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Imposter Syndrome & The Law School Caste System

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IMPOSTER SYNDROME & THE LAW SCHOOL CASTE SYSTEM

Sara L. Ochs*

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Abstract

For decades, legal academia has been structured around a hierarchical caste system, with tenured and tenure-track doctrinal law professors—many of whom are men—occupying the highest caste, and

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professors of legal skills courses—who more often identify as women—relegated to the lower castes. The status of these “lower caste” professors is routinely reinforced through weaker job security, less respect, and lower pay than received by their doctrinal, “upper caste” colleagues. Given this inequality, imposter syndrome plays a pervasive role in the lives and careers of professors of legal skills courses. Relying on qualitative data obtained from teaching faculty and staff at ABA accredited and approved law schools nationwide, this Article analyzes how the law school hierarchy manifests as imposter syndrome in professors of legal skills courses, which impacts their relationships with colleagues; teaching; relationships with students; publication and promotion of scholarship; and personal health and wellbeing. Based on these findings, the Article argues that the impacts of imposter syndrome on skills professors—many of which have gendered implications—promote a recurring cycle of classism and discrimination within legal academia. The Article further identifies imposter syndrome as an institutionalized, rather than an individualized, problem within legal academia. The responsibility and capacity to address this problem therefore lies in the institution—in this case, law schools—rather than the skills professors themselves. Thus, this Article concludes that the only way to reduce the insidious presence of imposter syndrome in legal academia is to dismantle the law school caste system and level the hierarchy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Legal academia is a profession of hierarchies and barriers.¹ Barriers to entry prevent all but a select few from entering the exclusive profession,² and those who do gain access often face engrained and inflexible hierarchies upon entry. Those academics who fall outside the limited purview of the concept of the “traditional” law professor, whether because of their race, gender, or the content

1. See Ruth Gordon, *On Community in the Midst of Hierarchy (and Hierarchy in the Midst of Community)*, in PRESUMED INCOMPETENT 325–26 (Gabriella Gutierrez y Muhs, Yolanda Flores Niemann, Carmen G. Gonzalez, and Angela P. Harris, eds. 2012) (discussing legal academia’s “obsession” with rankings and hierarchies).

2. See Christopher J. Ryan, Jr. & Meghan Dawe, *Mind the Gap: Gender Pay Disparities in the Legal Academy*, 34 GEO. J. LEGAL ETHICS, 10–11 (2021) (recognizing that legal academia represents “an exclusive sector of an already elite profession,” in which law school professor hiring is now more competitive than ever); see also MEERA E. DEO, *UNEQUAL PROFESSION: RACE AND GENDER IN LEGAL ACADEMIA*, 13–18 (2019) (noting these barriers are very successful at keeping minority and female applicants from entering legal academia).

of their course load, endure stigmas, biases, and prejudices from students, colleagues, and administrators. Constant exposure to this treatment can plant deeply seated doubts in non-traditional legal academics, often causing them to fear becoming exposed as less educated, knowledgeable, or accomplished than their qualifications represent.³ This fear, christened by psychologists as “imposter syndrome,”⁴ has emerged as a widespread psychological phenomenon with a strong foothold in legal academia, and one which adversely impacts those faculty members viewed as non-traditional law professors.

It is well settled that law faculty positions are not created equal. Indeed, for decades, scholars have recognized the strict hierarchical structure of legal academia, by which faculty are ranked based on their role in the law school and, specifically, their assigned course load.⁵ Tenured or tenure-track faculty members—the vast majority of whom are professors of doctrinal or casebook courses⁶—occupy the upper echelons of this hierarchy, enjoying the greatest levels of power and significant monetary and non-monetary rewards.⁷

Many law schools relegate professors of experiential-based skills courses, such as legal writing professors, academic success and bar prep faculty, clinic professors, and research librarians, who this Article will broadly refer as “legal skills professors” or simply “skills professors,”⁸ to the lower-levels of the law school hierarchy. Law

3. See AMY CUDDY, PRESENCE: BRINGING YOUR BOLDEST SELF TO YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGES, 88–89 (2015).

4. See Pauline Rose Clance & Suzanne Ament Imes, *The Imposter Phenomenon in High Achieving Women: Dynamics and Therapeutic Intervention*, 15 PSYCHOTHERAPY: THEORY, RSCH. & PRAC. 1, 1 (1978).

5. E.g., Kent D. Syverud, *The Caste System and Best Practices in Legal Education*, 1 J. ASS'N LEGAL WRITING DIR. 12, 13–16 (2002); Jo Anne Durako, *Dismantling Hierarchies: Occupational Segregation of Legal Writing Faculty in Law Schools: Separate and Unequal*, 73 UMKC L. REV. 253, 253–54 (2004); Mitchell Nathanson, *Dismantling the “Other”: Understanding the Nature and Malleability of Groups in the Legal Writing Professorate’s Quest for Equality*, 13 J. LEGAL WRITING INST. 79 (2007).

6. Doctrinal courses refer to both required first-year and elective upper-level courses which are primarily lecture-based and in which students’ participation is generally limited to answering questions in class; performing required readings, generally from textbooks; and taking examinations. See Nantiya Ruan, *Papercuts: Hierarchical Microaggressions in Law Schools*, 31 HASTINGS WOMEN’S L.J. 3, 4, n.5 (2020).

7. See Syverud, *supra* note 5, at 14.

8. This is a non-exhaustive list of courses legal skills professors may be assigned to teach. See Ruan, *supra* note 6, at 4, n.4 (2020). In and of itself, the use of the terms “doctrinal” and “skills professors” is problematic, as the pedagogical distinction between the two types of courses is superficial and contributes to the subordination of skills professors as a separate class of faculty. See Rachel Arnov-Richman,

schools often deny skills professors the job security, monetary benefits, and privileges to which their doctrinal faculty counterparts are entitled.⁹

Due to their placement at the lower rungs of the law school hierarchy, and their discriminatory treatment as “others” in legal academia, skills professors often endure severe feelings of self-doubt. Being made to feel as though they do not necessarily belong in legal academia often leads skills professors to feel like frauds; they expect their colleagues and students to eventually determine that they are not qualified as experts in their curricular areas, and they convince themselves they should neither be teaching nor writing scholarship. In other words, skills professors are highly susceptible to and affected by feelings of imposter syndrome.

In recent years, imposter syndrome has experienced a surge in societal recognition, and both popular and scholarly resources abound on how afflicted individuals should “cure” their imposter syndrome.¹⁰ Yet, as many psychologists recognize, imposter syndrome is not just an individual problem; instead it often manifests from one’s social context and the manner in which they are treated by their peers.¹¹ Indeed, those who are treated as less valuable or “worthy” of accolades than their peers and especially those who are subjected to discrimination by their institution—whether by their employer, educational institution, or community in general—are often more susceptible to imposter syndrome.¹² Despite this research, imposter syndrome is still stigmatized as an individual problem, with the onus on the self-proclaimed “imposter” to change

Integrated Learning, Integrated Faculty, 92 TEMP. L. REV. 745, 746, n.5 (2020); Maureen F. Fitzgerald, *What’s Wrong with Legal Research and Writing? Problems and Solutions*, 88 LAW LIBR. J. 247, 275 (1996) (recognizing that the categorization of “substance” and “skills” courses as two distinct types of courses “suggests a natural inferiority of ‘skills’ as a component of lawyering.”). However, given that this is one of the many ways in which law schools seek to render professors of legal writing, research, clinical courses, etc., a lower and separate class, I utilize these titles to signify the difference between doctrinal and non-traditional professors throughout this Article.

9. See, e.g., Kathryn M. Stanchi, *Who Next, the Janitors? A Socio Feminist Critique of the Status Hierarchy of Law Professors*, 73 UMKC L. REV. 467, 476–88 (2004).

10. See, e.g., Melissa Lawrence, *These Three Steps Will Cure Imposter Syndrome*, FORBES (Jan. 18, 2021), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ellevate/2021/01/18/these-three-steps-will-cure-imposter-syndrome/?sh=5ae1b09e58d5>.

11. See Sanne Feenstra et al., *Contextualizing the Impostor “Syndrome”*, 11 FRONT. PSYCHOL., 1, 3 (2020).

12. See *id.* (“[W]e contend that individuals may very well feel like impostors when they are treated in ways to suggest they are.”).

themselves to mitigate their imposter feelings.¹³ Instead, as others have begun to recognize, imposter syndrome needs to be treated as an institutionalized problem stemming from inequality, and the onus thus lies with the institution to promote equality in efforts to minimize imposter syndrome.¹⁴ In the context of legal academia, this means skills professors—who often suffer from imposter syndrome due to their rank in the law school caste system—are not at fault for their imposter syndrome, nor should they bear the burden of “fixing” themselves. Instead, this responsibility lies with their academic institutions.

