

Laidlaw Scholarship Reflective Report

Scholar

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Title of Scholarship Project:	Imposter syndrome and Sense of belonging

Please describe the research you have conducted this period

My research project was conducted in partnership with another scholar, Isabel Kedge, a student from the school of psychology.

The end goal of our project was focused on improving students' sense of belonging while at University by looking at the rates of imposter syndrome amongst student populations, and the possible reasons behind them. Together, we studied the numerous ways in which students conceptualise the condition as well as the accuracy of the most popular measure used to diagnose cases of imposter syndrome, the Clance Imposter Phenomenon scale (CIPS).

We undertook a qualitative approach to our research, using focus groups of undergraduate students from the University of Leeds, asking them questions based upon the contents, wording and structure of the CIPS, as well as their personal definitions and perceptions of the condition itself.

By gaining an insight into these general student discourses surrounding imposter syndrome, Izzy and I were able to find the discrepancies between how students perceive it versus the scientific community, and thus the misconceptions they have when perhaps making self diagnoses.

Our focus groups also reported a number of flaws within the CIPS that included the exclusion of certain populations, leading vocabulary, and inconsistencies that would lead to inaccuracy in results.

From our findings, we have a greater understanding of the reasons behind the exponentially high rates of imposter syndrome with this being due the skewed student perceptions of it, as well as the low reliability of the measures used to diagnose it.

How is the research work you have been undertaking impactful or important?

Imposter syndrome is a bit of a 'buzzword' at the moment, cropping up in various scientific articles and journals, as well as making its way into pop culture via podcasts, YouTube videos and even memes. This widespread use of the term has inevitably caused it to be employed in the wrong contexts, used to address feelings/thoughts that aren't actually synonymous with imposter syndrome.

This has led to current prevalence rates being incredibly high, with some studies reporting levels of around 82% in certain populations. These concerning figures needed to be addressed and using our research, we have been able to uncover the roots of this problem and some of the potential causes.

Firstly, by investigating the flaws of the CIPS and the methods used to diagnose the condition, we have identified ways in which measures can be improved which could be implemented in further studies to provide a more accurate and reliable measure for students. This would minimise misdiagnosis and allow people who genuinely suffer from imposter syndrome to seek out the help and support they require.

Secondly, our focus groups also served as an opportunity to educate fellow students on the definitions and characteristics of Imposter syndrome to clear up any of the misconceptions they had – this proved valuable for many of our participants, and I believe it would be useful for student populations as a whole. By reaching out, opening up conversations on the topic, and discussing various perceptions of the condition, we could ensure that more people have a clearer understanding of imposter syndrome and don't create further confusion or panic as to what the phenomenon truly is.

What impact has conducting research had on your degree course and university experience?

Despite my research topic being in the field of psychology, I am currently taking a degree in International business at Leeds. I had decided to branch outside of the business school for my research as this topic highly interested me on a personal level and I felt it to be a perfect opportunity to gain insights into various other departments at Leeds.

However, over the course of my project I realised the positive impact this research actually had on my understanding of the humane side of business organisations. As part of my course I have studied the behaviour of people as employees and how personality, culture, and individual learning styles can all impact a person's ability to fit in as an employee. I quickly found correlations between these topics I have been taught and certain characteristics of imposter syndrome.

During my literature review I learnt that the term imposter syndrome was coined after a study of the symptoms was conducted on a group of highly successful businesswomen and have come to realise that certain types of employee behaviour observed in businesses can be linked back to these symptoms. Thus, I feel that the positive outcomes of my research can be

extended beyond the context of students within University to a more broad spectrum of people, specifically those involved in business. At a later stage, I hope to use this research as part of my dissertation in my third year and build upon these findings to help link it to my field of study.

