

Michelle Addison · Maddie Breeze ·
Yvette Taylor
Editors

The Palgrave Handbook of Imposter Syndrome in Higher Education

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Editors

Michelle Addison
Department of Sociology
Durham University
Durham, UK

Maddie Breeze
Sociology and Public Sociology
Queen Margaret University
Edinburgh, UK

Yvette Taylor
School of Education
University of Strathclyde
Glasgow, UK

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Getting Stuck, Writing Badly, and Other Curious Impressions: Doctoral Writing and Imposter Feelings

Brittany Amell

Introduction: Doctoral Writing and Imposter Syndrome

Paying attention to doctoral students talk about writing is important. Unfortunately, talk about doctoral writing and doctoral writers frequently occurs only when there is a problem to be addressed, which in turn has consequences for doctoral writers, supervisors, and others (Aitchison and Lee 2006; Starke-Meyerring 2011). For one thing, this framing tends to perpetuate a culture of silence regarding writing and research pedagogies (Aitchison 2015). Within such frames, discussions about writing tend to rely on skills-based discourses of writing, where writing is viewed as a set of decontextualized skills that writers ‘acquire’ (Lea and Street 1998; Starke-Meyerring et al. 2014; Owler 2010). Interventions tend to be ad hoc, aimed at risk management, problem solving, and crisis control (Aitchison and Lee 2006; Starke-Meyerring et al. 2014). However, this downplays the value and role writing plays in doctoral learning and development.

Skills-based approaches to writing also have implications for writers: writing ‘differences’ are often problematized, positioned as deficits instead

B. Amell (✉)

Carleton University, Ottawa, ON, Canada

e-mail: brittany.amell@carleton.ca; BrittanyAmell@cmail.carleton.ca

of resources (Canagarajah 2002; see also Lillis 2001). These ‘deficits’ are leaky—they transfer to the writer responsible for producing the text. In other words, the responsibility for writing ‘well’ becomes the job of the writer. This is tricky. While writers have agency over the texts they produce, the choices available to them are constrained by the context, power relations, and reasons or motivations they might have for writing (Paré 2009; Reither 1985). Writers do not learn to write in a vacuum; they learn to write *from* other people and *for* other people. We write for readers who have values, knowledge, and expectations. In other words, doctoral writers must learn not only *what* to say but also *how* to say it (Tardy 2005). When writing becomes a ‘nonquestion,’ doctoral students are left in the lurch, expected to figure things out on their own (Starke-Meyerring 2011).

Similarly, we often hear talk about imposter syndrome or imposter feelings in individual terms. Typically, imposter feelings are recognized as feelings of insecurity, phoniness, failure, and fraudulence (Clance and Imes 1978; Seritan and Mehta 2016). In this view, when imposter syndrome is experienced by an individual, it’s ‘their’ feelings that are hindering them. However, just as we can recalibrate our view of writing to consider the individual in relationship to others, we can recalibrate ‘feelings’ to see them as more than properties of individuals. In such a view, feelings can be provoked by interactions between ‘sel[ves] and world[s]’ (Labanyi 2010: 223). Depression, for instance, can be provoked by ongoing legacies of colonialism, neoliberalism, violence, exclusion, and everyday isolation (Cvetkovich 2012). Imposter feelings can also serve as indicators of the places where the self and the world brush up against each other (Breeze 2018; Cohen and McConnell 2019). For instance, a recent study of 1,476 graduate students at one university found a connection between graduate students’ experiences and imposter syndrome (Cohen and McConnell 2019). The authors found that (1) doctoral students who were engaged in research programmes reported imposter feelings more frequently than their peers who were engaged in research programmes at the master’s level, (2) the degree to which quality mentorship was perceived as being available corresponded to lower scores for imposter syndrome among doctoral students, and (3) increased competition for funding corresponded to higher scores for imposter syndrome among master’s level students. The authors also found that graduate students who felt an increased sense of isolation were also apt to have higher scores for imposter syndrome (Cohen and McConnell 2019).

