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# Relationships between Impostorism, Perceived Parental Support, and Gender in First-Generation College Students

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## Introduction

### Background

- Impostorism is characterized by feelings of self-doubt and phoniness regarding one's abilities and achievements, despite one's history of success. This phenomenon has been studied in underrepresented minority groups because their minority status may create additional struggles in academic or professional settings (Chrousos & Mentis, 2020).
- An example of an underrepresented minority group at risk for additional academic or professional struggles is first-generation college students (FGCS). The group's underrepresentation is alarming, considering that they are approximately 24% of undergraduate students in the U.S. (Romanelli, 2020).
- Previous research regarding impostorism levels concerning gender has displayed varying results dependent on the geographical location and the population from which the participants were recruited. In one study, gender was not a predictor of impostorism in undergraduate students in honors programs (Lee et al., 2020). However, several studies conducted in the U.S. have found that women are more likely to report higher levels of impostorism than men (e.g., Kumar & Jagacinski, 2006).
- Past research on the association between impostorism and perceived parental support has shown that higher levels of parental support are associated with lower levels of impostorism (Holden et al., 2021). However, it is unclear whether perceived parental support is a protective factor for the FGCS population.
- This present research aims to address the gap in the literature by examining the associations between impostorism, perceived parental support, and gender among FGCS.

### Hypotheses

- **Hypothesis 1:** It is hypothesized that a negative correlation will exist between perceived parental support and levels of impostorism among FGCS.
- **Hypothesis 2:** If this negative correlation is significant, it is hypothesized that perceived parental support will reliably predict levels of impostorism when controlling for gender, and gender will reliably predict levels of impostorism when controlling for perceived parental support.
- **Hypothesis 3:** As an exploratory analysis, it is hypothesized that gender would moderate the relationship between levels of impostorism and perceived parental support, such that there will be a greater relationship between parental support and impostorism in first-generation college women than in first-generation college men.

## Method

### Participants

- A total of 503 undergraduate students (women = 397, men = 100, gender identity not listed = 6;  $M_{age} = 19.08$ ,  $SD_{age} = 1.87$ ) from Binghamton University's psychology subject pool completed the survey. Participants were racially/ethnically diverse: 34.60% of participants identified as European American/White, 37.60% as Asian, 16.70% as Latino/Hispanic, 8.00% as African American/Black, .40% as Native American/American Indian/Alaskan Native, and 2.80% as other or mixed race.
- The year in college of each participant varied: 47.70% were in their freshman year, 34.40% in their sophomore year, 12.90% in their junior year, 4.40% in their senior year, .40% were in an unspecified year, and .20% were missing response.
- Each participant received .5 research credit hours toward an applicable course within Binghamton University's Department of Psychology for completing the survey.

### Measures

- **Impostorism:** Participants completed a 20-item Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (Clance & Imes, 1978), which assessed participants' feelings of phoniness in relation to their academic achievements. The response options ranged from 1 (*not at all true*) to 5 (*very true*;  $\alpha = .92$ ). Sample items included: "At times, I feel my success has been due to some kind of luck" and "Sometimes I'm afraid others will discover how much knowledge or ability I really lack."
- **Perceived Parental Support:** Participants indicated their perception of the degree to which their parents/guardians support their undergraduate studies by responding to this prompt, "Please indicate how supportive the following people in your life are in your academic endeavors: Your parents/guardians". The response options ranged from 1 (*not very supportive*) to 7 (*very supportive*).

## Results

### Hypothesis 1

- A Pearson's  $r$  correlation coefficient was conducted to examine the association between impostorism and perceived parental support.
- There was a significant negative relationship between levels of impostorism and perceived parental support,  $r(480) = -0.12$ ,  $p = .01$ .

### Hypothesis 2

- A multiple regression analysis was conducted with impostorism as the outcome variable, and perceived parental support, gender, and perceived parental support x gender interaction as the predictor variables.
- Collectively, these three variables explained 4.70% of the variance in impostorism,  $F(2, 479) = 11.86$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .047$ .
- As shown in Figure 1, perceived parental support was a significant predictor of impostorism even when controlling for gender, such that higher levels of parental support predicted lower levels of impostorism,  $\beta = -.055$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $R^2 = .014$ .
- Gender was also a significant predictor of impostorism even when controlling for perceived parental support, such that participants identifying as a woman reported higher levels of impostorism,  $\beta = .323$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .032$ , as shown in Figure 2.

### Hypothesis 3

- The perceived parental support x gender interaction effect was not significant,  $F(3, 478) = 8.117$ ,  $p = .424$ ,  $R^2 = .048$ .