Despite greater media and pop culture references to imposter syndrome,¹⁵ a significant and expanding body of interdisciplinary literature examining the presence and impact of imposter syndrome in higher education,¹⁶ and abounding anecdotal stories of imposter syndrome among faculty members at law schools, relatively little legal scholarship has explored imposter syndrome in legal academia.¹⁷ Specifically, no work has yet to analyze the role that the engrained law school hierarchy plays in fostering imposter syndrome among legal skills professors.

This Article seeks to fill that gap by examining how the law school

13. See, e.g., Lawrence, *supra* note 10; Interview by Diana Opong, *5 Steps to Shake the Feeling That You're an Imposter*, NPR (Feb. 1, 2021), <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/959656202>.

14. See Ruchika Tulshyan & Jodi-Ann Burey, *Stop Telling Women They Have Imposter Syndrome*, HARV. BUS. REV. (Feb. 11, 2021).

15. See Dena M. Bravata et al., *Prevalence, Predictors, and Treatment of Impostor Syndrome: A Systematic Review*, 35(4) J. GEN. INTERNAL MED. 1252, 1271 (2020) (identifying 2,317 internet articles published on imposter syndrome between March 28, 2018 and March 18, 2019).

16. See, e.g., Anna Parkman, *The Imposter Phenomenon in Higher Education: Incidence and Impact*, 16(1) J. HIGHER EDUC. THEORY AND PRAC. 51, 52–53 (2016); Holly M. Hutchins & Hilary Rainbolt, *What Triggers Imposter Phenomenon Among Academic Faculty? A Critical Incident Study Exploring Antecedents, Coping, and Development Opportunities*, 20(3) HUM. RES. DEV. INT'L 194 (2016); Elizabeth Ramsey & Deana Brown, *Feeling Like a Fraud: Helping Students Renegotiate Their Academic Identities*, 25(1) COLL. & UNDERGRADUATE LIBRS., 86 (2017); Joel Bothello & Thomas J. Roulet, *The Imposter Syndrome, or the Mis-Representation of Self in Academic Life*, 56(4) J. MGMT. STUD., 854 (2019).

17. *But see, e.g.*, Lacy Rakestraw, *How to Stop Feeling Like a Phony in Your Library: Recognizing the Causes of the Imposter Syndrome, and How to Put a Stop to the Cycle*, 109 LAW LIBR. J. 465 (2017) (explaining the results of a 2011 survey conducted of law librarians to determine the prevalence of imposter syndrome); Leslie Culver, *The Rise of Self Sidelining*, 39 WOMEN'S RTS. L. REP. 173 (2018) (discussing how imposter syndrome contributes to female self-sidelining in legal academia, in which women forgo professional advancement).

faculty hierarchy generates feelings of imposter syndrome in skills professors, as well as the damaging effects of these feelings. Utilizing qualitative responses from teaching faculty and staff at American Bar Association (“ABA”) accredited and approved law schools nationwide, this Article analyzes the causes of and practical impact imposter syndrome has on skills professors, specifically regarding their relationships with colleagues; teaching; relationships with students; publication and promotion of scholarship; and personal health and wellbeing. The Article further identifies the secondary impacts such hierarchical-induced imposter syndrome has on skills professors’ students and their law schools more generally.

Part II of this Article explores the current literature on imposter syndrome, including its root causes and general symptoms. It then provides a succinct overview of the law school hierarchical structure that seeks to disadvantage skills professors and contributes to the widespread presence of imposter syndrome in legal academia. Part III then utilizes written responses from skills professors nationwide to identify the causes and impacts of skills professors’ imposter syndrome and specifically evaluates how imposter syndrome practically affects skills professors’ work, relationships, and wellbeing.

Finally, Part V identifies common themes from the survey that support the conclusion that hierarchical-induced imposter syndrome in skills professors often solidifies the hierarchical strata that initially caused it, thereby promoting a recurring cycle of classism and discrimination. In addition, skills professors’ imposter syndrome creates unexpected secondary impacts on their students and their law school administrations. This Part concludes by arguing imposter syndrome is an institutionalized, rather than individualized, problem. Therefore, rather than placing the burden on legal skills professors to mitigate their feelings of imposter syndrome, the responsibility instead lies with law schools to reduce the insidious presence of imposter syndrome in legal academia and remedy its detrimental impacts. To do this, law schools must tear down the hierarchies in legal academia and work towards equality for skills professors.

II. IMPOSTER SYNDROME

A. An Overview of Imposter Syndrome

Imposter syndrome was initially conceptualized as “impostor

phenomenon” in 1978 by psychologists Pauline Chance and Suzanne Imes.¹⁸ Imposter syndrome—or phenomenon¹⁹—is “a psychological experience of intellectual and professional fraudulence.”²⁰ Those who experience imposter syndrome fear others will eventually discover they are not as smart, accomplished, or successful as their external qualifications suggest them to be and constantly worry they will be exposed as frauds.²¹ Essentially, imposter syndrome “highlight[s] the universal fear that our lives or work don’t have meaning,”²² and induces an all-encompassing feeling that “we do not belong.”²³

The strongest indicator of imposter syndrome is “persistent self-doubt regarding intelligence and ability.”²⁴ Despite objective successes, individuals experiencing imposter syndrome are highly self-critical, fail to internalize their accomplishments, and instead attribute their achievements to external factors such as luck, help from others, or mistake, rather than to their actual competence.²⁵ Those experiencing imposterism “believe others have inflated perceptions of their abilities and fear being evaluated.”²⁶ They often set unrealistically high standards, and when they fail to flawlessly achieve their exaggerated goals, they characterize themselves as failures.²⁷ Self-proclaimed “imposters” discount their successes, avoid celebrating their accomplishments, and focus extensively on negative feedback or criticism, while emphasizing any minute failures.²⁸

18. See generally, Clance & Imes, *supra* note 4.

19. The terms imposter syndrome, imposter phenomenon, and imposterism are utilized interchangeably in modern nomenclature and will be used as such in this Article. See Katherine Hawley, *Conspiracy Theories, Impostor Syndrome, and Distrust*, 175 PHIL. STUD., 969, 974 (2019); Katherine M. Caflich, *Imposter Syndrome: The Truth About Feeling Like a Fake*, AM. SOC. FOR MICROBIOLOGY (Aug. 14, 2020).

20. Karina K. L. Mak et al., *Impostor Phenomenon Measurement Scales: A Systematic Review*, 10 FRONT. PSYCH. 1, 1 (Apr. 2019).

21. See Clance & Imes, *supra* note 4, at 241.

22. MEREDITH FINNEMAN, BRAG BETTER: MASTER THE ART OF FEARLESS SELF-PROMOTION, 30 (2020).

23. See CUDDY, *supra* note 3, at 167.

24. Hutchins & Rainbolt, *supra* note 16, at 194.

25. See Bravata et al., *supra* note 15, at 1252; see also Mak et al., *supra* note 21, at 1.

26. Mak et al., *supra* note 20, at 1.

27. See Sophie Pannhausen et al., *Never Good Enough: The Relation Between the Impostor Phenomenon and Multidimensional Perfectionism*, CURRENT. PSYCHOL. at 1 (2020).

28. See, e.g., Jessica Bennett, *How to Overcome 'Impostor Syndrome'*, N.Y. TIMES, <https://www.nytimes.com/guides/working-womans-handbook/overcome->

Despite its name, imposter syndrome is not a medically or psychiatrically recognized disorder that carries a clinical diagnosis.²⁹ However, the symptoms of imposter syndrome are significant and include “increased levels of stress, burnout, and decreased job performance and satisfaction over time,”³⁰ “generalized anxiety, lack of self-confidence, depression, and frustration related to inability to meet self-imposed standards of achievement,”³¹ as well as emotional instability and negative self-evaluation.³² These emotional symptoms can also often develop into physical conditions such as back pain, migraines, or even autoimmune disorders.³³

Imposter syndrome often manifests in two general types of responses. First, it may generate avoidance tendencies, resulting in procrastination and self-sabotage.³⁴ An individual’s imposterism may exacerbate pre-existing fears of failing, often prompting them to abandon their goals in efforts to preemptively avoid failure.³⁵ Second, individuals afflicted with imposter syndrome may cope through overwork and overpreparation, which, while productive in the short-term, can generate long-term workaholism and burnout.³⁶

Unlike the symptoms of imposter syndrome—which are largely accepted throughout psychological literature—the causes of imposterism are more ambiguous. Scholars have largely recognized imposter syndrome is caused—at least in part—by the characteristics of the individual affected by the imposter feelings.³⁷ For instance, Anna Parkman has identified that imposter syndrome most often adversely affects “those with advanced degrees, those who have the traits of conscientiousness, achievement orientation, . . . and people who work in highly competitive and stressful occupations.”³⁸ A 2014

impostor-syndrome (last visited Mar. 22, 2022).