The present chapter brings doctoral writing and imposter syndrome (or imposter feelings) in conversation with each other. Doctoral writing is not only a component of doctoral education; it plays a crucial role in ‘doctoral

becoming.’ In Canada, where I am based, doctoral students are required to submit and defend a dissertation or thesis to graduate. Although doctoral writing is receiving an increasing amount of attention, I know of very few studies that consider doctoral writing and imposter syndrome together. This is important because both doctoral writing and imposter syndrome have implications for the types¹ of experiences that Emmioğlu et al. (2017) suggest influence doctoral students’ decisions to persist in their programmes. The data for this chapter is derived from three separate studies: (1) a case study of one Indigenous doctoral candidate and their experiences with writing, (2) a mixed-methods study of doctoral students’ experiences with writing during their PhD, and (3) a qualitative explorative study of graduate students’ experiences with imposter syndrome (refer to Table 16.1 and Table 16.2 for more information).

Doctoral education is an interesting arena for witnessing imposter syndrome. Imposter syndrome flourishes in high-achievement arenas, and feelings of fraudulence and failure figure to some extent in experiences with imposter phenomenon *and* doctoral writing (Casanave 2019; Clance and Imes 1975). Further, doctoral writing often includes high-stakes components that ask writers to perform mastery before they feel ready (Casanave 2019). In addition, ideas about what doctoral writing constitutes are tied to imaginaries of ‘legitimate scholarship’ that have accumulated over ‘generations of institutional life’ (Giltrow 2002: 199). As such, doctoral students end up inheriting reading and writing practices—academic ways of doing and being—which may in turn reify or ‘market’ certain privileges and/or particular social orders (Giltrow 2002: 200).

This chapter draws on research from three studies that examined the experiences of doctoral students. The studies were conducted with doctoral students studying at Canadian universities, where doctoral students often complete ‘comprehensive exams’ in addition to coursework. Few Canadian professional doctoral programmes exist, and dedicated training for supervisors and doctoral researchers is still relatively rare. In addition, research assessment frameworks and researcher development frameworks have not yet been introduced to the extent that they have elsewhere (Acker and Haque 2017). Canadian universities are typically publicly funded and provide funding for full-time doctoral students, which can include work as a research or teaching assistant (Acker and Haque 2017). However, funding packages often only cover a four- to five-year time span.

¹ These two are: the extent to which doctoral students feel ‘academic’ and like they belong to an academic community (Emmioğlu et al. 2017).

Table 16.1 The three studies, in a nutshell

	Study 1: writing experiences		Study 2: writing experiences		Study 3: imposter feelings	
Research ethics board approval?	Yes		Yes		Yes	
Timeline?	August 2015–April 2016		December 2016–March 2017		September 2019–March 2020	
Purpose?	To understand the experiences Indigenous students had with academic writing		To understand the tensions doctoral writers experience, as well as strategies for navigating these tensions		To explore how imposter syndrome is understood and experienced by graduate students at one University	
Methods of data collection?	1. Semi-structured interviews 2. Sketches of writing experiences 3. Samples of writing		1. Questionnaire 2. Two focus groups 3. One semi-structured interview 4. Four structured interviews 5. Collages and drawings		1. Questionnaire	
Who?	Students who self-identified as Indigenous at an Eastern Canadian University		Doctoral students studying at Canadian universities, across stages and disciplines		Graduate students studying in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at an Eastern Canadian University, regardless of stage or degree. In this chapter, I focused on the responses from doctoral students	
Participants?	This multiple case study consisted of four students in total. Of these, one ('Elby') was a doctoral candidate. The others were enrolled at the undergraduate level (two in first-year and one in their third year)		The majority of participants were in their second or fourth year and in Arts and Social Sciences or Public Affairs 1. Sixty-six (66) doctoral students participated in the questionnaire 2. Each focus group had three doctoral students (6 in total) 3. One doctoral student participated in the semi-structured interview ('Lydia') 4. Four doctoral students participated in the structured interviews		Forty-three (43) graduate students participated. Of this number, 18 identified as PhD students, 22 identified as master's students, and two (2) did not answer the question. PhD students tended to be in the later stages of their degrees—nine (9) were at year 4 or higher. Six (6) were in the first or second year of their degree, and one (1) was in the third year. PhD programs are typically expected to last four-years	
Other	This research was conducted independently under the supervision of Dr. Guillaume Gentil		This research was conducted independently under the supervision of Drs. Janna Fox and Natasha Artemeva		This research is a result of a collaborative effort with Dr. Sophie Tamas and Maria Dabousse	

