

The Impostor Phenomenon and Achievement Motivation Among Emerging Filipino Adults: The Moderating Role of Personality

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ABSTRACT

The impostor phenomenon (IP) has traditionally been understood as a trait or experience common among accomplished individuals, with most studies focusing on Western populations. This research broadens the discourse by examining IP among Emerging Filipino Adults (EFAs) aged 18 to 25, a relatively underexplored group navigating the transition into adulthood. Specifically, the study investigates the prevalence of impostor experiences in this demographic, their relationship to achievement motivation, and the moderating role of personality traits. Examined through standardized measures on impostor experiences, motivation, and personality, data from a large sample of EFAs revealed that impostor feelings are frequent in this group. Results show that impostor experiences are closely tied to achievement-related tasks, particularly those driven by fear of failure rather than hope for success. Furthermore, the personality trait of neuroticism intensifies the link between impostor experiences and motivation, highlighting how dispositional factors interact with contextual pressures to shape these experiences. These findings suggest that impostor feelings are not merely the byproduct of significant accomplishments but can emerge early in adulthood, sustained by both internal traits and external achievement demands. The study underscores the need to view the impostor phenomenon as both dispositional and contextual, opening new directions for interventions, institutional practices, and further research on non-Western populations.

Keywords: *Impostor phenomenon, achievement motivation, personality, emerging adults, Filipinos*

INTRODUCTION

Individuals emerging into adulthood often do not fully identify as adults or adolescents but adopt qualities of both, leading to identity confusion and lower self-efficacy in their academic and occupational endeavors (Arnett, 2000; Lane, 2015; Schubert & Bowker, 2019). Although historically characterized as adaptive, self-assured, high in self-esteem, and positive in disposition (Puyat, 2005; Suan & Magallanes, 2020), Filipinos emerging into adulthood confront numerous changes and challenges and experience tension and turmoil in their transition into adulthood and professional life.

Education is a key tool for alleviating poverty among Filipinos, and obtaining a degree is highly desirable because it improves one's chances of securing a decent-paying job (Pascual, 2014). For young Filipinos, academic stressors are also associated with fear of failure, fear of choosing the wrong field of study and work,

pressure to succeed, and expectations of future employment (Dy et al., 2015; Savella, 2021). Additionally, succeeding in academic or occupational tasks affords individuals social approval and recognition (Korpershoek et al., 2021). Filipinos riddled with these economic, social, and psychological pressures in emerging adulthood may have considerably worse consequences in this transitional developmental stage. Identifying factors that compound these negative experiences can aid counselors, educators, and emerging Filipino adults in navigating this arduous transition and better position them to enter professional life (Lane, 2015).

Of particular interest to this study is the impostor phenomenon, which Lane's grounded theory (2015) identified as potentially intensifying the negative experiences of individuals as they transition into adulthood. The impostor phenomenon is the experience of feeling fraudulent despite external success (Clance & Imes, 1978). It has been correlated with anxiety and depression (McGregor et al., 2008; Bravata et al., 2020), low self-esteem, and self-efficacy (Royse-Roskowski, 2010), issues common among emerging adults.

Using Lane's (2015) grounded theory of the impostor phenomenon in individuals emerging into adulthood, the objectives of this research study are threefold. First, it aims to address a population gap in understanding the impostor phenomenon by establishing its presence and severity in a non-Caucasian, underrepresented sample of emerging Filipino adults and providing baseline data for future researchers. Studies have mainly focused on Western populations, despite a growing body of literature showing variations in impostor phenomenon experiences across other demographic groups (Bravata et al., 2020).

Secondly, the study explores how the experiences of impostor phenomenon among emerging Filipino adults relate to their achievement motivation. Lane (2015) identified achievement motivation as a performative impact of the impostor phenomenon on emerging adults in his framework, challenging the notion that impostor experiences result from high achievement. Given the value emerging Filipino adults place on meritocracy and the various sources of pressure they are burdened with, it is reasonable to assume that their experiences of impostor syndrome influence their achievement motivation.

Finally, the present study also aims to understand impostor phenomenon among emerging adults by determining whether personality traits moderate the relationship between impostor phenomenon experiences among emerging Filipino adults and their level of achievement motivation. The impostor phenomenon has been repeatedly associated with individual personality traits such as anxiety, perfectionism, and procrastination, suggesting that it resides in broader personality domains (Bernard et al., 2002; Lane, 2015). Some research studies have applied the Five-Factor Model of personality and found associations between the impostor phenomenon and the Neuroticism and Conscientiousness factors (Bernard et al., 2002; Chae et al., 1995). Additionally, research has associated personality traits with achievement motivation and goal orientations (Payne et al., 2007; Bipp, 2008). However, to the researcher's knowledge, no study has examined personality traits

as possible moderator variables in the relationships between experiences of the impostor phenomenon and achievement motivation.