Figure 1

Predicting Impostorism from Perceived Parental Support

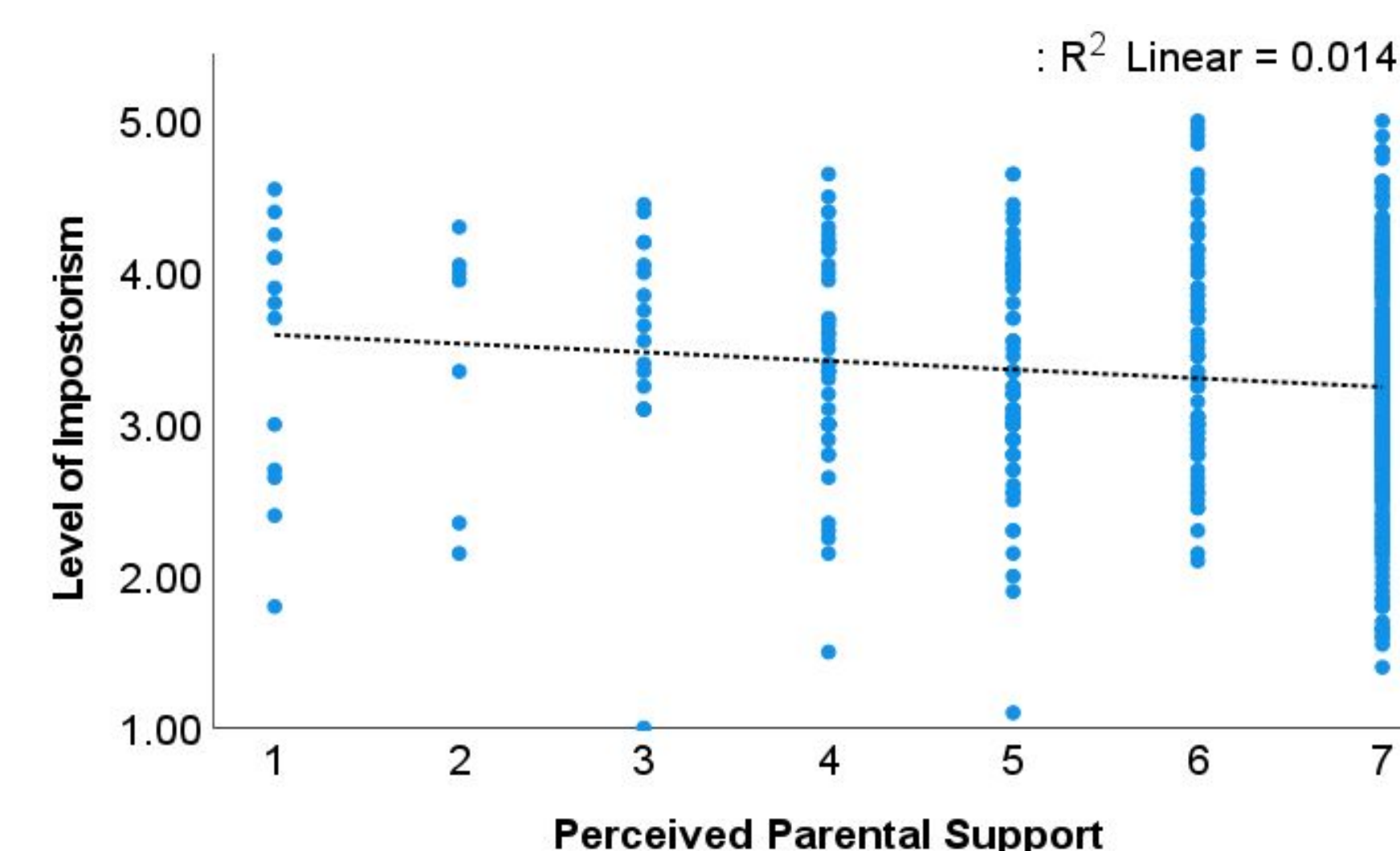
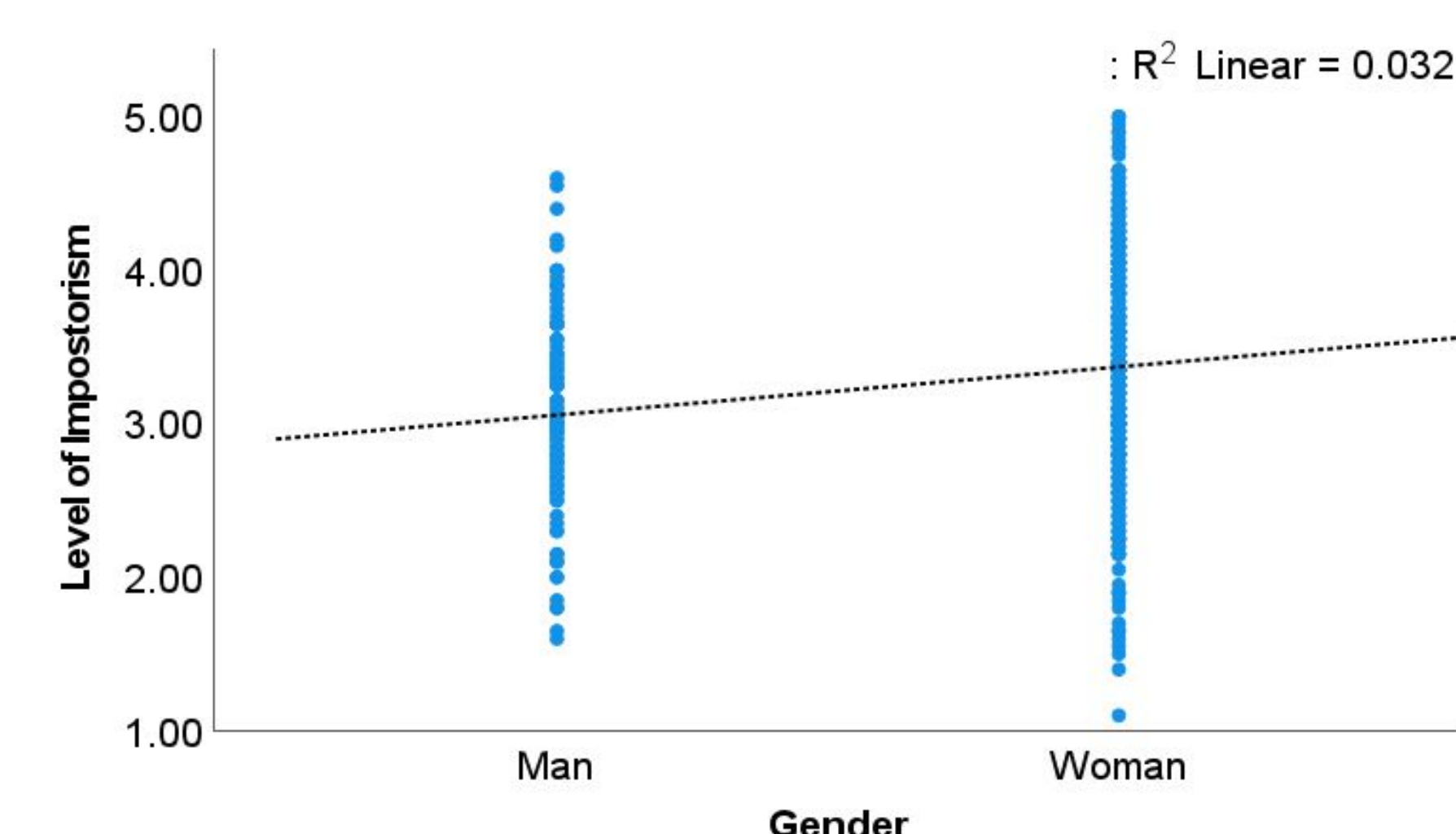