Table 16.2 Snapshot of Lydia and Elby, taken from the time of their respective interviews

Pseudonym	Year of study	Stage	Gender	Identifies as...	Discipline
Lydia	8	Dissertation	Female	White	Education Sciences
Elby	8	Dissertation	Male	Indigenous	Business

This chapter draws on data from questionnaire responses and interview transcripts. I focus chiefly on interviews with two doctoral candidates, Elby and Lydia, who were both in their 8th year at the time of their respective interviews and have both since graduated (see Table 16.2). For my analysis, I moved iteratively between the transcripts and questionnaires. I wrote extensive notes, reflective research journal entries, and made voice and video memos. I was first interested in forming a picture of how imposter syndrome figured in doctoral students' experiences. Two questions that guided my analysis stage were:

1. How does imposter syndrome figure in students' experiences? What shape(s) does it take?
2. What work or role might imposter syndrome perform in students' narratives?

I found that there were three main ways imposter syndrome figured in students' experiences: the compass, the obstacle, and the press. I focus on in each in the next section. I also identified two additional and interrelated metaphors—the lighthouse and the award—which I mention in the concluding section of the chapter along with some recommendations for practice. My hope is that this chapter highlights some potentials available for reflection and intervention—ideally at the pedagogical, supervisory, and institutional level, rather than at the level of individual doctoral students.

The Three Metaphors: Getting Stuck, Writing Badly, and Other Curious Impressions

The Press

Did you know that the word *impression* comes to us by way of Old French and Latin words for *into* and *to press*? In many ways, doctoral education is

about pressing academics into being. The completion of doctoral education involves a ritualized act that symbolizes the crossing of a threshold—they arrive on one side of the threshold as novices and exit as independent researchers. In other words, they *become* PhDs. What if imposter feelings functioned like a press? Imposter feelings could be imprints, left from pressures to cross the finish line; evidence of the places where doctoral bodies have encountered imperatives to write, to press keys that form words that become paragraphs which grow into pages that turn into dissertations that (hopefully) transform candidates into doctorates.

Writing on the topic of neoliberalism and the production of selves, Clarke (2008) notes there are at least:

three categories of person visible in contemporary governmental discourse: established “*independent*” persons, people who might be “*empowered*” to become independent (through techniques of self-development), and the “*residue*” requiring containment and control. (141, my emphasis)

Of these three, those inscribed as most desirable and valuable are those who are also ostensibly necessary to the success of neoliberal projects, i.e. independent, private, self-governing individuals (Clarke 2008). Extending Clarke’s ideas further, doctoral students who make the transition by successfully defending and submitting their dissertation become established and *independent* researchers. If doctoral writers are lagging, ‘techniques of self-development’ such as workshops and other events can be deployed to *empower* (pressure) students to write (Clarke 2008: 141). I’m reminded here of Ricki, a focal participant in Burford’s (2017) study of doctoral feelings about not writing, who noticed ‘a saturation of messages’ on campus urging ‘doctoral students to write’ (480). These messages ‘evoked a background feeling of being “moved along,” similar to “psychological warfare [...] like, can you hack it?”’ (480). Circulating feelings of not writing as bad, undesirable, and private might support the kinds of atmospheres intended to motivate (compel) doctoral bodies to write, that is, to become the desirable doctoral body who crosses into the ‘established independent’ category of bodies (Clarke 2008: 141). Perhaps the *residue* then—those requiring further ‘containment and control’ (141)—are the unruly ‘not-writers,’ who threaten the institution’s image of itself with their lagging times-to-completion and seeming lack of independence. They are the students deemed to be ‘too needy,’ like this student in the following excerpt from Lydia:

I worry that I need too much hand holding. Some supervisors in my department would often talk about students that needed too much help. I am so

terrified of being that student that everyone talks about behind their back, like ‘oh that student that was just passed through’. So, I worry about going to them too much.