Emerging Filipino Adults

Arnett (2004) describes “emerging adulthood” (EA) as the period from ages 18 to 25, marked by identity exploration, instability, and hope. For emerging Filipino adults (EFAs), fear of failure, high self-expectations, and achievement-related stress significantly influence their personal and social lives (Dy et al., 2015; Korpershoek et al., 2021). Limited research exists on whether EFAs' experiences align with those of other emerging adults. Regardless of potential variations in EAs, Arnett (2004) argues that understanding this period in the human lifespan is necessary and that societal efforts should expand to support emerging adults during this transition.

The Impostor Phenomenon

Dr. Pauline Clance and Dr. Suzanne Imes introduced the Imposter Phenomenon (IP) after observing high-achieving women who felt fraudulent in their accomplishments, attributing their success to factors such as luck or clerical errors rather than their own ability (Clance & Imes, 1978). While initially proposed as a psychological condition, IP has more recently been conceptualized as a personality trait (Bravata et al., 2019). Kolligian and Sternberg (1991) also suggest that IP is “perceived fraudulence,” a normative response to highly competitive settings that leads to heightened self-monitoring. More recently, Slank (2019) argues that those with high IP reasonably doubt their own talents by recognizing external factors that contribute to their achievements.

The IP is associated with low self-efficacy, an inability to internalize success, an external locus of control, and a fear of exposure (Sakulku & Alexander, 2011; Neureiter & Traut-Mattausch, 2016; Parkman, 2016). It correlates positively with perfectionism, extraversion, and neuroticism (Chae et al., 1995; Bernard et al., 2002). IP is also associated with lower job satisfaction, reduced organizational commitment, and limited opportunities for career advancement (Vergauwe et al., 2015; Hutchins et al., 2018). It affects diverse student populations across academic levels (Brauer & Proyer, 2017; Rosenstein et al., 2020).

Early studies suggested that IP was more prevalent in women (Clance & Imes, 1978; Harvey & Katz, 1985). More recent findings show no significant gender difference (Leonhardt et al., 2017; McClain et al., 2016). Research on age and IP suggests that older individuals report fewer IP experiences (Thompson et al., 1998; Chae et al., 1995), although some studies found no age effect (Want & Kleitman, 2006). Lane (2015) highlights IP as a significant issue for emerging adults, intensifying their challenges during the transition to professional life.

Achievement Motivation

Achievement motivation (AM) is an internal drive that prompts individuals to pursue success by setting personal standards, demonstrating persistence, and overcoming challenges (Lang & Fries, 2006; Singh, 2011). It encompasses two tendencies: the

Hope of Success (HS; approach) and the Fear of Failure (FF; avoidance) (Heckhausen, 1991). A higher level of AM is associated with better academic performance and lower dropout rates (Singh, 2011). Cultural influences and attribution styles also affect AM. In their theory of motivation, Ilagan et al. (2014) asserted that Filipino workers are motivated by career growth, recognition, and job enjoyment. They may sometimes prioritize self-satisfaction and recognition over financial rewards (Franco, 2008).

Clance's (1985) impostor cycle describes shifts in motivation during achievement tasks. Impostor-related fears and self-doubt lead to over-preparation or procrastination, followed by rushed work (Clance, 1985; Thompson et al., 2000; Ross et al., 2001). After completion, impostors often feel a temporary sense of relief but downplay their success, attributing it to luck or extra effort. While AM relates to goal-oriented behavior, there is limited research directly connecting AM to the IP.

Personality

Personality research often focuses on trait theories, which suggest that inherent traits shape personality. A prominent model in this field is the Five-Factor Model (FFM), developed by McCrae and Costa (1991, 2003) through factor analysis and later expanded into the Five-Factor Theory (FFT). Their work has strongly influenced personality research, establishing the “Big Five” traits: Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism (Feist et al., 2018). With the recent prominence of context-specific and indigenous psychologies, it is also essential to consider Filipino personality traits relevant to the present study.

Hiya is generally translated as “shy” or “shame” and has two meanings: an emotion related to fear of disgrace and a virtue akin to temperance, involving consideration and self-control in social interactions (Lasquety-Reyes, 2016). The meaning of *hiya* can vary depending on affixation (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000), such as *mahiayain* (a shy person) and *kahihiyain* (a sense of propriety). EFAs' *hiya* experience and expressed beyond the social norm can lead to experiences akin to the IP, such as the decreased ability to internalize success, fears of being disgraced or exposed as frauds, and faulty evaluations of their own and others' performance.