29. See Bravata et al., *supra* note 15, at 1252.

30. *Id.* at 1270.

31. Clance & Imes, *supra* note 4, at 242.

32. See Flora Fassl et al., *Impostors Dare to Compare: Associations Between the Impostor Phenomenon, Gender Typing, and Social Comparison Orientation in University Students*, 11 FRONT. PSYCHOL. 1, 2 (2020).

33. See DR. JESSAMY HIBBERD, THE IMPOSTER CURE: HOW TO STOP FEELING LIKE A FRAUD AND ESCAPE THE MIND-TRAP OF IMPOSTER SYNDROME 35 (2019).

34. See *id.* at 165–66; see also Kirsten Weir, *Feel Like a Fraud?* AM. PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOC., <https://www.apa.org/gradpsych/2013/11/fraud> (last visited Mar. 22, 2022).

35. See generally HIBBERD, *supra* note 33, at 35.

36. See generally Pannhausen et al., *supra* note 27.

37. See generally Feenstra et al., *supra* note 11 (detailing the scholarship dedicated to examining imposter syndrome as an individualistic concept).

38. Parkman et al., *supra* note 16, at 52–53; see also HIBBERD, *supra* note 34, at

empirical study published in the *Journal of Business Psychology* further confirmed that self-efficacy, maladaptive perfectionism, and neuroticism are the three character traits most closely linked to imposter syndrome.³⁹

Another school of thought has recently emerged which recognizes that the causes of imposter syndrome do not lie exclusively within the nature or characteristics of the affected individual; instead, psychologists and academics have begun to recognize that social structure and context lead people to question their self-worth and their qualifications.⁴⁰ In other words, research indicates imposter syndrome may be linked not only to an individual's psychological and emotional attributes, but also to their social context and the manner in which they are treated by others.⁴¹

Specifically, imposter syndrome thrives in hierarchical settings.⁴² Members of groups who occupy lower ranks of professional and societal hierarchies, or those who are seen as "others," meaning they deviate in some way from societal norms or fall within the minority demographic of their school, workplace, or community,⁴³ are rendered particularly susceptible to imposter feelings.⁴⁴ These groups include individuals "who have been marginali[z]ed, previously left out of decision-making[,] and those who may have struggled with

61 (noting those who are more prone to Type "A" perfectionist tendencies are usually more susceptible to imposter syndrome).

39. See Jasmine Vergauwe et al., *Fear of Being Exposed: The Trait Relatedness of the Impostor Phenomenon and its Relevance in the Work Context*, 30 *J. BUS. PSYCHOL.* 565, 577 (2014); see also Pannhausen et al., *supra* note 27 (recognizing strong links between perfectionist tendencies and feelings of imposterism).

40. See Feenstra et al., *supra* note 11, at 2.

41. See *id.* (building on Pauline Chance's initial finding that imposter feelings might be shaped by "interpersonal and social contexts").

42. See *id.* at 3; see also Molly Campbell, *Feeling Like a Fraud: Impostor Syndrome in STEM, TECH. NETWORKS* (Oct. 7, 2019), <https://www.technologynetworks.com/tn/articles/feeling-like-a-fraud-impostor-syndrome-in-stem-324839> (noting that imposter syndrome is particularly evident in STEM, which is "renowned for its hierarchy").

43. See Bridgette J. Peteet et al., *Impostorism is Associated with Greater Psychological Distress and Lower Self-Esteem for African American Students*, 34 *CURR. PSYCHOL.* 154, 157 (2014); see also Weir, *supra* note 34 (recognizing that "differing in any way from the majority of your peers—whether by race, gender, sexual orientation or some other characteristic—can fuel the sense of being a fraud"); Parkman et al., *supra* note 16 (explaining that "in professions where one sex is predominating, individuals of the opposite sex are more likely to demonstrate imposter behaviors").

44. See Feenstra et al., *supra* note 11, at 3.

embedded or implicit biases.”⁴⁵ Specifically, those belonging to a professional group or category earning lower compensation, having less representation, or ranking lower on the social or professional hierarchy than their peers may “question their ‘place’ within certain institutions . . . [and] thereby increas[e] their susceptibility to feel like ‘imposters’ when in those institutions.”⁴⁶ Likely for these reasons, numerous scholars recognize that imposter syndrome disproportionately impacts females⁴⁷ and racial minorities,⁴⁸ two prominently disenfranchised demographic groups.

B. Imposter Syndrome in Legal Academia

Given both individual and external causes of imposter syndrome, interdisciplinary literature suggests imposter syndrome enjoys a strong foothold in academia.⁴⁹ This is especially true for legal academia, which is predominantly composed of accomplishment-oriented academics with one or more advanced degrees.⁵⁰ Moreover,

45. Dr. Theresa Simpkin, *Faking it? Why the Imposter Syndrome Phenomenon May Be a Barrier to the Post-Covid ‘New Normal’*, TRAINING J. (July 31, 2020), <https://www.trainingjournal.com/articles/opinion/faking-it-why-imposter-phenomenon-may-be-barrier-post-covid-%E2%80%98new-normal%E2%80%99>.

46. Feenstra et al., *supra* note 11, at 3.

47. See, e.g., Manfred F.R. Kets de Vries, *The Dangers of Feeling Like a Fake*, HARV. BUS. REV. (Sept. 2005), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/299261265_The_dangers_of_feeling_like_a_fake; see also Elizabeth A. Canning et al., *Feeling Like an Imposter: The Effect of Perceived Classroom Competition on the Daily Psychological Experiences of First-Generation College Students*, 11(5) SOCIAL PSYCH. AND PERSONALITY SCI. (2020); Advancing the Future of Women in Business: The 2020 KPMG Women’s Leadership Summit Report, at 2 (2020), <https://womensleadership.kpmg.us/content/dam/womensleadership/pdf/2020/2020wlsstudy.pdf> (detailing a survey distributed by KPMG to 700 business women from a variety of industries and Fortune 1000 companies which found that as much as 75% of female executives reported experiencing imposter syndrome at some point in their career). But see, e.g., Bravata, et al., *supra* note 15, at 1271 (recognizing that out of thirty-three reviewed articles, sixteen reported significantly higher statistics of imposter feelings in women, but that the remaining seventeen found no differences in rates of imposter syndrome between women and men).

48. See generally George P. Chrousos & Alexios-Fotios A. Mentis, *Imposter Syndrome Threatens Diversity*, 367 SCI. 749, 749 (2020); see also Peteet et al., *supra* note 44; Kevin Cokley et al., *An Examination of the Impact of Minority Status Stress and Imposter Feelings on the Mental Health of Diverse Ethnic Minority College Students*, 41(2) J. MULTICULTURAL COUNSELING AND DEV. 101, 106 (2013).

49. See Parkman, *supra* note 16, at 53–54; Melanie Clark et al., *Perceived Inadequacy: A Study of the Imposter Phenomenon among College and Research Librarians*, 75(3) COLL. AND RSCH. LIBR. 255, 256 (2014).

50. See Parkman, *supra* note 16, at 53–54.

imposter syndrome thrives in the highly competitive and stressful academic environment for which legal academia is known.⁵¹ For instance, Manfred F.R. Kets de Vries notes that imposter syndrome is highly prevalent in academia since “the appearance of intelligence is vital to success,”⁵² while Holly Hutchins has concluded that the “publish or perish” culture pervasive in academia, in which “performance targets are often vague, support can be inconsistent, and [there exists] a highly competitive research and funding climate,” fosters the presence of self-doubt and feelings of fraudulence.⁵³ Such feelings are easily implicated in legal academia, where professors’ prospects at tenure and promotion are subject largely to student evaluations—which research reflects are significantly flawed by gender and racial bias⁵⁴—and offers to publish in law reviews, which are manned primarily by second and third-year law students.⁵⁵

In addition to this competition and unreliable feedback, one of the primary features of legal academia that renders it prone to imposter syndrome is its hierarchical structure. Not only does legal academia maintain a hierarchy premised on experience—with those less experienced, untenured professors at the bottom, escalating in prestige until the topmost hierarchical level occupied by fully tenured, “expert” professors—but it is also structured around a second, less reasoned hierarchy: one based on a professor’s primary course assignments. This second hierarchy is so ingrained in the legal academy that many academics, including the president of the

51. See Holly M. Hutchins, *Outing the Imposter: A Study Exploring Imposter Phenomenon Among Higher Education Faculty*, 27(2) NEW HORIZONS IN ADULT EDUC. & HUM. RES. DEV. 3, 4 (2015) (noting imposter syndrome is common among individuals who work in “highly competitive, stressful occupations similar to that of the academic environment”).