Figure 2

Predicting Impostorism from Gender



## Discussion

- Supporting Hypothesis 1, the results of this study showed a negative correlation between perceived parental support and impostorism, suggesting that higher levels of perceived parental support is associated with lower levels of impostorism. Although there is limited research investigating the relationship between impostorism and perceived parental support, the present study's finding is consistent with Gratton & Bouffard (2017), where a lack of positive parental support has been shown to increase the development of impostorism.
- Supporting Hypothesis 2, the results of this study demonstrated that perceived parental support was a significant predictor even when gender was controlled for, and gender was a significant predictor even when perceived parental support was controlled for. These findings are consistent with past research: women are more likely to report higher levels of impostorism than men (Kumar & Jagacinski, 2006), and parental support may likely be linked to impostorism (e.g., Gratton & Bouffard, 2017).
- The exploratory analysis involving gender as the moderator (Hypothesis 3) showed that gender was not a significant moderator for the association between perceived parental support and impostorism. Future research is needed to understand more deeply the interaction between perceived parental support and gender in predicting impostorism among FGCS.
- The findings from this study have practical implications. Administrators, educators, and counselors within higher education might consider providing additional accommodations for FGCS who report lower levels of parental support. Similarly, additional support may be crucial to the success of first-generation college women since they may be more likely to struggle with feelings of impostorism than men.

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