

ISME 2020 – Musician’s Health and Wellness Special Interest Group

Impostor Phenomenon Responses of Music Education Master’s and Doctoral Students and Early-Career Faculty

Wendy L. Sims

University of Missouri, Columbia, MO USA

simsw@missouri.edu

An equitable and inclusive society is one designed to maximize the success of all its member participants. This includes people with various psychological issues that might affect their mental and/or physical health and well being. Recent research has shown that the potentially debilitating psychological construct identified as the Impostor Phenomenon (IP) was experienced by music education graduate (master’s and doctoral) students and early-career music education faculty members.

IP was first identified by psychologist Pauline Rose Clance, and defined as the irrational feelings held by successful and high-achieving individuals that they were not deserving of their successes or had achieved them by luck, resulting in fears that they would be exposed and identified as a fraud or “intellectual phony.” Those with frequent and intense impostor feelings may suffer from anxiety, stress, depression, procrastination, and job burnout. Clance created an instrument to identify IP feelings that has been used and validated in many research studies over the past 40 years in various professions and locations.

The results of two recent music education studies investigating IP responses indicated that while impostor feelings were most frequent and intense in the female participants, as the previous IP research would predict, male participants also experienced IP to varying degrees. Early career music education faculty members were found to experience the strongest IP feelings in their role as researchers, as opposed to teachers. Most of the graduate students experienced at least moderate levels of impostor feelings related to their graduate studies, with the majority experiencing these frequently or intensely. The profile of the graduate student most likely to experience impostor feelings was found to be a single female without children, the first person in her family to pursue a graduate degree, in the 3rd year of a face-to-face graduate program. While these studies were completed with individuals in the U.S.A., there is research that has identified this phenomenon with students and professionals from many other countries, as well.

There are several research-based strategies that can help people overcome IP. Individuals often feel better just by learning about IP, identifying and labeling their feelings, and finding out that others feel that way, too—that they are not alone. Professors can discuss this phenomenon with their students, and those working with young faculty can share this information. Research has found that graduate students who are new to research can assuage their feelings by direct instruction in how to read literature in the field and how to write literature reviews. Mentoring, especially when that includes the mentor sharing

their own experiences, successes, and failures with the research writing and publication process, is helpful for both graduate students and young faculty.

This session is designed to assist conference participants in understanding and identifying impostor feelings that they may have, and/or that may be affecting the well-being of their students and colleagues. It is also the desire to inspire others to consider research into IP with other music professional; for example, performers and conductors. As IP becomes more well known within the music education field, there is the potential to help those experiencing impostor feelings to work towards feeling better about themselves, and to assist others. This will increase the likelihood that all those in our profession will be able to achieve higher levels of psychological well being, enabling them to achieve their fullest potential.

For more information:

Pauline Rose Clance—Impostor Phenomenon Website: <http://paulineroseclance.com>

Sims, W. L. & Cassidy, J. W. (2019). Impostor phenomenon responses of early-career music education faculty. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 67(1), 45-61.

Sims, W. L. & Cassidy, J. W. (2020). Impostor feelings of music education graduate students. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 68(3), 249-263.