To illustrate, EFAs may feel *hiya* when processing success. Social convention and propriety would dictate that Filipinos have ‘*pagkadimayabang*’ or modesty, wherein explicit presentations of one's achievements are discouraged as not to appear superior to others (del Pilar, 2017). For an EFA who highly adheres to this *pagkadimayabang*, IP experiences may amplify their aversion to self-promotion beyond social convention. Hence, EFAs may feel that it is shameful or *nakakahiya* to credit themselves and talk about their achievements with others, even if warranted and well-deserved. In other situations, they may also defer to older individuals rather than assert their opinions to avoid the risk of being shamed or *mapahiya*.

Multiple aspects of EFAs' lives are affected by their level of success in academic or occupational endeavors. It influences their ability to achieve economic stability, gain social recognition, and avoid psychological stressors. Hence, the

present study considers the personality traits of EFAs as essential for investigating factors that influence their AM, thereby contributing to the growing research on the relationship and interaction between personality and motivation.

Theoretical Framework

Although the impostor phenomenon has been steadily gaining research interest, prior studies have primarily focused on highly accomplished individuals in Western contexts (Bravata et al., 2019), reinforcing the notion that impostor experiences are byproducts of significant success. Gaps are identified in the literature. Little is known about the impostor phenomenon in non-Western settings, particularly among those still developing their professional identities, such as emerging Filipino adults. The phenomenon has also rarely been studied in relation to motivational processes, leaving unclear whether impostor experiences arise from high achievement or from serving to motivate individuals in achievement-related tasks. To address these gaps, the present study builds on Lane's (2015) grounded theory, which contextualizes IP in the experiences of emerging adults.

According to Lane (2015), emerging adults attribute their IP to perfectionism and a lack of self-validation. These individuals tend to have high AM, holding themselves to lofty standards and goals. This is consistent with the findings of other studies (Bechtoldt, 2015; Dudău, 2014; Thompson et al., 2000). External factors that aggravate or temper impostor feelings include constant social comparison, feedback evaluation, and experience gain.

Lane (2015) also outlined the performative and affective impacts of IP. In terms of performance impact, individuals experiencing the IP report show increased motivation to maximize their abilities and prove their competence, as well as a tendency to engage in avoidance behaviors, such as procrastination. Affective responses to experiencing IP include fear, worry, anxiety, and, to a lesser extent, the guilt of one's accomplishments.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to examine the Impostor Phenomenon (IP) among Emerging Filipino Adults (EFAs) and its relationship with achievement motivation (AM) and personality traits. Specifically, it seeks to (1) determine the level of Impostor Phenomenon (IP) among Emerging Filipino Adults (EFAs); (2) examine the relationship between IP and Achievement Motivation (AM) among EFAs, and (3) investigate whether the Big Five personality traits moderate the relationship between IP and AM among EFAs.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design. A quantitative descriptive survey design, employing a cross-sectional method, was used to achieve the objectives of the present study. No active intervention was implemented to induce the impostor phenomenon in emerging Filipino adults, as Lane's (2015) theoretical framework proposes it is an expected

occurrence during the transitional stage of emerging adulthood. Hence, the cross-sectional method was employed, as it allows the measurement of existing differences among people, subjects, or phenomena without a time dimension (Lavrakas, 2008). Furthermore, a cross-sectional research design is not geographically bound and is well-suited to gathering and analyzing data from large samples using online surveys (Lavrakas, 2008; Lewis-Beck et al., 2004). These were essential considerations, as the COVID-19 pandemic was still ongoing at the time of the study, and active safety protocols and physical restrictions needed to be followed.

Participants of the Study. A minimum sample of 385 was required at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. The study surveyed 781 emerging Filipino adults (18–25 years old) from Baguio City and nearby Benguet municipalities; after excluding 116 incomplete or outlier responses, 665 valid samples remained. Respondents qualified if they were Filipino nationals aged 18–25, had internet access, could read and understand English, and were willing to provide informed consent. Those outside the age range, non-Filipinos, and individuals unwilling or unable to consent or comprehend English were excluded.

Research Instrument. Data were collected through an online survey consisting of the following measures:

Demographic Questionnaire. Respondents provided basic information, including gender, educational level, and field of study or practice (e.g., Business, Education).

Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS). The 20-item CIPS (Clance & Imes, 1978) assessed impostor feelings using a five-point Likert scale (1 = not at all true to 5 = very true), with higher scores indicating stronger impostor tendencies. The scale has demonstrated excellent reliability ($\alpha = .90\text{--}.96$; French et al., 2008; McClain et al., 2016) and strong construct validity through correlations with the Perceived Fraudulence Scale ($r = .78$, $p \leq .01$; Kolligian & Sternberg, 1991) and the Harvey Impostor Phenomenon Scale ($r = .89$, $p \leq .001$; Harvey, 1981).