52. Kets de Vries, *supra* note 47, at 2–3.

53. Hutchins, *supra* note 51, at 4.

54. See generally Deborah J. Merritt, *Bias, The Brain, and Student Evaluations of Teaching*, 82 ST. JOHN’S L. REV. 235 (2008); see also Debra Austin, *Leadership Lapse: Laundering Systemic Bias Through Student Evaluations*, 65 VILL. L. REV. 995 (2020); Sylvia R. Lazos, *Are Student Teaching Evaluations Holding Back Women and Minorities?: The Peril of “Doing” Gender and Race in the Classroom*, in PRESUMED INCOMPETENT 179 (Gabriella Gutierrez y Muhs, Yolanda Flores Niemann, Carmen G. Gonzalez, and Angela P. Harris, eds. 2012).

55. Law reviews generally serve as the primary outlets for legal scholarship, and publication therein is one of the primary criteria for evaluating tenure and promotion. See Steven W. Bender, *The Value of Online Law Review Supplements for Junior and Senior Faculty*, 33 Touro L. REV. 387, 392–93 (2017) (recognizing most law schools require tenure-track faculty to publish or have substantially completed two or three full-length, heavily cited articles published in traditional printed law reviews to qualify for tenure).

Association of American Law Schools for the 2020 year, Darby Dickerson, have analogized it to the caste system utilized in traditional Hindu society.⁵⁶ In this caste system, tenured and tenure-track professors are the “Brahmins” and occupy the highest and most revered level of the hierarchy, while deans occupy the second-highest caste.⁵⁷ These two castes are followed by clinical professors, and even further below them, legal writing faculty, and then law librarians, followed only by adjunct faculty and staff.⁵⁸ The distinctions between these castes are evidenced in myriad ways, including rank, pay, job security, and general treatment by colleagues and students.⁵⁹ For instance, Chancellor Kent Syverud recognized that tenure-track faculty—who are at the top tier of the hierarchy—are paid the best, have the most job security, and control most curricular decisions, while the legal writing professors—who lie several castes beneath tenure-track professors—are paid low salaries, are frequently not entitled to tenure, and often “teach courses that relatively few tenured faculty want to teach.”⁶⁰

The hierarchy conceptualized in Syverud’s caste system⁶¹ and the

56. Darby Dickerson, *President’s Message: Abolish the Academic Caste System*, ASS’N AM. L. SCHS., <https://www.aals.org/about/publications/newsletters/aals-news-fall-2020/presidents-message-abolish-the-academic-caste-system/> (last visited Mar. 22, 2022) (in her open letter to the academy, Dean Dickerson was referencing Kent Syverud’s initial conceptualization of legal academia’s caste system); see Syverud, *supra* note 5; see also, e.g., Stanchi, *supra* note 9, at 486–88; Mary Beth Beazley, *Shouting into the Wind: How the ABA Standards Promote Inequality in Legal Education, and What Law Students and Faculty Should Do About It*, 65 VILL. L. REV. 1037, 1048 (2020).

57. See Syverud, *supra* note 5, at 13–14.

58. See *id.* (Syverud does not specifically include bar prep or academic support faculty in his caste system, although one can reasonably assume that they would also be relegated to the lower levels of the hierarchy); see also J. Lyn Entrikin et al., *Treating Professionals Professionally: Requiring Security of Position for All Skills-Focused Faculty Under ABA Accreditation Standard 405(c) and Eliminating 405(d)*, 98 OR. L. REV. 1, 12 (2020) (recognizing that “most clinicians and legal writing faculty make up the ‘middle’ and ‘lower castes,’ respectively”).

59. Dickerson, *supra* note 56.

60. Syverud, *supra* note 5, at 14–15.

61. Despite the fact that Dickerson and many others credit Syverud with the conceptualization of the law school caste system, previous academics recognized the existence of castes in legal academia even earlier than 2002. See, e.g., Marina Angel, *Women in Legal Education: What It’s Like to Be Part of A Perpetual First Wave or the Case of Disappearing Women*, 61 TEMPLE L. REV. 799, 804 (1988) (“Law schools have created a new caste system, and the lowest caste is comprised of women.”); see also Maureen J. Arrigo, *Hierarchy Maintained: Status and Gender Issues in Legal Writing Programs*, 70 TEMPLE L. REV. 117, 185 (1997) (noting female instructors were relegated to “the lowest caste in the law school academic hierarchy”).

results thereof are problematic for numerous reasons, many of which arise from misconceptions of and flawed biases against skills professors.⁶² The first misconception is that skills professors are not as inherently qualified to serve as law professors as their doctrinal counterparts based on traditional criteria, and thus should not be entitled to the same rewards.⁶³ This misconception has been repeatedly disproven. For instance, according to a 2008 survey, legal writing professors were more likely to have participated in law review while in law school and had significantly greater practice experience than their doctrinal colleagues.⁶⁴

The second flawed bias is that skills professors' responsibilities are not as demanding as those of doctrinal professors.⁶⁵ Yet, as many academics, including Professor Jan Levine, have recognized, teaching legal writing, a required skills course, "may be the most demanding job in the law school."⁶⁶ Unlike traditional professors of large doctrinal classes, legal writing professors teach at both a class level and at a one-to-one level with their students, committing significant effort and time to providing oral and written critiques of each student's work and promoting students' intellectual growth in an individualized manner.⁶⁷ Professor Mary Bowman describes legal writing teaching as "labor-intensive frontline work involving significant amounts of formative assessment and working with students to develop their skills over a long period."⁶⁸ Additionally,

62. While this Article addresses only three of the flawed biases against skills professors, as Professor Mary Beth Beazley recognizes, there are many, many more. See generally Mary Beth Beazley, "Riddikulus!": *Tenure-Track Legal-Writing Faculty and the Boggart in the Wardrobe*, 7 SCRIBES J. LEGAL WRITING 79 (2000) (identifying numerous "boggarts" or "living myths" that are utilized to discredit professors of legal writing).

63. See Kirsten A. Dauphinais, *Sea Change: The Seismic Shift in the Legal Profession and How Legal Writing Professors Will Keep Legal Education Afloat in its Wake*, 10 SEATTLE J. FOR SOC. JUST. 49, 97 (2011).

64. See Susan P. Liemer & Hollee S. Temple, *Did Your Legal Writing Professor Go to Harvard?: The Credentials of Legal Writing Faculty at Hiring Time*, 46 U. LOUISVILLE L. REV. 383, 421 (2008); see also Dauphinais, *supra* note 63, at 97-99.

65. See Beazley, *supra* note 62, at 80-81 (recognizing the misconception that legal writing is a "nonintellectual, simplistic subject," that can be taught "with no preparation, training, or experience").

66. Jan M. Levine, *Leveling the Hill of Sisyphus: Becoming a Professor Legal Writing*, 26 FLA. ST. U.L. REV. 1067, 1072 (1999).

67. See *id.*; see also Stanchi, *supra* note 9, at 493 (explaining that legal writing instruction "includes frequent assignments, detailed, frequent and constructive feedback, and individual [student] meetings").

68. Mary Nicol Bowman, *Legal Writing as Office Housework?* 69(1) J. LEGAL EDUC. 22, 24 (2019). In 2004, Professor Kathryn Stanchi calculated that the average

skills professors undertake heavy emotional labor in advising and mentoring students.⁶⁹ It seems rational for this work to be applauded by colleagues and administrations, but it is more often underappreciated and “inadequately rewarded.”⁷⁰

A third incorrect perception is that skills courses are relatively unimportant compared to doctrinal courses, a view which doctrinal professors have occasionally shared with their students.⁷¹ This perception is directly disputed by recent surveys, both of law school graduates and law firm partners and associates, who largely rank the skills taught in skills courses, especially those focused on legal research and writing, as among the most important in law practice.⁷² Likely given the importance of these skills, additional surveys reflect that both law firms and law school graduates believe law schools need to better prepare students for practice.⁷³ These survey results, along

workload for legal writing professors involved critiquing approximately 3,000 pages of student writing, and spending 100 hours in student conferences and seventy hours preparing and teaching assignments each academic year. Stanchi, *supra* note 9, at 484.

69. See Bowman, *supra* note 68, at 25 (recognizing that “the combination of the small size of legal writing classes and the individualized feedback legal writing faculty provide may make students more prone to show their negative emotions to legal writing faculty than to non-LRW faculty”); Pamela Edwards, *Teaching Legal Writing as Women’s Work: Life on the Fringes of the Academy*, 4 CARDOZO WOMEN’S L. J. 75, 94–95 (1997).

