fields, we can look at recent systematic and scoping reviews of IP research. A systematic review from 2019 showed that "none of the included articles presented an evaluation of a specific treatment … for managing imposter symptoms,"[21] but mentioned that early work on private practice suggested things like validating feelings and providing group therapy to help sufferers feel less alone. A systematic review of workplace-relevant IP literature first published in 2023[22] did not assess treatments or interventions but did show that leadership styles are related to experiences of IP, revealing that as a possible avenue for further research and interventions. They also suggested that conceptual imprecision regarding IP, specifically whether IP is a trait (internal, more enduring) and/or state (external cause, short term), affects how researchers connect it to workplace outcomes. They also showed how various theories have been applied to the study of IP and briefly mentioned how those can shed light on ways to positively influence workplace behavior.
A scoping review of interventions addressing the IP of adults in a professional context, published in 2024[23] (after our survey), showed that most of the studies included in their review were undertaken after 2018, and that a few fields have explored possible solutions, like group workshops or leadership help, but nothing was GLAMs specific. They identified two main types of interventions: training and counseling (coaching interventions, clinical supervision, support groups). The training type of interventions showed increased knowledge about IP and positive feelings of empowerment and group connection, among other effects. Group-based interventions were frequently suggested to mitigate the feelings of isolation often experienced with IP, and the counseling-type interventions encouraged mental effort and implementation of coping strategies. They noted that the social dimension of the work environment was accounted for by some studies and that the systemic nature of IP suggests "it may therefore be relevant to address it within educational programs, integrations strategies, and human resource management policies."[24]

Conclusion

We set out to determine the prevalence of IP in the archival field, as our professional population had not yet been assessed in such a study, and to explore what factors might affect IP feelings. Previous studies and systematic reviews showed that IP had some presence in the closely related field of librarianship, and systematic/scoping reviews of IP literature suggested many possible factors without all data pointing to specific factors applying across the studied populations. Our respondents showed that, on average, participants fall into the "frequently experiences impostor phenomenon" category, and over 65% of respondents either experienced frequent or intense IP feelings.

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[21] Bravata et al., "Prevalence, Predictors, and Treatment of Impostor Syndrome," 1271.

[22] Daniel P. Gullifor, et al. "The Impostor Phenomenon at Work: A Systematic Evidence-based Review, Conceptual Development, and Agenda for Future Research." *Journal of Organizational Behavior (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.)* 45, no. 2 (February 1, 2024): 234–51, https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2733.

[23] Emma Para, et al. "Interventions Addressing the Impostor Phenomenon: A Scoping Review." *Frontiers in Psychology* 15 (March 28, 2024), https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1360540.

[24] Para et al., "Interventions," 13.

Our results also demonstrate that IP is prevalent across demographics in our field and gave some insight into factors that lead to increased IP feelings. As age increased, respondents' IP score decreased, and as years in role increased, also IP decreased. Being female and working at an institution that did not provide institutional support to complete one's work (as assessed by the respondent) both led to slight increases in IP score, but caregiving did not.

There are some limitations to our study, including our sample not allowing for analysis of the influence of several demographic factors, including race, on IP feelings. We are not certain if our sample is thoroughly representative enough to generalize our results to the whole population of American archival workers, and our survey may be subject to response bias and self-selection bias.

Since our data shows that IP affects people in the profession, we need to look at what we can do about it. There are multiple avenues for future action, the first of which is research – one of the reviews suggested that research on IP, in general, could better assess what negative effects IP is having on workplace performance. Such a study could be applied specifically to archives workers and might help us understand qualitatively how IP shows up in the profession in terms of the resulting behaviors, be they undesirable, like shame resulting in missed opportunities for promotions or new projects, or desirable, like using feelings of inadequacy to drive motivation and learning.[25] These behaviors could shed light on what interventions would likely address those negative outcomes. In addition, this work can help us discern the internal feelings of inadequacy that characterize IP. Such a study might also be able to tap into the traits vs. states debate mentioned in the Guilford et al. 2023 review. If it can be determined whether archivists are experiencing IP as trait-based (e.g., because we tend to be perfectionists) or state-based (e.g., because archival work is growing more demanding with the increase in standards, digital stewardship, etc.)[26], that would inform approaches to interventions (treatments).

Other avenues for research are comparing types of interventions to assess their effectiveness specifically in archival workers, which could inform the interventions that our professional organizations offer, and comparing leadership styles to assess their effect on IP, which could inform supervisor-specific interventions. Whatever research is pursued, the systematic and scoping reviews suggest that future research should ideally be scientific and robust, so results can be analyzed and compared to other studies to expand our knowledge base. To facilitate future research, we intend to place the data gathered for this study in the SAA Dataverse.

The second avenue for future action is initiating interventions. Taking action to address IP without the sound theory that the Gullifor article calls for may not be the most scientific approach, but waiting for firm results from other fields before we take action could take years. While Para et. al. suggested that IP could be relevant to address in "educational programs,"[27] our study noted that only 4.9% of participants received some kind of IP preparation in graduate school. This leads us to suggest that archival graduate programs could incorporate interventions like IP education webinars, group sessions, etc., though research into interventions specifically for students was outside the scope of this paper. Professional organizations are also in a unique position to offer specialized IP support that is tailored to the needs of archives workers, as opposed to what would likely be more generalized training developed by and offered through an employer (university, government body, corporation, etc.). We suggest that SAA and other archival

[25] Jodi Allison-Bunnell, "Responses & Retrospectives: Not Just Your Problem: Metadata Shame, Imposter Syndrome, and Archivists." ArchivesAWARE, Society of American Archivists, December 3, 2019.
[26] It may also be worth considering the effect of American capitalist society's tendency to value production and innovation over the unseen labor of maintaining historical collections, metadata, etc., and folding in "vocational awe" when exploring trait vs. state IP feelings.
[27] Para et al., "Interventions," 13.

professional organizations explore free and low-cost offerings to address IP, utilizing some of the interventions mentioned by Para, et. al. This could include offering training on IP education and the emotional skill building to combat it, as well as turning some of the peer mentoring groups into IP peer support groups, with a little bit of structure and guidance developed by SAA. SAA could also offer an intentional pairing of mentors with mentees (e.g., by adding IP as a possible topic selection), and they could offer training or peer support and education groups for supervisors to encourage leadership within our field that can nurture our talented colleagues.

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