In the present study, the CIPS also showed high internal consistency ($\alpha = .91$). Big Five Inventory (BFI). The 44-item BFI (John et al., 1991) measured Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = disagree strongly to 5 = agree strongly). The BFI demonstrates strong test-retest reliability (.80–.90) and acceptable internal consistency across cultures ($\alpha = .70\text{--}.79$; Rammstedt & John, 2007). It correlates well with Goldberg's Trait Descriptive Adjectives (mean $r = .80$) and the NEO-FFI (mean $r = .77$). In the current sample, reliability values ranged from .72 to .82. Achievement Motives Scale–Reduced (AMS-R).

The AMS-R (Lang & Fries, 2006) is a 10-item scale assessing Hope of Success and Fear of Failure using a 5-point Likert format (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Reported internal consistency ranges from .71 to .88. Hope of Success is

positively related to goal setting ($r = .24$, $p \leq .01$), persistence ($r = .25$, $p \leq .01$), and flow ($r = .31$, $p \leq .001$). In the current study, both subscales showed strong reliability ($\alpha = .83$ for Hope of Success; $\alpha = .85$ for Fear of Failure).

Data Gathering Procedures. An online survey was used to collect data, ensuring adherence to safety protocols in place in the Philippines during the COVID-19 pandemic. Request letters for data collection were sent to universities in the Benguet area, targeting EFAs. A Google Form link was shared via institutional emails upon approval. The form included an introduction to the study, an informed consent form, a demographics survey, and three scales: the CIPS, AMS-R, and BFI. Based on a pilot study, the entire survey took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. Another data collection method involved a poster that solicited respondents, which was published on social media platforms such as Facebook. The poster contained the study's title, the researcher's contact details, the inclusion criteria, and a link to the corresponding Google Form.

Data Analysis. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 23 (IBM Corp., 2015). Demographic variables (gender, educational attainment, and field of study/practice) were coded as dummy variables. Scores for the CIPS, BFI, and AMS-R were computed and reverse-scored as required, producing variables for IP, AM (and its subscales: Hope of Success and Fear of Failure), and the five personality traits. Mean IP scores were analyzed to determine the prevalence and severity of IP among EFAs using CIPS cutoffs. Tests of normality (Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Deviation from Linearity) indicated non-normal data; therefore, Welch's ANOVA was used to test demographic group differences, followed by Games-Howell post hoc tests. Pearson correlation analyses examined the relationships between IP and AM, as well as between IP and the AM subscales (HS and FF). Moderation analyses were conducted using Hayes's (2012) PROCESS Macro (Model 1) to test whether personality traits moderated the relationship between IP and AM.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Impostor Phenomenon in Emerging Filipino Adults

The first research problem involves identifying EFAs' IP level using respondents' mean scores on the CIPS, where higher scores indicate more frequent and severe interference with the IP. Table 1 presents respondents' frequent IP experiences ($M=73.37$, $SD=12.95$). IP was initially conceptualized to be experienced by high-achieving individuals, particularly females and other minority groups, who, despite garnering substantial success, have difficulty internalizing success and experience a state of fraudulence or impostorism. However, further research indicates that IP is more common and likely to occur when achievement-related tasks are involved (Hawley, 2019; Bravata et al., 2019; Chakraverty, 2019). Hence, IP would be perceived as contingent on achievement-related tasks rather than the experience of individuals with a particular level of success. The frequent IP

experiences reported by EFAs in the current study support this notion.

Table 1

Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents' Scores on the CIPS

	N	M	SD	Qualitative Interpretation
Impostor Phenomenon	665	73.37	12.95	Frequent

Note. Qualitative Interpretation of CIPS Scores: 0-40 Few IP Experiences; 41-60 Moderate IP Experiences; 61-80 Frequent IP Experiences; 81+ Intense IP Experiences

N indicates sample size, *M* indicates mean, and *SD* indicates standard deviation.

Additionally, IP is socially motivated, as individuals conceal weaknesses to meet societal expectations. Fleischhauer et al. (2021) found that individuals with high IP scores tend to exhibit negative self-presentation, particularly when their performance is public or visible. Similarly, Datu (2017) notes that EFAs, rooted in an interdependent culture, prioritize social norms and maintain a positive image. They often engage in self-reflection or *pagninilay-nilay*, constant self-monitoring, and even self-criticism to judge the appropriateness of their behaviors in social situations (Aruta, 2021). Individuals who experience IP may feel impartial towards their success because they believe that achieving is simply the proper way to behave and not something worth special attention. Success, then, is expected to be empty, leaving individuals with IP feeling undeserving of any positive feedback (Sakulku & Alexander, 2011; Parkman, 2016).