70. Levine, *supra* note 66, at 1073.

71. See Edwards, *supra* note 69, at 99–100.

72. See Susan M. Case, *The NCBE Job Analysis: A Study of the Newly Licensed Lawyer*, THE BAR EXAMINER 52, 55 (Mar. 2013) (explaining a 2011-2012 survey commissioned by the National Conference of Bar Examiners and conducted among practicing attorneys in which respondents overwhelmingly recognized “written communication” as the most significant skill and ability lawyers need in practice); Carolyn Elefant, *5 Classes that Prospective Solo Practitioners Should Take in Law School*, ABOVE THE LAW (Feb. 24, 2014, 3:48 PM), <https://abovethelaw.com/2014/02/5-classes-that-prospective-solo-practitioners-should-take-in-law-school/> (“Hands down, the most important law school course for all lawyers, particularly solo [practitioner]s-to-be, is legal research and writing.”).

73. E.g., *White Paper: Hiring Partners Reveal New Attorney Readiness for Real World Practice*, LEXISNEXIS (2015) (explaining the results of a 2015 survey commissioned by LexisNexis of 300 hiring partners and senior associates at U.S. law firms, in which 95% of hiring partners and associates “believe recently graduated law students lack key practical skills at the time of hiring”); *Kaplan Bar Review Survey: 63% of Law School Graduates from the Class of 2013 Believe that Law School Education Can be Condensed to Two Years*, KAPLAN (Sept. 10, 2013), <https://www.kaptest.com/blog/press/2013/09/10/kaplan-bar-review-survey-63-of-law-school-graduates-from-the-class-of-2013-believe-that-law-school-education-can-be-condensed-to-two-years/> (recognizing that 97% of law school graduates surveyed favored a law school model that incorporates more clinical experience).

with widespread calls for law schools to focus on experiential learning in efforts to improve “practice readiness” among graduates,⁷⁴ reflect that skills courses—which, aside from research and writing also foster analytical skills and introduce various forms of lawyering to which students are not otherwise exposed in doctrinal courses⁷⁵—and clinical courses—which prepare students to understand future client needs; work cooperatively as part of a legal team; and understand professional values⁷⁶—are now more imperative than ever.

In light of these general misunderstandings pertaining to skills professors, the law school caste system is premised on misconceptions and flawed biases. Indeed, the status distinction between skills and doctrinal professors is nothing more than a superficial means to justify classism in legal academia. As Professor Stanchi describes it, legal academia’s “institutionalized status system is based on elitism and gender discrimination. It reflects a rigid and empty adherence to a set of artificial and contrived rules of prestige and rank that are unjustifiable and enforced by power and dominance rather than reason.”⁷⁷ Moreover, skills professors are often given little to no opportunity to broaden their course loads or improve their status within their law schools. Instead, their status as a clinical professor, a legal writing professor, a law librarian, or a professor of academic success or bar prep courses is “self-perpetuating,” in that working in one of these roles disables them from serving in other

74. *E.g.*, Tiffany D. Atkins, #FortheCulture: Generation Z and the Future of Legal Education, 26 MICH. J. RACE & L. 115, 155 (2020) (calling for “law school curricula . . . to incorporate more experiential opportunities through the program of legal education” so as to most effectively educate the next generation of law students); Patrick Meyer, *The Status of Curricular Change During the Industry’s Great Recession: Radical, or the New Norm?* 42 OHIO N.U.L. REV. 155, 155 (2015); Sherri Lee Keene, *One Small Step for Legal Writing, One Giant Leap for Legal Education: Making the Case for More Writing Opportunities in the “Practice Ready” Law School Curriculum*, 65 MERCER L. REV. 467, 475 (2014); Mary Beth Beazley, *Finishing the Job of Legal Education Reform*, 51 WAKE FOREST L. REV. 275, 275 (2016) (recognizing 2014 ABA standards requiring law schools to take greater efforts to prepare law students for legal practice).

75. *See* Dauphinais, *supra* note 63, at 104. For instance, in addition to teaching memorandum and brief writing, legal writing courses can often incorporate instruction on oral argument, client counseling and interviewing, and negotiation. *See* Keene, *supra* note 74, at 494.

76. *See* Judith Welch Wegner, *The Carnegie Foundation’s Educating Lawyers: Four Questions for Bar Examiners*, THE BAR EXAMINER, 19 (2011).

77. Stanchi, *supra* note 9, at 468.

positions, such as that of a doctrinal professor.⁷⁸ Indeed, some skills professors often have no ability or opportunity to leave their positions to transfer to a doctrinal position within their institution, with the effect that they are essentially “siloe” in the position and teaching load for which they were originally hired.⁷⁹

The competitive environment of legal academia coupled with the entrenched law school caste system which intentionally seeks to disadvantage skills professors creates a perfect atmosphere in which to catalyze imposter syndrome.

III. IMPOSTER SYNDROME & SKILLS PROFESSORS

Given interdisciplinary research noting the prevalence of imposter syndrome in hierarchically rich industries, significant scholarship on its foothold in higher education, and anecdotal data from various colleagues in legal academia, it seemed like a near foregone conclusion that imposter syndrome would exist among and detrimentally impact legal skills professors. To determine the causes and consequences of legal skills professors’ imposter syndrome, between September and November 2019, I distributed a self-reporting questionnaire to full-time law school faculty and staff members with teaching responsibilities at ABA accredited and/or approved law schools throughout the United States.⁸⁰ The questionnaire comprised both quantitative and background demographic questions—inquiring as to the respondents’ minority status, gender, and primary courses taught—as well as more open-ended qualitative questions regarding participants’ personal experiences with imposter syndrome.⁸¹

78. Ruan, *supra* note 6, at 10.

79. See Arnow-Richman, *supra* note 8, at 753–54; see also Durako, *supra* note 5, at 269 (explaining that legal writing faculty are often restricted to teaching only legal research and writing and that “some schools would prefer to hire an adjunct professor or a new tenure-track professor with less experience in the area of law to teach a subject than to allow a writing teacher to reach beyond the limits of writing courses”).

80. At the time of the survey’s creation, I was a teaching fellow at Elon University School of Law and thus, obtained approval from the Elon Institutional Review Board to distribute the survey. I distributed the survey via various email listservs—including the AALS (Association of American Law Schools)’s, Women in Legal Education Listserv, and the Legal Writing Institute Listserv—within my home institution, and through colleagues at various law schools. I utilized Qualtrics as the platform to distribute the survey and analyze its results. All responses were kept anonymous.

81. The survey received 241 voluntary responses. With assistance from

Given the questionnaire's limitations, it does not allow for broad, sweeping conclusions. However, it does provide insight into the scope, causation, and impact of imposter syndrome in legal academia. Namely, the open-ended responses in the survey supported the findings that the hierarchical structure of academia contributed to legal skills professors' imposterism experiences. These open-ended responses further revealed that skills professors who have endured imposter feelings have experienced them to such an extent that they have critically impacted their careers and academic performance. This section will first analyze the causes of imposter syndrome among skills professors before examining the practical extent to which imposter syndrome impacts skills professors in the discharge of their academic responsibilities.

A. The Causes of Imposter Syndrome in Skills Professors

The skills professor respondents' open-ended responses to the questionnaire supported the presumption that many of their experiences with imposter syndrome arose at least in part from their placement in the law school caste system. For instance, one respondent who identified as a professor of academic skills and/or bar prep courses summed up the feelings of imposter syndrome felt by her and other skills professors at her institution, stating:

The fissure between tenure and non-tenure [faculty] is so wide and deep that even though I literally do everything tenured faculty do (teach doctrinal bar classes, teach elective doctrinal classes, produce award-winning scholarship, etc.), plus more (orchestrate our entire bar support program, oversee adjunct professors, counsel graduates all summer, etc.), I am made to feel that I am inadequate and that I never will be good enough.

Another respondent echoed these sentiments, recognizing that her imposter syndrome was tied directly to how her faculty colleagues

Professor Christopher Leupold, Professor of Psychology, Isabella Cannon, Leadership Professor, and Faculty Fellow for Law and Leadership at Elon University I filtered this sample to include only those 207 participants who are full-time faculty or staff members with teaching responsibilities at ABA accredited and/or approved law schools. 174 of these participants identified as female, 24 identified as male, 1 identified as non-binary, and 8 declined to identify their gender.

and students perceived her position as a legal writing professor:

I'm an excellent writer, and I teach writing well. But colleagues look down their noses at m[e] for being nothing more than a grammar teacher. I feel sure other faculty tell first year students not to spend so much time on their writing class; they tell students no decent teacher would be stuck in Legal Writing. So[,] I feel like I am constantly trying to prove to my students, and myself, that I'm doing worthwhile work[.]