What leadership skills do you believe you have gained from the research period? (please refer to the leadership attributes below)

Over the course of my research, Isabel and I came across many unforeseen obstacles that we had to tackle using initiative and teamwork. We made sure to correspond everyday regarding the tasks and goals we had to accomplish within specific time frames, and how we would go about this to ensure a high level of organisation was maintained throughout. However, despite this careful planning, we were frequently met with uncertainty when things out of our control went wrong or didn't abide by our schedule. For example, focus group participants making last minute cancellations which required the entire group to then be rescheduled needed us to employ **effective decision making in a complex environment**. Our ability to quickly relay information and react to unexpected situations was challenged, and improved over the course of our study. I can now say that if I was to manage a similar project, I would be more aware of the need to make effective decisions in changeable environments. Another skill I believe I have gained is to **learn continuously**. Going into my project, I did not have a great amount of knowledge on imposter syndrome and thus gained a better understanding of the condition during my literature review, and the discussions I had with Isabel and my supervisors. I was also new to focus groups and the processes required to advertise, organise and run such sessions. Now having completed my research, I can confidently state that I would be able to conduct focus groups successfully in the future, thus demonstrating I have learnt more about research techniques.

Please talk about activities you've been involved in to disseminate your research, including but not limited to attending conferences, producing research posters, and promotion of the scholarship

Recently, my research partner and I were invited to the RAISE (Researching, Advancing, and Inspiring Student Engagement) conference 2022 held at Lincoln University where we had the opportunity to listen to a number of talks on the current and ongoing developments in the world of student engagement, and see what exactly goes on 'behind the scenes' at universities. We also presented our research to a room of students and academics wherein we explained the background to our study, the methodology, results and implications. Posts of our presentation were put onto social media from which certain academics contacted our supervisors to find out if our presentation could be accessed at a later date, which evidenced to me the interest and prevalence of our research on the current University climate.

At RAISE 2023, Izzy and I will be on the committee which we hope will give us the opportunity to further disseminate our results and present to larger audiences.

After thoroughly enjoying our experience at RAISE, Izzy and I are planning on entering more conferences, such as DART-P and the Leeds Student Education conference as we feel the feedback from our first presentation was incredibly positive and inspired to us to ensure that we strive to spread our work to help those that would benefit from our findings.

We are also currently in the process of writing a formal publication of our work to be included in an academic journal for more people to have access to. More personally, I have received emails and messages, from students asking for some insight into our analysis and results, with most recently a student contacting me via LinkedIn to discuss the study as part of research for his dissertation.

What are your future career or educational plans?

I am planning on taking a work placement after the second year of my course is complete in a business/ management position, specifically in a social enterprise if possible. I feel that the ethical leadership skills I have gained thus far have given me greater confidence in my ability to carry out a management role and specially one that acts with integrity and strong morals which is why I am highly passionate about taking on a role within an ethically driven organisation.

Prior to the Laidlaw programme, I had little knowledge on the world of Undergraduate research, its benefits and impacts. Now, having conducted my own project, I have had my interest peaked and am inspired to further my work upon completion of my undergraduate course. I hope to continue in education, taking a Masters degree and ultimately aiming to undertake a PhD in the future.

Supervisor

Please comment on your scholar's research period, what you consider to be your scholars' strengths and which leadership attributes (please refer to the leadership attributes below) you feel your scholar has demonstrated and is particularly skilled in. You could also identify areas which your scholar can develop further.

Both Sarah and Izzy have evidenced strong intellectual abilities throughout the project, including engaging in research skills such as interviewing, liaising with participants, transcription, and preliminary analysis. They each have brought energy and enthusiasm to the project, which has resulted in a wealth of qualitative data from Scholar-led focus groups. They have demonstrated strong communication skills in working together collaboratively on the project and have used digital connectivity to produce the project too.

Most notably, both Scholars also demonstrated the ability to listen, speak, and write clearly and confidently through their presentation at the Researching, Advancing, and Inspiring Student Engagement (RAISE) Annual Conference 2022. Sarah and Izzy both presented at the conference and designed the presentation independently, which evidenced strong independent thinking skills. Their presentation was very well received and they answered questions with confidence and skill.

Overall, Izzy and Sarah have developed a host of different leadership skills throughout their fellowship.

Signature of Scholar _____ Sarah Amin _____ Date: __12__ / __01__ / __23__



Signature of Project Leader _____ Date: __20__ / __12__ / __22__