In relation to maintaining a social face and reputation, EFAs are also sensitive to propriety and try to avoid *kahihayan* in their everyday social interactions (Aruta, 2021). This awareness and deference to unwritten social expectations underscore the conceptualization of IP as a socially expected behavior. *Hiya*, depending on its usage, may pertain to restraint and temperance in interacting with others, or to the fear of disgrace from committing something or from being in unacceptable or inappropriate situations (Lasquete-Reyes, 2016). This aligns with some characteristics and correlates of IP, such as having difficulties with internalizing success and self-promotion. Because having *hiya* is both a societal expectation and a social behavior ingrained in Filipino culture, EFAs fear drawing attention to their achievements to avoid being perceived as arrogant and immodest. IP also fosters a desire to continuously "prove oneself" and "keep up appearances." Hence, the sense of *hiya* of EFAs dictates that they have successful outcomes in achievement-related tasks because that is their expected level of performance. However, they should not engage in excessive self-promotion, which, in most cases, results in little or no self-promotion at all because perceptions of what is excessive vary widely.

Furthermore, EFAs are embedded in a collectivist, interdependent culture that prioritizes communal goals, relationships, and expectations over the objectives

and welfare of individual members. Filipinos continue to uphold cultural values that promote smooth interpersonal relationships, such as *pakikibagay* (conformity), *pakikiramdam* (sensitivity to others), and *pakikipagkapwa-tao* (shared inner perception; Reyes, 2015). EFAs define themselves based on their contributions to the collective and their ability to integrate well into their communities. EFAs perceive acceptance and belongingness as a result of meeting the needs and expectations of their in-groups, leading to a more self-effacing and humbler attitude, which, in Du and Jonas's study (2015), negatively correlated with self-esteem. Since EFAs carefully balance societal expectations for success and greater emphasis is placed on the collective rather than the individual, they are highly motivated to do well in achievement-related tasks and, at the same time, maintain a degree of humility and are less likely to internalize success or engage in self-acknowledgment and even perceive it as excessive, making them vulnerable to IP.

Competitive academic and occupational environments, along with "cultures of genius" (Slank, 2019), characterize the ethos of modern meritocratic systems, in which external manifestations of talent, effort, and achievement primarily determine success. EFAs who operate in these meritocratic systems experience validation primarily from producing positive outcomes in achievement-related tasks, rather than from inherent satisfaction and fulfillment in their efforts. Perhaps people feel like impostors, not solely because of personal dispositions or the unstable nature of emerging adulthood, but also because of how success is construed by modern society and the exorbitant standards it upholds and rewards.

Possible sociodemographic differences were investigated to further clarify the IP experiences of EFAs. Kolmogorov-Smirnov values indicated non-normally distributed data for both IP ($W=0.062$, $p=.000$) and AM ($W=0.082$, $p=.000$) variables. Deviation from Linearity values also showed a linear relationship between the variables. Welch's and Games-Howell tests were conducted to determine whether significant differences existed in the mean scores of the demographic groups. And the results from Welch's test showed significant differences in IP levels by gender ($F(1, 665) = 4.349$, $p < .05 = .019$), as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations of Gender Categories and Welch's Test for Unequal Variances for Gender and the Impostor Phenomenon

Gender	Men		Women		Non-Binary		F	Sig.
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Impostor Phenomenon	71.03	13.84	73.75	12.59	79.11	11.79	4.349	0.019*

Note. M indicates mean, and SD indicates standard deviation.

*significant at the 0.05 level

Table 3 summarizes the results from the Games-Howell test. Men and non-binary individuals significantly differ in their levels of IP, with a mean difference of 8.077 ($p < .05 = 0.034$). No significant differences were found among the other gender categories and demographic variables for educational attainment and field of practice.

Table 3

Mean Differences of Games-Howell Post hoc Test for Gender and Impostor Phenomenon

		Mean Difference	Sig.
Women	Men	2.717	.089
	Non-binary	-5.360	.170
Men	Women	-2.717	.089
	Non-binary	-8.077*	.034
Non-binary	Women	5.360	.170
	Men	8.077*	.034

Note. *significant at the 0.05 level

The difference in IP scores between men and non-binary respondents should be interpreted cautiously, given the small sample size of the latter group. According to the Psychological Association of the Philippines (2011), Filipino LGBTQ+ individuals face minority stressors and discrimination, mainly due to their non-adherence to dominant heterosexual norms (Bernardo, 2013). Bravata et al. (2019) propose that inconsistent gender differences in IP suggest that it is prevalent across demographics and is more closely linked to achievement-related tasks than to gender or sociodemographic factors. This study's findings support this perspective.

Slank (2019) further expounds on how the prevailing narrative that women fear success and failure, lack confidence in themselves, and require aid in correcting these self-denigrating beliefs is problematic and harmful. This traditional view emphasizes a false notion that females are solely accountable for their experiences without consideration for larger societal and cultural systems that place them at a disadvantage. In the same vein, Jacobs and Jacobs (2014) and Clark et al. (2014) contend that gender is not as significant a contributor to IP as earlier studies suggested. Other gender groups experience IP at a rate comparable to that of females. The lack of significant differences between the gender groups in the current study reinforces the earlier assumption that IP is not necessarily dependent on individual sociodemographic factors, such as gender or age, but rather on achievement-related tasks.