Yet another respondent, a woman of color who teaches a mix of both clinical and doctrinal courses, identified the cause of her imposter syndrome as the classist treatment—including recurring microaggressions— she received from both students and colleagues alike. She wrote:

[Y]our colleagues take actions against you to demonstrate that they do not think you're qualified. Whether it[']s the [A]cademic Dean approaching everyone—except you—to ask them to teach a course that is in your area of expertise. Or faculty members making direct comments. . . . This leads your confidence to lessen over time [and] builds up microaggressions[,] which leads to imposter syndrome.

Thus, the open-ended responses lent support to the hypothesis that hierarchical treatment of skills professors as lower-caste members of legal academia fosters feelings of imposter syndrome. This connection between skills professors' imposter feelings and their rank in the law school caste system is hardly surprising when considered in light of the various discriminatory practices to which skills professors are subjected.

In nearly every aspect of their position, skills professors are consistently and constantly impacted by their role in the law school caste system, in everything from “their title, their compensation, their job security . . . their governance rights,” and the ways in which they

are treated by colleagues and students.⁸² One of the most evident ways in which the law school hierarchy manifests is through tenure status. Although recent years have brought marked improvement for skills professors, especially those of legal writing courses, with more tenure-track and renewable long-term contract positions,⁸³ the statistics remain bleak. While tenure is almost ubiquitous for professors of doctrinal or casebook courses, such job security continues to remain elusive for the vast majority of skills professors.⁸⁴ As of the 2019-2020 academic year, out of 169 law schools surveyed, only 27% offered traditional tenure or tenure-track status to their legal writing faculty.⁸⁵ Likewise, out of 1,135 full-time teachers in a law clinic or field placement course, less than 22% received traditional tenure or were on the traditional tenure-track.⁸⁶ While the statistics for tenure among other skills professors, including law librarians, and academic success and bar prep faculty are less forthcoming, a 2013 survey reflected that only 23.9% of law schools provide tenure-track status for non-director librarians.⁸⁷

82. Ruan, *supra* note 6, at 15.

83. See Cody J. Jacobs, *The "Other" Market*, 92 *TEMPLE L. REV.* 765, 767–78 (2020).

84. Such disparity in tenure is specifically permitted in the ABA's Accreditation Standard 405, retained in 2014, which mandates a "tenure policy" for law school faculty but exempts law schools from requiring clinical faculty and legal writing faculty to fall within their stated tenure policy. See ABA Standards and Rules of Procedure for Approval of Law Schools, 2020-2021, Standard 405, at 29. While Section 405(c) requires law schools to provide full-time clinical faculty with job security "similar to tenure," the standard provides no equivalent requirements for legal writing professors. *Id.* at Standard 405(c). Instead, Section 405(d) requires only that law schools afford legal writing instructors job security, rights, and privileges necessary to "attract and retain" qualified faculty and to "safeguard academic freedom." *Id.* at Standard 504(d). Thus, 405(d) essentially institutionalized discrimination against skills professors, especially those of legal writing courses, and "codified the ability of the academy to maintain a system that is procedurally and substantively unequal." Entrikin, et al., *supra* note 58, at 4; Tiffany Jeffers, *The Choice to Stay in the Pink Ghetto*, 23 *J. LEGAL WRITING INST.* 41, 42 (2019).

85. Ted Becker et al., *ALWD/LWI Writing Survey, 2019-2020: Report of the Institutional Survey*, 60, vi, 60 (2020), [hereinafter ALWD/LWI Survey]. Additionally, 9% of the law schools surveyed offered programmatic tenure for legal writing professors, meaning that tenure is achieved "through a separate track [and/or] using different standards than the tenure awarded to doctrinal faculty." *Id.* at vi; 60.

86. Of the respondents who identified as law clinic instructors, 16% identified as having unitary tenure, while 6% identified as being on the traditional tenure track; of the respondents who identified as instructors in field placement courses, 15% identified as having unitary tenure, while less than 1% identified as being on the traditional tenure track. See Robert R. Kuehn et al., *Center for the Study of Applied Legal Education (CSALE) 2019-20 Survey of Applied Legal Education*, 57 (2020) [hereinafter CSALE Survey].

87. See Statistical Summary of the ALL-SIS CST Academic Law Librarian Tenure

A second method in which inequality is perpetuated between skills and doctrinal professors is salary. Determining precise inequalities in salaries between these two categories of professors is largely difficult due to underreporting and public unavailability of faculty wages,⁸⁸ however, the literature and statistics available make it a near certainty that skills professors are generally paid a small fraction of the salaries provided to their tenure-track, doctrinal counterparts. Recent data indicates that on average, the starting salary for legal writing professors is \$30,000 lower than those of doctrinal faculty.⁸⁹ According to survey data from 2019-2020—which again, is not as comprehensive as possible due to underreporting—the average base salary for entry-level, traditional tenure-track professors of doctrinal courses is \$108,089.⁹⁰ In contrast, the average base salary for entry-level legal writing professors on traditional tenure-track lines is \$95,650,⁹¹ and the base salary for non-legal writing faculty on a traditional tenure-track who primarily teach clinical courses is \$95,357.⁹² The figures decrease even further for legal writing professors with long-term contracts, who earn an average entry-level salary of \$80,875, and those legal writing professors with short-term contracts, whose average entry-level salary is only \$72,789.⁹³ On top of these vast discrepancies, tenure-track professors of doctrinal courses are often entitled to summer research stipends, which in 2019 generally ranged from \$2,400 up to \$25,000, according to a salary survey conducted by the Society of American Law Teachers.⁹⁴ However, many skills professors—especially those who do not occupy traditional tenure-track positions—are either not entitled to these stipends or are provided lesser amounts of stipend funds than their tenure-track doctrinal

and Employment Status Survey (Updated May 31, 2013); *see also* Jamie J. Baker, *The Intersectionality of Law Librarianship & Gender*, 65 VILL. L. REV. 1011, 1020 (2020).

88. *See* Ruth Anne Robbins et al., *Persistent Structural Barriers to Gender Equity in the Legal Academy and the Efforts of Two Legal Writing Organizations to Break them Down*, 65 VILL. L. REV. 1155, 1162–63 (2020).

89. *See* Beazley, *supra* note 56, at 1049.

90. *See* ALWD/LWI Survey, *supra* note 85, at 150; *see also* SALT Equalizer, 1–4 (Nov. 2019), <https://www.saltlaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/SALT-salary-survey-2019-final-draft.pdf> (providing information from seventy-nine schools on starting salaries for assistant, pre-tenure associate, and tenured professors).

91. *See* ALWD/LWI Survey, *supra* note 85, at 146.

92. *See id.* at 150.

93. *See id.* at 146.

94. *See* SALT Equalizer, *supra* note 90, at 1–4 (providing information from seventy-nine law schools on summer research stipends).

counterparts.⁹⁵

Again, while entry-level salary figures remain largely elusive for librarians, bar prep, and academic success positions, these categories of professors often receive lower pay than tenured and tenure-track faculty.⁹⁶ As a result, regardless of how much skills professors excel at teaching, scholarship, and service, for most, it remains impossible to ever reach parity with their doctrinal tenured or tenure-track peers.⁹⁷

Outside of salary and job security, skills professors are often denied many of the status benefits awarded to tenure and tenure-track faculties. One of the most entrenched markers of hierarchies is the use of title.⁹⁸ A faculty member's title carries a certain level of prestige and respect, and sociological research has recognized that students often associate their level of respect for their instructors based on the instructors' title.⁹⁹ While doctrinal tenure-track faculty are almost universally awarded the titles of Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, or Professor, depending on merit and length of experience, many law schools refuse to award skills professors the same titles.¹⁰⁰ Instead, common titles for skills professors range from "lecturer" to "instructor," or else are qualified as "clinical" professors, professors "of legal writing," or professors "of the practice."¹⁰¹ As scholars have recognized, while this distinction in title lacks any apparent educational justification,¹⁰² its true intentions are clear: to segregate skills professors from their doctrinal counterparts, to "stigmatize the lesser group," and to paint skills professors as "others."¹⁰³ Skills professors are often forced to wear these distinctive

95. See ALWD/LWI Survey, *supra* note 85, at 95; see also Stanchi, *supra* note 9, at 483.

96. See Robbins, et al., *supra* note 88, at 1164 (noting that the wage gap for librarians is even worse than for legal writing professors); see also Catherine Martin Christopher, *Normalizing Struggle*, 73 ARK. L. REV. 27, 35 (2020).

