

THE PALGRAVE HANDBOOK OF IMPOSTER SYNDROME IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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This book was a gift.

A gift in the literal and metaphorical sense. At £150, a very generous benefaction indeed! And, as a 2022 tome on the exact subject of my EdD thesis, regardless of how good it was, it was a gift. An up-to-date take on imposter phenomenon – what was not to love!?! And, at the risk of stretching the metaphor too far, it is the gift that keeps on giving. It contains 37 chapters and 633 pages, with over 66 contributors, all talking about the experience of imposter phenomenon while either studying or working in higher education. It is a treasure trove of experiences. This gift really has not just been for Christmas. Now I've shown you the wrapping paper, let me take you inside.

Both the strength and the weakness of the book is that it, unashamedly, sets out its argument and intention in Chapter 1, written by the editors, and all the other 36 chapters support and illuminate that view. Addison *et al.* clearly look to move the discourse of imposter syndrome on from just being an issue for the individual, to one of addressing the social, systemic and political inequality that provides the incubating ground for imposter syndrome to flourish within HE. Regarding the intention outlined in Chapter 1, the book successfully does this. Chapter after chapter exemplifies the inequalities faced by the contributors, the systemic bias and hierarchy that exacerbates those feelings of inadequacy and inauthenticity. It takes the study of imposter syndrome into the 21st century. Since its inception in 1978 (Clance & Imes 1978), imposter syndrome research has been focused on individual and internal deficits and the psychological interrogation of its links with perfectionism and anxiety. This handbook clearly situates imposter syndrome in the social and systemic, which, in my opinion, moves the thinking regarding imposter syndrome forward significantly.

What it does not do (nor pretend to) is interrogate what imposter syndrome actually is or aim to quantify the experiences of the contributors. It takes at face value the contributors' experience of imposter syndrome. This, of course, brings many benefits both to the contributor and also to the body of research about imposter syndrome (see, for example, Cristea and Babajide, p. 55; Addison and Griffin, p. 107).

However, it does not enable the reader to question those experiences. This is primarily because a significant body of the book is made up of autoethnographies (see, for example, Kayombo and Misiaszek, p. 445; Leary, p. 511). Considering the aim of the book, this is not surprising. However, it does have some academic limitations, with regard to the reader's ability to scrutinise the claims of the contributions.

Personally, I thoroughly enjoyed reading the autoethnographies, and having contemplated using this methodology for my own research, I am certainly not going to criticise it. However, the book title says 'Handbook', which, for me, suggests something more encompassing. I think a 'collection of autoethnographies postulating a theoretical position' might have been a more apt wrapping paper.

However, regardless of its title, the book is wonderfully diverse and the range of voices and perspectives in this collection is delightful. It has contributions from across the globe, with a focus on hearing the voice of black, working-class and queer women's experiences and lots more besides (I am not going to lie – the chapter on female ejaculation was a surprise: Borghu p. 361). The book's editors suggest, 'the work gathered in this Handbook re-inscribes the Anglo-centricity and white-Western bias of much HE scholarship' (p. 7); possibly, time will be needed to assess this claim. Nevertheless, the diversity of voice was enlightening (for example, Chua *et al.*

Editors: Michelle Addison, Maddie Breeze and Yvette Taylor

Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022

ISBN:9783030865696

highlighting the work of deaf academics). Another added extra is the illustrations and artwork created by Indian artist, Samia Singh, who collaborated with the editors on visualising imposter syndrome. My only criticism is that there were not more of her images alongside the text. Although, her images of the imposter as a lizard did not resonate with my own experience of imposter phenomenon; however, I was very excited at the possibility of using artwork to help others visualise their own imposters.

Who else might benefit from this gift?

Obviously, anyone studying imposter phenomenon would bite your hand off to know about this book! But this edited collection also has relevance and value for those interested in, or studying, early career researcher/academics or the neoliberal university (NLU) system, as most of the contributions have the NLU lurking in the background. For those looking for a collection of autoethnographies, it would be a welcome addition to the reading list. Additionally, those wishing to explore a diverse range of academic voices and perspectives on working in academia will have many hours of pleasure.

I've approached this book review as a thank you for the gift, hopefully not just a sycophantic tribute but a thank you that will enable others to know whether the gift would be a useful one for them to either receive or bestow. I was on the receiving end of a generous gift and, as a way of paying it on, I have created fairly detailed notes on all the chapters. If they are of interest, please contact me at corinna.richards@me.com and I will gladly pass them on. ■

REFERENCE

Clance, P. R & Imes, S. A. (1978). 'The imposter phenomenon in high achieving women: dynamics and therapeutic intervention'. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice*, 15(3), 241–7.