2. Correlation Between the Impostor Phenomenon and Achievement Motivation

The second research problem seeks to determine the relationship between the respondents' IP and AM levels. As shown in Table 4, there is a significant, positive, and moderate relationship between the IP and AM levels of the EFAs

($F(1,665) = .450$), implying that EFAs who report higher levels of IP also report having higher levels of AM. This provides quantitative evidence for Lane's (2015) assumptions that IP impacts performance, specifically motivation. Other research findings also indicate that impostors have higher levels of AM (Safarzadeh et al., 2012; Chakraverty, 2019).

However, although stated as a "beneficial" performance impact, emerging adults with IP often strive to meet self-imposed high standards, focusing less on self-improvement. They perceive others as naturally capable, feel inadequate, and overcompensate and overwork to achieve comparable success (Parkman, 2016; Noskeau et al., 2021). For impostors, success is not attributed to inherent competence but to how much extra effort they can exert. Hence, heightened levels of AM increase productivity for achievement-related tasks but, concomitantly, further bolster emerging adults' IP experiences. The two specific factors of AM, Hope of Success (HS) and Fear of Failure (FF), were considered to further examine the relationship between IP and AM.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics and Pearson Correlations for Impostor Phenomenon and Achievement Motivation and its Factors, Hope of Success, and Fear of Failure

Variables	n	M	SD	Pearson			
				1	2	3	4
Impostor Phenomenon	665	73.37	12.952	-	.450**	-.183**	.658**
Achievement Motivation	665	41.24	4.407	.450**	-	.518**	.750**
Hope of Success	665	20.44	2.963	-.183**	.518**	-	-.178**
Fear of Failure	665	20.80	3.832	.658**	.750**	-.178**	-

Note. Continuous variables were mean-centered before the Pearson correlation (pairwise) analysis.

n indicates sample size, *M* indicates mean, and *SD* indicates standard deviation.

**. Correlation is significant at the .01 level (two-tailed)

The IP experiences of EFAs correlate with HS ($F(1,665) = -.183$) and FF ($F(1,665) = .658$). HS represents the approach tendency of AM, characterized by positive emotions and optimistic beliefs about one's ability to succeed (Brunstein, 2008). The findings indicate that HS has a weak negative correlation with IP. EFAs who report higher levels of IP are less likely to be confident in their capacity to succeed in achievement-related tasks, a finding that aligns with the negative associations between IP and self-efficacy (McDowell et al., 2015). Impostors report low self-confidence, negative affect, and pessimistic views on their chances of success when faced with achievement-related tasks.

Interestingly, IP has a significant, positive, and strong correlation with FF, the avoidance approach of AM. FF is the tendency to perceive threat and anxiety when failure is possible (Conroy et al., 2007). It reflects a fixed mindset, in which failures are seen as personal flaws, leading to maladaptive behaviors such as procrastination or withdrawal (Dweck, 2017). Paradoxically, these avoidance strategies result in a lack of success nonetheless (Noskeau et al., 2021). EFAs with higher IP levels are likely driven by FF in achievement-related tasks.

Qualitative and quantitative studies have generated evidence for strong relationships between FF and IP (Neureiter & Traut-Mattausch, 2016; Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016). Characteristically, impostors fear failing because it exposes their perceived incompetence to others. They do not see failures as opportunities for improvement but rather as threats to their fragile image. Impostors want to 'keep up appearances' and are over-concerned with how others evaluate them (Sakulku & Alexander, 2011; Bravata et al., 2019). They live in constant 'dread of evaluation' and are motivated by a core need to avoid negative attention at all costs. However, these fears are largely unfounded regarding differences in performance and outcomes of impostors and non-impostors. The difference is more a matter of perceived competence than inherent competence itself (Noskeau et al., 2021). Hence, impostor fears are largely considered irrational and detrimental to an individual's self-concept. The pervasive societal values upheld in interdependent and collectivist cultures, to which EFAs belong, such as *hiya*, contextualize the relationships between HS and FF to the IP experience of EFAs. As aforementioned, EFAs' sense of *hiya* confounds their IP experiences and may also play a role in their motivation.

3. Personality Moderating the Impostor Phenomenon and Achievement Motivation

The Big Five personality traits were utilized in a moderation analysis to address the study's third problem. The results in Table 5 show that Neuroticism had a negative and significant moderating effect ($\beta = -.0058$, $t = -3.1130$, $p = .0019$). Examination of the interaction plot, shown in Figure 1, indicates that as IP levels and Neuroticism increase, respondents' AM levels are at their highest. Furthermore, the strength of the relationship between IP and AM levels is considerably reduced for EFAs reporting lower levels of Neuroticism.