97. See Stanchi, *supra* note 9, at 477.

98. See *id.* at 487 (recognizing that title is the primary "caste marker").

99. See Lisa T. McElroy et al., *The Carnegie Report and Legal Writing: Does the Report Go Far Enough?*, 17 LEGAL WRITING 279, 301-05 (2011).

100. See Stanchi, *supra* note 9, at 487.

101. *Id.*

102. See Melissa H. Weresh, *Form and Substance: Standards for Promotion and Retention of Legal Writing Faculty on Clinical Tenure Track*, 37 GOLDEN GATE U.L. REV. 281, 294 (2007) ("[T]here is no justification to distinguish titles between doctrinal and legal writing faculty.").

103. See Stanchi, *supra* note 9, at 487; see also Robbins et al., *supra* note 88, at 1172; Levine, *supra* note 66, at 1095 (noting that the titles of legal writing positions

titles as “badge[s] of inferior status.”¹⁰⁴

Compounding this marginalization, skills professors are often precluded from voting on some or all administrative matters facing their law school. It is extremely uncommon for doctrinal tenured or tenure-track faculty to be denied a right to vote at faculty meetings;¹⁰⁵ however, as of 2019-2020, only 91% of legal writing professors who had traditional tenure or were on the traditional tenure track had been granted full voting rights.¹⁰⁶ While this discrepancy is discouraging, an even more concerning finding is that a mere 5% of legal writing professors who were not tenured or tenure-track in 2019-2020 were provided full voting rights.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, another 2019-2020 study reflected that only 26% of clinical respondents were permitted to vote in all matters raised in faculty meetings.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, results from a less recent survey published in 2004 reflected that only 15% of 149 surveyed law schools permitted all law library faculty to vote.¹⁰⁹

Other conduct utilized in certain institutions reinforces the inferior mentality forced upon skills professors, including physically segregating skills professors from the rest of the faculty by placing them in smaller or “less desirable” office locations removed from doctrinal faculty.¹¹⁰

The mistreatment of skills professors also presents considerable gender and racial implications. As mentioned previously, women and minorities—as marginalized classes in society—are often vulnerable to feelings of imposterism. This is certainly so in the predominantly white male environment of legal academia, in which female

in teaching advertisements “proclaim the second-class status of many legal writing jobs,” and “seem to be written for underlings, not for faculty colleagues”).

104. Durako, *supra* note 5, at 258.

105. See Susan P. Liemer, *The Hierarchy of Law School Faculty Meetings: Who Votes?* 73 UMKC L. REV. 351, 367 (2004) (noting that “newly hired tenure-track professors vote at their very first faculty meeting”).

106. ALWD/LWI Survey, *supra* note 85, at 89 (recognizing that those legal writing professors who lacked full voting rights could not vote on matters related to tenure and promotion).

107. *Id.* at 89 (recognizing that only 3% of full time, long term legal writing professors without 405(c) status were granted full voting rights).

108. CSALE Survey, *supra* note 86, at 58.

109. Liemer, *supra* note 105, at 360-61.

110. See Stanchi, *supra* note 9, at 487 (noting that some law schools used to prohibit skills professors from sitting with doctrinal faculty at graduation and other law school events); see also Durako, *supra* note 5, at 254 (stating that law schools have historically been “downright creative” in creating methods to impart “separate and unequal treatment” on legal writing faculty).

professors—especially female professors of color—are still viewed as minorities.¹¹¹ Yet, this vulnerability to imposter syndrome is expounded when a professor’s marginalization due to their gender or race is coupled with the low status of a skills professor.

Tenured or tenure-track faculty at the top-tier of the law school caste system are composed of a majority of white, male faculty members, while women constitute much of the lower castes.¹¹² In fact, legal writing, law library, and—to a slightly lesser extent—clinical faculty positions are often identified as “female gendered field[s].”¹¹³ As Professor Steven Homer has recognized, “[T]eaching skills . . . has long been placed within a feminized frame, because of the intensive student interaction required, the undesirable grading work, low status, and because writing and skills have historically been excluded from the masculinized conception of the traditional law teacher.”¹¹⁴

Surveys conducted during the 2019-2020 academic year further support Homer’s conclusion that teaching skills courses is “women’s

111. See Meera E. Deo, *The Ugly Truth About Legal Academia*, 80 BROOKLYN L. REV. 943, 951–56 (2015) (recognizing that the “norm” at most law schools is “middle- to upper-class, heterosexual, white male”); see also Meera E. Deo, *Trajectory of a Law Professor*, 20 MICH. J. RACE & L. 441, 443 (2015) (noting that as of 2014, 83% of law school deans and 79% of associate deans were white). According to the ABA, in 2020, 9,330 full-time faculty were employed at ABA accredited law schools. Of this number, 4,985 identified as male; 4,340 identified as female; and 1,991 identified as belonging to a minority demographic. ABA 2020 Faculty Resources, <http://abarequireddisclosures.org/Disclosure509.aspx> (numbers compiled from a report generated at this website).

112. See Gordon, *supra* note 1, at 323 (publicly available information reflects that 64% of traditional, tenure-track doctrinal positions are occupied by men, whereas 62% of law deans are male); see also Ruth Anne French-Hodson, *The Continuing Gender Gap in Legal Education*, FED. LAWYER, 81, 87 (2014), (explaining the results of a study conducted at Yale Law School, which reflected that women represented only approximately 20% of tenured faculty). While there exists minimal public data on the racial demographics of tenured law professors, scholars recognize that these positions are relatively seldom occupied by minorities. See Stephanie Francis Ward, *How Many Tenured Law Professors Are Black? Public Data Does Not Say*, ABA JOURNAL (Oct. 28, 2020), <https://www.abajournal.com/web/article/how-many-tenured-law-professors-are-black-public-data-does-not-say> (quoting Professor Meera Deo as saying, “We know from the little data available that there are very few tenured Black law professors in the U.S.”); Robbins et al., *supra* note 88, at 1161 (noting that statistics on the gender and racial composition of tenured positions is largely outdated and elusive).

113. See Steven K. Homer, *Hierarchies of Elitism and Gender: The Bluebook and the ALWD Guide*, 41 PACE L. REV. 1, 32 (2020); see also Edwards, *supra* note 69, at 1 (explaining the impact of the “marginalization of legal writing teachers” on women in the legal academy).

114. Homer, *supra* note 113, at 34.

work.” These studies determined that as of the 2019-2020 academic year, approximately 70% of legal writing faculty identified as female,¹¹⁵ along with 70% of law librarians,¹¹⁶ and 67% of clinical faculty.¹¹⁷ The prevalence of women in these positions, in which they have “lower status and pay, higher workloads, and less job security than their male counterparts” has contributed to the existence of a “pink ghetto” in legal academia.¹¹⁸ Moreover, while legal academia as a whole remains in significant need of racial diversification,¹¹⁹ the 12.3% of legal writing faculty and the 19% of clinical faculty who are people of color,¹²⁰ as well as the academic success, bar prep, and librarian faculty who identify as racial minorities face even greater barriers. Members of these “lower castes” who identify both as women and persons of color are subject to a “triple threat” of discrimination.¹²¹

Indeed, the open-ended comments provided by skills professor respondents to the questionnaire validated the gendered and racial causes of imposter syndrome. As one professor of academic skills and/or bar prep courses stated, imposter syndrome has an outsized impact on female skills professors of color because “at [her] institution and most others, most non-tenured faculty are women (often women of color).” Likewise, another clinical professor

115. ALWD/LWI Survey, *supra* note 85, at 68; *see also* Robbins et al., *supra* note 88, at 1161.

116. Baker, *supra* note 87, at 1017.

117. *See* Kuehn et al., *supra* note 86, at 52; *see also* Duncan et al., *Law School Dean Wanted: A Woman for All Reasons*, 65 VILL. L. REV. 1083, 1101 (2021) (there does not appear to be recent statistics regarding the gendered demographics of academic success/bar prep positions, however, scholars have noted that women are more likely than men to be bar prep and academic support instructors).

118. Renee N. Allen et al., *The “Pink Ghetto” Pipeline: Challenges and Opportunities for Women in Legal Education*, 96 U. DET. MERCY L. REV. 525, 526–27 (2019) (using the term “pink ghetto” to describe the socioeconomic status of people who perform work traditionally performed by women); *see generally* Jo Anne Durako, *Second-Class Citizens in the Pink Ghetto: Gender Bias in Legal Writing*, 50 J. LEGAL EDUC. 562 (2000).

119. DEO, *supra* note 2, at 4–7.

120. *See* ALWD/LWI Survey, *supra* note 85, at 69 (noting that 86.1% of legal writing respondents identified as white; 5.1% identified as African American; 3.2% as Asian-American; 1.9% Hispanic; 0.9% as Native American; 0.9% as multiracial; and 0.6% as another race); *see also* Kuehn et al., *supra* note 86, at 53 (noting that 81% of clinical faculty respondents identified as white; 6% as Latino/Hispanic; 9% as Black or African American; 8% as Asian, 1% as American Indian or Alaska Native; and less than 1% as Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander).