The student who is *passed through* performs an important function in Lydia’s story. Similar to being pressed through, the notion of being passed through is suggestive of being *pushed through*. It implies that one hasn’t really ‘earned’ the doctorate (reminiscent of Lee and Williams 1999). ‘The student’ sounds a social and relational warning—avoid becoming ‘that student [who] was just passed through or you will become the next subject of secrets and gossip.’ This threat is compounded by Lydia’s allusion to being surveilled vis-à-vis the watchful eyes of ‘some supervisors’ and ‘everyone.’

Surveillance or the threat of surveillance is a tool frequently employed to support the production of selves that are critical to the political and ideological project of neoliberalism (Clarke 2008). As neoliberalism increasingly takes hold, the structure and management of academic institutions shift in response to reflect a social imaginary that rewards competition, entrepreneurialism, marketization, self-governance, and privatization (Caretta et al. 2018). Increased ‘audit, accountability and performativity’ accompany these shifts (Knights and Clarke 2014: 351). Particularly relevant for this chapter is the use of audit reports in doctoral education. At my institution, it’s not uncommon for students to be expected to complete ‘milestone reports,’ whereby they must report on the work they are doing and/or provide rationale for work that has not been completed. For better or worse, these reports tie doctoral achievement to time-to-completion, which reinforces the message that doctoral students need to stay productive because being ‘productive’ means moving along—and not moving means something is wrong.

When asked what they thought the purpose of imposter syndrome might be, one student suggested it provided the ‘social pressure to succeed’ which may also serve as ‘a strong motivator for hard work and achievement.’ Another responded:

I’ve always thought of it as a helpful thing gone into overdrive—it is helpful for my work ethic that I can put pressure on myself. At some point though, I connected self-worth and production, and now it is no longer helpful. I imagine imposter syndrome is really useful neoliberally, if everyone is constantly trying to prove they are capable producers. It internalizes production metrics as self-worth.

In addition to alienating students, milestone reports can also provoke imposter syndrome. First, they typically don’t provide enough space or

permission for students to bring their whole-selves in. Second, some institution requires these reports to be signed off by doctoral supervisors and while this might be okay if the supervisory relationship isn't inducing imposter feelings but can become problematic if it is.

The Compass

Sometimes students appeared to be using imposter syndrome as a *compass* in their accounts of orienting away from certain things and towards others. For instance, Lydia's desire to avoid being a 'student who needs too much' oriented her away from what might be considered 'too much' to ask as a doctoral student and the costs associated with doing so, as well as towards the pivotal role supervisors play in doctoral students' accounts.

Although the experience of questioning the value of what one is saying is frequently reported in the literature on imposter syndrome, the following quote illustrates a complexity that often goes unacknowledged—mainly that the questions asked by this student *also* demonstrate a rhetorical awareness that accompanies the development of advanced academic practices (Tardy 2005):

Questioning the value of what I am saying: Do I know enough? Maybe I'm missing something. Is it clear what I am writing?

I can relate to this—I am at the dissertation stage of my doctorate. A piece of doctoral writing wisdom I recently received and struggled with revolved around tailoring my writing to a specific audience. I found this advice paralysing, because at the time, I struggled to imagine anyone interested in reading or engaging with my ideas. How do I tailor my writing to an audience I struggle to imagine exists? While imposter syndrome *did* trigger and intensify my experience, at the same time, I was grappling with the difficulty many interdisciplinary writers have with determining who their readers are.

When asked what they thought the opposite of feeling like an imposter is and how they recognized it, doctoral students suggested it could be 'expertise,' feeling like one was 'engaged in the department/academic culture/ university more broadly,' or like one's work is 'valued by the university.' Other responses included:

I suppose the opposite would be feeling comfortable and as though I belong. I recognize it as mutual understanding, through shared, meaningful conversation, shared laughter. Connections across vulnerabilities, space to be creative and space for trying and failing.

The opposite would be: Confidence. A sense of belonging. Involvement in campus activities, committees etc. Using one's voice to be heard. Putting one's self 'out there' for critique.

