

Imposter syndrome

Part 'self', part 'other'



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This short article will discuss how imposter syndrome can affect a person's sense of identity and belonging. I will briefly share some of my experiences before discussing why a decolonised curriculum can, by examining our histories and their intersections with Europe and the UK, support opportunities for black and minority ethnic (BME) educators and students in teaching and learning, and help them to understand who they are.

Firstly, as a mature student and, now, an older British Pakistani Muslim female early-career researcher and associate lecturer, I questioned my identity, the relevance and impact of my research, my place in academia and the worth of my academic qualifications and achievements. This level of self-reflexivity threw into sharp focus the fact that there was something missing that was making me feel inadequate. Clance and Imes (1978, p. 241) have noted that those suffering from imposter syndrome do not experience an internal sense of success despite their many achievements and professional standing in the academy and society.

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MISSING PIECES OF HISTORY

As I was growing up, the lack of culture and history shared with us by my parents in our home led me to believe the narrative fed to me in our schools

in the 1970s: of being uncivilised, and requiring assimilation into the mainstream culture. This narrative continued through compulsory education – where the munificence of the British Empire, for example, was taught – and into higher education, which seeps students in dead white European men's perspectives on science and sociology while omitting other world-views perceived as substandard and detrimental to knowledge-seekers.

Reading Priyamvada Gopal's *Insurgent Empire* (2019) and Satnam Virdee's *Race, Class and the Racialised Outsider* (2014) informed me of a different version of European and British 18th-, 19th- and 20th-century history – one of colonies, resilience and resistance by the colonised, one that is not taught in schools. It also illustrated how attitudes towards colonised citizens continue to be held in relation to minority communities now residing in Europe and Britain.

A growing literature documents the fact that the inequality and racism faced by minority ethnic educators in the spaces in which they teach is often played out through a series of micro-aggressions and passive-aggressive behaviours. In some cases the literature shows us how to navigate those spaces, and even what strategies to utilise in order to avoid encounters with instances of internalised racism or 'unconscious bias' – a set of behaviours and attitudes which are racist, but which the owner refuses to take responsibility for. The entitlement of the dominant group to, within the social structures of class, gender and race, behave and participate in group and individual behaviour that underpins their superiority to minority ethnic academics (Bivens, 1995; Andersen & Hill-Collins, 2010) impacted on how I interpreted these interactions within the structure: I internalised them as 'not being good enough' and 'not belonging'.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

Knowing my history has given me sense of identity and of self-worth which was previously missing. This



showed me how important it is to know our place in history, where we come from and why we are here. It empowered me to work alongside allies in academic and political circles to be vocal, and on occasion to ‘disrupt the narrative’, through critical workshops that encourage us to speak ‘our truth’.

BME academic research groups such as the Centre for Education for Race Equality in Scotland, and BME educator groups such as the Scottish Association of Minority Ethnic Educators, are invaluable as they share their research, their experiences and their bespoke coaching and mentoring programmes, creating safe spaces in which to voice concerns in the workplace in order to inform policy and practice. They develop not only resilience but resistance and criticality of racism and ‘white privilege’. They are also vehicles for a movement for changing the policy and practice of education and, more importantly, creating a decolonised curriculum as a prerequisite for a socially just nation. ■

References

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