

ELITISM AND ISOLATION:

The Influence of Class on Experiences of Imposter Syndrome at Durham University

What impact does class have on experiences of imposter syndrome at Durham University?



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- 1) How do students define and perceive imposter syndrome?
- 2) How do the symptoms of imposter syndrome impact students and how frequently?
- 3) Do issues relating to class trigger imposter syndrome in students at Durham University?
- 4) How can the findings in this report inform the development of future policies that aim to mitigate the impact of imposter syndrome at Durham University?

Imposter Syndrome

'Imposter Syndrome' (IS) can be roughly defined as "perceived fraudulence" (Kolligian Jr. and Sternberg, 1991). In this case, an individual doubts their abilities and achievements compared to others in a given environment, such as a workplace or a place of education, leading them to believe that they are an 'imposter'. Contemporary research has begun to investigate the systemic dimension of imposter syndrome, but more evidence is needed to create thorough accounts of how systemic inequalities in class, gender, and race affect the manifestation of imposter syndrome, especially in the British Higher Education (HE) system (Addison & Stephens Griffin, 2022).

Research Aims

The main aim of this research was to contribute to the growing amount of research on the systemic dimension of imposter syndrome, and to add to the limited pool of research of student experiences of imposter syndrome in HE. Additionally, it recognises Durham University's unique, untapped potential as a case study investigating systemic class issues in HE and to what extent such inequalities manifest and influence experiences of imposter syndrome.

Durham University

As one of the UK's oldest universities, Durham University is often seen as a highly reputable institution of higher education. However, it is not without controversy. Claims of classism frequently tarnish its reputation (Askham 2021), and it is ranked as the worst institution for social inclusion in England and Wales, likely due to its disproportionately high privately educated student population. In fact, Durham University has the lowest state-school intake out of any other UK university (Mohamed and Hodgson, 2022). Despite this, little to no academic research on class has been conducted at Durham University, let alone concerning imposter syndrome.

Method

- Mixed-method design
- 15 questions analysed from a survey questionnaire conducted at Durham University (11 closed-response, 4 open-text response)
- Non-probability, volunteer sample with 704 valid cases all drawn from the student population
- Quantitative analysis conducted using SPSS
- Qualitative analysis conducted using NVivo
- Particular focus on first-generation students and those who received a contextual offer, and how students think the University can address and mitigate the influence of class on experiences of imposter syndrome.

IMPACT ON STUDENTS

MOST STUDENTS EXPERIENCE IMPOSTER SYNDROME FREQUENTLY

60% of students report feeling like an imposter at least once a month

20% of students experience imposter syndrome once a week

1 in 10 experiences imposter syndrome every day

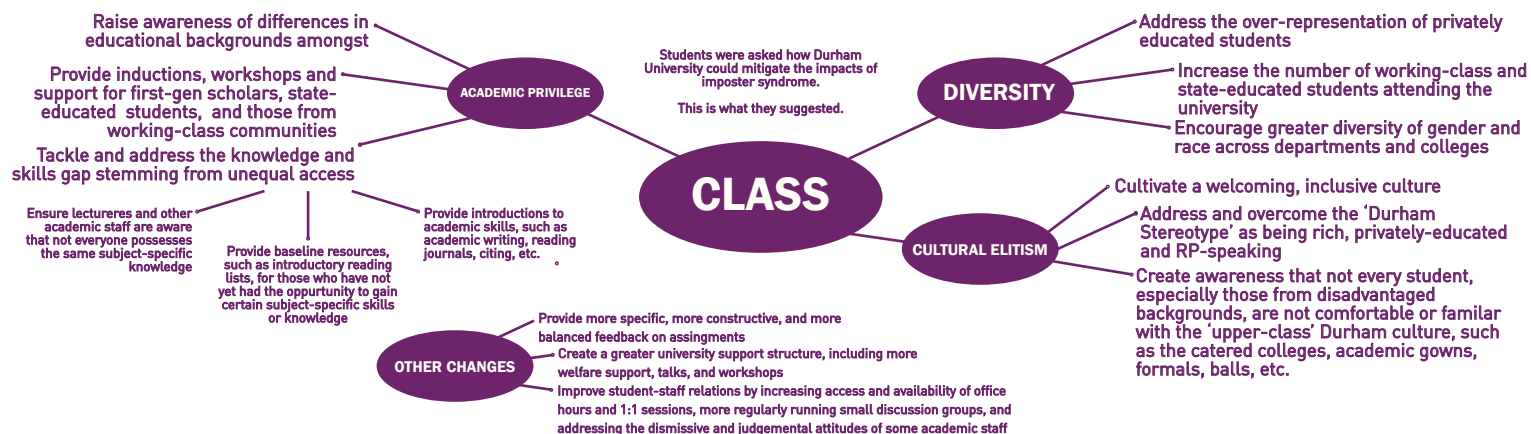
IMPOSTER SYNDROME IMPACTS ATTENDANCE AND ENGAGEMENT

1 in 4 report imposter syndrome having a moderate to great effect on their attendance

6 out of 10 report imposter syndrome having a moderate to great effect on their engagement

IMPOSTER SYNDROME is TWICE MORE LIKELY to have a SIGNIFICANT EFFECT on ATTENDANCE for FIRST-GEN STUDENTS

WHAT CAN THE UNIVERSITY DO?



WHAT CAN WE CONCLUDE?

CLASS INEQUALITY IS A MAJOR FACTOR IN STUDENT EXPERIENCES OF IMPOSTER SYNDROME IN HIGHER EDUCATION

DURHAM UNIVERSITY HAS A CLASS PROBLEM THAT NEEDS TO BE ADDRESSED

ACADEMIC PRIVILEGE, A LACK OF DIVERSITY, AND CULTURAL ELITISM AFFECTS STUDENT SENSE OF BELONGING

FIRST-GEN SCHOLARS, STATE-EDUCATED STUDENTS, AND THOSE FROM WORKING-CLASS COMMUNITIES ARE MOST AFFECTED

THE UNIVERSITY NEEDS TO ENACT POLICY CHANGE TO ADDRESS THESE ISSUES

References:

- Addison, M., & Stephens Griffin, N. (2022). The Canary in the Coalmine: The Impact of Imposter Syndrome on Students' Learning Experience at University. The Palgrave Handbook of Imposter Syndrome in Higher Education, 107-123. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-86570-2_7
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