These responses offer insights into the requirements for 'becoming doctoral,' which includes demonstrating an ability to conduct independent inquiry and contributing to a disciplinary community. This seems to suggest that the opposite of imposter syndrome (feeling like a fraud) might be doctorate-ness (feeling like an academic). Viewed from this angle, 'phding' seems to involve imposterism, which in a way is true: doctoral writers are often asked to perform expertise before they feel ready (Casanave 2019) and prototypical models of doctoral education are generally premised on the idea of academic apprenticeship, where novices move from peripheral participation to full participation in a community-of-practice under the guidance of a mentor (Lave and Wenger 1991).

The Obstacle

Cisco (2019) asked postgraduate students attending a large American university what ways, if at all, they experienced imposter phenomenon during their postgraduate education. Three of the four themes that arose related to what one might think of as quintessentially academic activities: participating in group discussions, engaging in academic readings (books, articles, etc.) and writing academic manuscripts. The fourth related to comparing oneself to colleagues and professors. Speaking up in class seemed to heighten feelings of imposterism—participants indicated that engaging in class discussions might reveal the limits of their intelligence or articulateness. Comparisons to peers and professors often reinforced participants' anxieties that they did not have enough understanding of disciplinary knowledge, jargon, or methodologies. The students in Cisco's study shared that they felt that nothing they 'could say or write would meet... colleagues' or professors' expectations' (7). Didi, for example, frequently questioned her writing to the point of eroding her confidence:

Are my sources good enough? Is my style good enough? Am I smart enough to do this? Is my perspective valid enough? Is the argument I'm making a good argument? Am I even capable? (Cisco 2019: 8)

Relatedly, the data from my studies suggests that writing appeared to provoke imposter feelings for some students, which in turn became an *obstacle* to writing. For instance, after submitting his comprehensive exam papers, Elby shared that he was labelled a ‘bad writer’ by some faculty members who felt his papers weren’t as well written as they ‘should’ have been. This irked Elby, who had interpreted the papers not as a test of academic writing performance but as an opportunity to learn and, yes, engage in a performance of displaying knowledge. But, at the same time, Elby also felt strongly that his department contained ‘some very elitist people who seem to think that if you are not a certain kind of writer, you are not even allowed to be at the university.’ Prior to the comprehensive exam papers, the complex rhetorical and ideological nature of writing was rendered an invisible ‘nonquestion’ (Starke-Meyerring 2011). This had consequences for Elby, who shared that his confidence was eroded. This further compounded by what equated to a rejection from a prospective supervisor later:

When I went to ask one of them to be my supervisor, because at that time I still respected them, they said no. They didn’t want to work with me because I am a ‘bad writer.’

Elby didn’t recall learning how to identify what kind of writing or writers were allowed in his department or discussing any expectations regarding how comprehensive exam papers ought to be written. It was only after the fact that Elby discovered there *were* tacit expectations and even then the expectations weren’t so much discussed as they were silently invoked by the imaginary of the ‘certain kind[s] of writer... allowed to be at the university.’ In many ways, Elby is right—there *are* certain kinds of writing that have been historically privileged over others in the academic sphere. And ‘standard edited academic English,’ as Inoue (2015) calls it, *does* privilege middle class white settlers, or at least it can if uncritically adopted as the benchmark for academic English. Furthermore, academic assessment practices—which include assessments such as comprehensive exams—are frequently criticized by scholars for a lack of ‘fairness,’ which is a concept that can be loosely translated as a measure of equity in testing practices (Inoue 2015). Inoue (2015) bluntly puts it this way:

You don’t have to actively try to be racist for your writing assessments to be racist. As Victor Villanueva (2006) explains... we don’t live in a post-racial society. We live in one that has a “new racism,” one that uses different terms to accomplish the same old racial hierarchies and pathways of oppression and

opportunity. We cannot eradicate racism in our writing classrooms until we actually address it first in our writing assessments. (9)