Table 5

Summary of Moderation Analysis for Impostor Phenomenon, Achievement Motivation, and Neuroticism

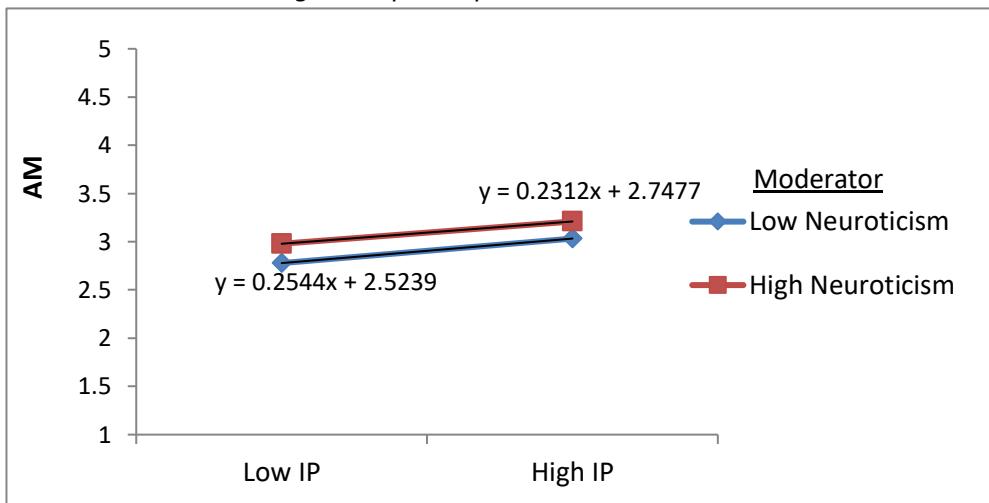
	coeff	se	t	p
Impostor Phenomenon	.1214	.0140	8.6561	.0000
Neuroticism	.0945	.0305	3.0955	.0020
Int_1	-.0058	.0019	-3.1130	.0019

Note. $R^2 = .2266$.

The predictor is the impostor phenomenon, the criterion is achievement motivation, and the moderator is neuroticism.

Figure 1

Neuroticism moderating the impostor phenomenon and achievement motivation



Note: IP = Impostor Phenomenon, AM = Achievement Motivation

The relationship between Neuroticism and IP has been well documented across studies (Bernard et al., 2002; Vergauwe et al., 2015; Rohrmann et al., 2016; Sawant et al., 2023). Most findings show positive correlations between these variables. Neuroticism, conceptualized as a tendency towards experiencing negative affect such as anxiety and depressive feelings, has been evidenced to align with the IP experiences of individuals, wherein there is self-doubt and perceived fraudulence over one's success and competence. The significant moderating effect found in the current study is also interesting, given that South and Southeast Asians have been found to have lower levels of Neuroticism than other cultures (Reyes et al., 2016). Hence, those who report high levels of Neuroticism, who are likely sensitive to negative evaluations, may be uniquely vulnerable to experiencing IP and higher AM.

In the same vein, several studies have explored the relationship between Neuroticism and AM with mixed findings. In their individual studies exploring the AM and personality traits of Indian university students, Daitkar (2017) and Rahman (2014) found positive associations between Neuroticism and AM, indicating that individuals who rated themselves highly on the Neuroticism scale also exhibited higher AM. In contrast, AM has been found to negatively associate with Neuroticism, impulsiveness, and fear of failure (Herman et al., 2018; Apostolov & Geldenhuys, 2022). Individuals high in Neuroticism are also likely to be impulsive, to pursue avoidance performance goals, and to have difficulty distinguishing the importance of tasks (Racine et al., 2013; Settles et al., 2012).

Of particular interest to this current study are the positive associations found between Neuroticism and the avoidant approach to achievement motivation, conceptualized as FF. Findings suggest that neurotic individuals experience severe anxiety and withdrawal behaviors, which are components of FF and avoidance motivation (De Castella et al., 2013). As shown in Table 6, similar results were obtained for Neuroticism as a moderator of the relationship between IP and FF, indicating a negative and significant moderating effect ($\beta = -0.0037$, $t = -2.9464$, $p = 0.0033$).