The ‘certain kind of writer’ evoked by Elby serves as a waypoint for normality. In other words, what gets cast as excess, different, or abnormal becomes a deficit—perhaps ‘in need’ of techniques for empowerment and self-development, to echo Clark again (2008)—rather than a resource (Canagarajah 2002). This ‘difference as deficit’ adhered itself to Elby, the ‘bad writer’ responsible (or *responsibilized*) for producing ‘problem’ texts. This is problematic for many reasons, but I want to point readers to the pedagogical implications this has, particularly if we agree with sociocultural views of doctoral education regarding the shared responsibility for learning how to participate in an academic community (Lave and Wenger 1991; also Hopwood 2010). For example, an apprenticeship view of doctoral education suggests that students learn how to participate in an academic community under the guidance of a mentor or senior member of the community. What counts as participation will vary depending on the community, which in turn will constrain the choices available to doctoral students as they write. Treating writing as a ‘nonquestion’ leaves the complex task of identifying these constraints (or affordances) to students to negotiate on their own, who already are likely struggling to figure out not only *what* to write but *how*, and in *what form* (Tardy 2005). This will have some impact on doctoral students’ learning experiences in general, but it’s also likely to impact on doctoral students’ feelings of belonging to an academic community (Emmioğlu et al. 2017).

I want to dwell for a bit longer on the importance of belonging, particularly because it is frequently associated with imposter syndrome and doctoral dropout in the literature (Chakraverty 2020; also Cohen and McConnell 2019) and because negotiating belonging is paramount to completing the doctorate. At most Canadian institutions, the dissertation is expected to contribute to a scholarly community—and negotiating what this contribution entails is a large part of the writing and defending process. However, researchers of doctoral education have long argued that knowledge production is only one aspect of doctoral learning; additional related components also include the development of a scholarly identity, which involves ‘feeling academic’ and a sense of belonging (Jazvac-Martek 2009). The process of forming a scholarly identity is significantly influenced by doctoral students’ experiences and relationships (Hopwood 2010), yet there remains a persistent emphasis in the literature on the 1:1 relationship between the supervisor and the student. In addition, ‘community’ often evokes an imaginary of a

singular academic community, one that students *want* to belong to (Jazvac-Martek 2009). The appropriateness of these assumptions has been questioned in the literature, including the implications of what it might actually mean for some to be ‘successful’ or to ‘belong’ to a particular academic community (Burford 2017; Jazvac-Martek 2009; Todd 2016). For some students, such as Elby, framing imposter feelings as a writing obstacle might be a practical and appropriate ‘strategy for getting out, but also for getting through’ (Burford 2017: 477). His experience with his comprehensive exams was so distressing; it caused him to question whether he belonged:

It shook me up, it devastated me. It scared the shit out of me. I was wondering, ‘should I even be here?’ but I knew I should be... I knew I was damn good at my job... but that writing [experience]... prevented me from moving forward. It paralysed me. I can’t believe that, at my age, these individuals could destroy me. But it shows you how fragile our identities are, our confidence in what we are doing here is.

However, this question of belonging was eventually eclipsed. Elby reconfigured the ‘imposter’ label as an indicator that he was doing something right as a member of an Indigenous community, which included pushing back and rejecting ‘elitist’ settler-colonial academic practices, as well as creating space where he felt he could exist *wholly* and *fully* as a member of an Indigenous community:

I was in the elevator with someone, and I looked at them and said, that was brutal. They said, it’s better coming from someone you trust, because in the academic world they’re going to destroy you. You have to get used to that. I said, *not in my world*. The people I work with...and in Indigenous studies...if we want to indigenize the institution...that attitude doesn’t, can’t exist. It is not our traditional way. And in a lot of ways, going back to the Indigenous identity, this is such a hostile environment when it comes to triggering us. We might not even realise it when it’s even happening. It can trigger our old belief systems. All of a sudden, it’s that *stupid Indian* stereotype all over again. I mean, back in the 90’s in university? You hid. Here I am in an institution and I hid. I did it for a reason. This was at a time when you hid your identity in shame. That’s what you did. You were told to do that. One way I overcame this was by locating myself in the research. I specifically started off with my life narrative. I was struggling to start writing, struggling to get into it. So, I started writing my life narrative. I told myself it was a positionality piece. I told myself, *I have to situate myself in the research. It’s who we are as Indigenous people*.

Waite (2017: 56) writes that it is impossible to engage in ‘acts of writing without coming up against notions of failure.’ But these moments can become liberatory for some, who craft strategies for reclaiming failure as something to write with or alongside, rather than against (Probyn 2005). Likewise, embracing the image of the imposter is another way one might reclaim failure. Doing so requires retrieving imposterism from the heap of bad feelings to see how it might be recycled or repurposed—perhaps into a kind of radar that can tell us where the shallow, conventional definitions of success are, should we wish to avoid them. I appreciate how this student in the following excerpt frames imposterism and ‘outsideness’ as a ‘valid position’:

I am a queer visible minority. I think this contributes to feeling like an ‘imposter’ within society in general, but I would say I don’t feel this as much in academic spaces, especially at my university where I feel the department is quite welcoming. [However, I arrived here] from a different discipline and have found it a challenge to integrate into my current field of study (though I hear similar struggles from many). It has taken time for me to come to terms with the idea that my in-betweenness is a strength rather than a perpetual weakness. I think there is an academic benefit to learning to see ‘outsideness’ as a valid position from which it is possible to have a meaningful perspective. There is a lot of creativity, flexibility, generativity needed to survive as an outsider, as an imposter. And I think there is solidarity in recognizing that in some way this describes all of us.

The Imposter as Resource Cards and Concluding Remarks

My aim throughout this chapter has been to highlight the places one might pause for reflection and intervention—ideally at the pedagogical, supervisory, and institutional level, rather than at the level of individual doctoral students—instead of a precise ‘inventory.’ In support of this aim, I created a set of cards readers may download and print (see [Appendix](#)). Each card is based on the data and my analysis, and contains the metaphors introduced in this chapter (the press, compass, and obstacle, plus two more: the award and lighthouse). Figure 16.1 shows thumbnails of the cards.

I was motivated to develop these cards because I believe that the knowledge generated from my inquiry processes ought to be useful and subvert theory/practice divides. I imagine these cards used in several ways, such as:



Fig. 16.1 Resource cards (see [Appendix](#) for download link)

- Conversation starters at faculty and supervisor brown-bag lunches, especially those geared towards the topic of imposter syndrome.
- Topics for Inkshedding activities (see Hunt, n.d.).
- Questions to guide reflection, whether in general or repurposed in some way to support critical readings of imposter syndrome and doctoral education literature.
- Conversation starters during supervision meetings, experimenting with using them in 1:1 meetings and in group meetings (if one has multiple students, similar to studio-based approaches).

As I write these closing lines, I am sitting on the couch in my living room. The sun is streaming through my windows, the windchimes on my porch

are being jostled about by our Canadian Spring weather, and my dog has shimmied across the couch to snuggle in a bit closer to me. Outside, my city is on lockdown for the eighth week due to COVID-19. Being in a PhD programme already involves being isolated for extended periods of time—something that has only become more intensified with the pandemic and physical distancing—which in turn makes it easy to lose sight of the impact and value one's work has. Cohen's and McConnell's (2019) recommendation that chairs, directors, supervisors, and faculty mentors make more of an effort to recognize students' accomplishments across a wide variety of areas, in addition to higher status achievements, feels apropos now more than ever.

Writing a good conclusion is a challenge. This chapter has been keeping me company for the better part of a year, though most especially during this pandemic. Frankly, I loathe to let it go. Letting go, saying goodbye, etc., is difficult at the best of times—why would it be any different for me? I'm emboldened by the words of Dr. Amanda Visconti, who says we should write for the person we were 10 months ago. I also want to write for the person I want to be 10 months from now. Ten months from now, I'd like to remember the effort, care, and community that have sprung up around this chapter. I'd also like to remember that letting go is an overlooked and valuable part of writing. And, ideally, the person I'll be ten months from now will be closer to adding the letters 'Dr.' to her name.

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Appendix: Link to Cards

Hello Readers: Thank you for your interest. You can download a printable PDF of the cards at <https://bit.ly/2yMCQIk>. I'd love to hear about what you get up to.—Britt.

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