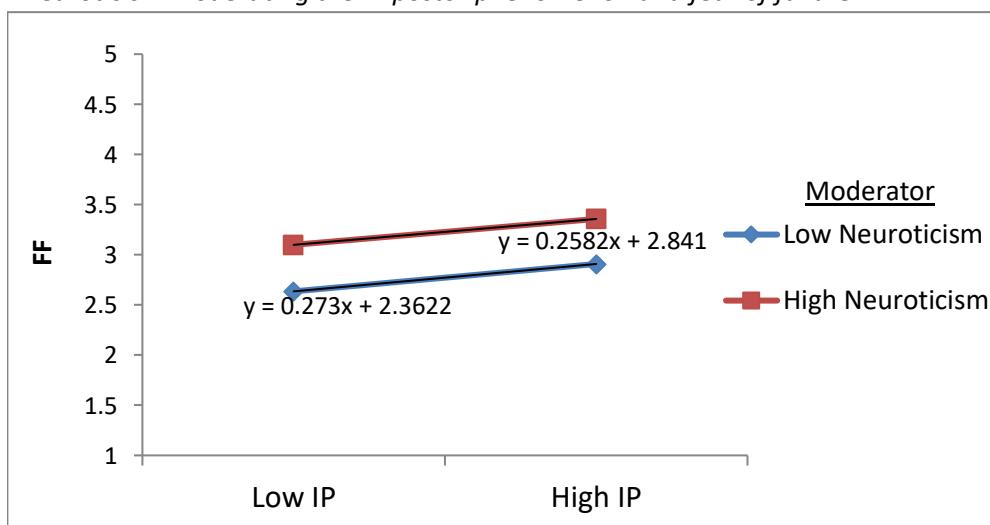
Table 6
Summary of Moderation Analysis for Impostor Phenomenon, Fear of Failure, and Neuroticism

	coeff	Se	t	P
Impostor Phenomenon	.1328	.0095	13.9823	.0000
Neuroticism	.2283	.0207	11.0426	.0000
Int_1	-.0037	.0013	-2.9464	.0033

Note. $R^2 = .5304$.

The predictor is the impostor phenomenon, the criterion is fear of failure, and the moderator is neuroticism.

Figure 2
Neuroticism moderating the impostor phenomenon and fear of failure



Note: IP = Impostor Phenomenon, FF = Fear of Failure

As shown in Figure 2, respondents who reported higher levels of IP and Neuroticism had the highest levels of FF. The higher the level of Neuroticism that EFAs report, the stronger the positive relationship between their levels of IP and FF

becomes. Moreover, the effect of IP on FF is more pronounced for individuals who report high levels of Neuroticism. Neuroticism did not have a significant moderating effect on the relationship between IP and HS ($\beta = -0.0021$, $t = -1.5265$, $p = 0.1274$). The other personality factors did not yield significant moderating effects.

This pattern of Neuroticism and IP seems to be present in other populations, such as in Korean, American, and Belgian samples (Sakulku & Alexander, 2011; Vergauwe et al., 2015; Bravata et al., 2019), suggesting that emotional dysphoria is highly likely a component or exacerbator of the intense feelings of inadequacy of the IP. Lane's (2015) grounded theory also describes the performative impacts of IP as increasing the productivity and AM of emerging adults but concomitantly encouraging avoidance behaviors and exacerbating negative psychological experiences. The moderating effect found in the current study, in which higher Neuroticism levels are associated with a more robust and positive relationship between IP and FF, supports these propositions.

These findings provide new insights into how emerging adults experience IP and its impact on their performance in achievement-related tasks. Respondents who report high levels of Neuroticism experience negative affect more keenly, and, in tandem with high IP levels, are significantly more motivated to do well on achievement-related tasks than those with low Neuroticism or IP levels. Additionally, their increased motivations are likely rooted in their FF and avoidance behaviors, as evidenced by the findings in the previous problem.

CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated the impostor phenomenon (IP) among Emerging Filipino Adults (EFAs), its relationship with achievement motivation (AM), and the moderating influence of personality traits. Findings reveal that EFAs frequently experience impostor feelings even without major professional accomplishments, suggesting that IP is not solely a consequence of success but can emerge during periods of academic, occupational, and interpersonal transition. The results further show that IP is more strongly linked to fear of failure than to hope for success, indicating that impostor-prone EFAs often rely on avoidance strategies and struggle to internalize their competence. Additionally, personality traits—particularly neuroticism—heighten the effect of IP on achievement motivation, emphasizing the dispositional nature of impostor experiences. Overall, the study highlights the need for environments and support systems that validate diverse forms of development and help EFAs build healthier self-perceptions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, EFAs are encouraged to cultivate greater awareness of impostor tendencies through self-reflection and to seek mentorship or peer support to reduce feelings of isolation and self-doubt. Educational institutions and workplaces should promote more inclusive, holistic systems of evaluation that

recognize growth, perseverance, and socioemotional skills, rather than relying solely on grades or rigid performance metrics. Mental health professionals are advised to integrate cognitive-behavioral strategies, group counseling, and personality assessments into their interventions to help EFAs challenge irrational beliefs, understand dispositional influences, and develop healthier motivational patterns. Finally, future research is recommended to explore IP across different age groups, cultural contexts, and professional fields, and to develop culturally grounded or locally adapted measurement tools to more accurately capture the Filipino experience of the impostor phenomenon.

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