121. Lorraine Bannai, *Challenged X 3: The Stories of Women of Color Who Teach Legal Writing*, 29 BERKELEY J. GENDER L. & JUST. 275, 278 (2014).

respondent recognized that because of her status as a “younger, female faculty member of color,” she felt that “students/faculty may perceive [her] to be less qualified than others who teach at her school,” an experience that can easily develop into imposter syndrome. Moreover, a female professor of color who teaches both clinical and doctrinal classes stated that “[a]s a minority woman—imposter syndrome is generated by the environment and *direct* comments that both faculty make to you and inappropriate comments that students make on your evaluations.”

The implications of these demographics and responses are significant and lend credibility to the finding that skills professors, especially those who identify as females or minorities, tend to be most detrimentally impacted by legal academia’s hierarchies and barriers.

B. The Impacts of Imposter Syndrome on Skills Professors

In addition to exploring the existence and causes of imposter syndrome among legal skills professors, the questionnaire also sought to evaluate the specific methods in which imposter syndrome manifested in the performance of skills professors’ academic duties. To do so, I inquired as to how imposter syndrome impacted skills professors’ relationships with their colleagues, the teaching of their courses, their relationships with their students, their publication and promotion of scholarship, and their general health and wellbeing.

1. Relationships with Colleagues

The open-ended responses to the questionnaire reflected that many skills professors often believe their fellow faculty members assume they are not qualified to teach their assigned courses or to engage in scholarship in their area of research. Although several respondents noted they have formed close relationships with other skills colleagues at their equivalent rank or level, the same was not true regarding their relationships with their doctrinal colleagues who hold superior status in the law school caste system. Instead, many respondents specifically recognized that their diminished status in their law school has fostered feelings of imposter syndrome that impact how they interact with their doctrinal colleagues. Specifically, one respondent who identified as teaching academic success/bar prep classes stated the following:

Being non-tenured [or tenure-]track, I have felt

inadequate compared to tenured track faculty and tend to avoid connecting with the tenured faculty folks like I do with the other directors of programs and instructors and faculty. I know that I am more qualified and passionate about the subject matter I am involved in, but I often feel like there is a disconnect with the doctrinal tenured faculty and the more practical-academic success and well-being faculty members. I feel like the doctrinal faculty thinks they are better or smarter or more impactful than I am in my role . . . so, I let imposter syndrome creep in.

Another legal writing respondent echoed this sentiment, writing:

I find I am more reticent to communicate with the tenure-track faculty not only because of feelings of inadequacy but also because our differing status tends to make that somewhat difficult. Tenure-track faculty members with far fewer years of experience than I have are treated better and listened to more, despite their inexperience, by virtue of their job status.

Similarly, many other skills respondents admitted their imposter syndrome concerns cause them not to socialize or “really engage” and makes them “hesitant to connect” with doctrinal, tenure-track faculty members, lest they reveal their lack of knowledge or qualifications, or expose their own ignorance. Others stated the opposite: that their doctrinal colleagues are reluctant to socialize with *them*, on the mistaken belief that because the respondents teach skills courses, they are not as smart or capable, thereby fostering imposter syndrome even further. Given this general lack of interactions, one legal writing respondent admitted she is made to “feel distant and/or like an ‘other.’”

These comments reflect recent scholarship recognizing the role of rankism in the frayed relationships between professors of different ranks in the law school caste system. One of the most common manifestations of this rankism is that skills professors regularly experience “hierarchical microaggressions” from doctrinal colleagues—“everyday slights found in higher education that communicates systemic valuing (or devaluing) of a person because of

the institutional role held by that person in the institution.”¹²² These repetitive affronts ensure skills professors “never forget that they occupy a lower rung on the faculty ladder.”¹²³ Professor Nantiya Ruan has identified four categories of these hierarchical microaggressions to which skills professors are routinely subjected, including: “(1) devaluing microaggressions based on perceived status; (2) degrading microaggressions based on perceived roles; (3) demeaning microaggressions based on unexamined bias; and (4) discrediting microaggressions based on structural norms.”¹²⁴

Several skills professor respondents to the questionnaire also reflected that their imposter syndrome impedes their willingness to seek help from their colleagues. One legal writing respondent noted her reluctance to share her scholarship with doctrinal colleagues, explaining that if they identified holes in her scholarship, they might “think [she was] unqualified in other ways.”

Moreover, respondents also recognized their imposter syndrome prevents them from sharing their ideas or voicing their opinions in faculty meetings. As one respondent stated, “Being . . . a librarian . . . makes me feel like I’m not as able to share opinions on teaching matters to the extent the governing faculty are,” while a clinical professor respondent wrote, “I expect [my doctrinal colleagues] to downplay my contributions so I rarely speak at faculty meetings.”

2. Teaching

As evidenced by the questionnaire’s responses, many skills professors fear their students will find them unqualified to teach their courses. For several respondents, especially those who are early on in their teaching career or who have just started teaching a new course, these imposter feelings often cause them to present themselves to students in an inauthentic manner. For some, this inauthenticity involves portraying themselves with the demeanor they envision students expect from their male, doctrinal professors. As one legal writing respondent wrote, during her first year “as a young woman and a brand[-]new teacher,” she “put on what [she] thought was a tough, always correct, professor persona,” which

122. Kathryn Young et al., *Hierarchical Microaggressions in Higher Education*, 8 J. DIVERSITY HIGHER EDUC. 61, 66 (2015); see also Ruan, *supra* note 6, at 19 (adopting the definition coined by Professors Kathryn Young, Myron Anderson, and Sarah Stewart).

123. Beazley, *supra* note 56, at 1050.

124. Ruan, *supra* note 6, at 23.

backfired, causing her students to “hate” her.

Others choose to deal with their imposter feelings and avoid potential student confrontations by being overly lenient with their students. One male legal writing professor recognized that he is “probably a bit too permissive with student ‘excuses’ for poor performance and unprofessional behavior.” A female clinical professor also wrote that she does not “push [students] as hard as [she] might, given that they could come back with a retort about [her] lack of being qualified.”

A significant reason for skills professors’ flawed responses to their students can be traced to students’ awareness of how their law school administrations and other doctrinal professors treat skills professors at their institution. Professor Ruan notes that law students also recognize the derogation of skills professors through their titles, the location of their offices, or how doctrinal professors treat them. Therefore, students receive the message that skills education, and by extension the professors who teach it, are of little importance in their law school career.¹²⁵ Not only does this lead students to begin treating skills professors with their own microaggressions—such as referring to a law professor by their first name, or Mr./Mrs. rather than as “Professor”—but it also has more severe potential consequences, like derogatory student evaluations and even the fostering of student resentment and bias.

For instance, students who are aware of skills professors’ rank in the law school hierarchy are often annoyed by the time and effort required by their skills courses and will either not put in the requisite effort to develop their skills or will become resentful of their skills professors,¹²⁶ many of whom—as this Article has previously addressed—are women.¹²⁷ This resentment can sometimes bubble into student confrontations, open hostility, and in some serious cases—“gender-based physical intimidation”—especially by white male students against female skills professors of color.¹²⁸

Student evaluations also play a significant role in the manifestation of imposter syndrome in skills professors’ teaching. For many skills professors, student evaluations are critical in administrative decisions pertaining to their job security, promotion,

125. *See id.* at 31.

126. *See Edwards, supra* note 69, at 99–100.

127. *See id.* at 99.

128. *See DEO, supra* note 2, at 62–66.

and salary.¹²⁹ Indeed, as one clinical law professor in the survey recognized, “student evaluations play an outsized role in my ability to secure a long-term contract.” Due to the weight student evaluations hold in the trajectory of skills professors’ careers, several respondents recognized that they have adapted their approaches to teaching and student feedback to avoid negative evaluations. One respondent, a female clinic professor, noted, “I don’t always push students as hard as I could because they control my career.” Another female clinical professor wrote, “My self-doubt prevents me from giving more direct feedback, as I want my students to like me and give me good evaluations. I sometimes think I have to be nice to them in order to get good evaluations.”

Negative student evaluations have an impact beyond career implications, especially for those suffering from imposter syndrome. As one female legal writing professor of color recognized, her students use evaluations as an opportunity to personally attack her, rather than to critique the course. Others noted that negative and biased evaluations are “crushing” and “hurtful.” For some, these comments validated pre-existing feelings of self-doubt and a lack of qualifications, causing them to further question their role in academia.

Moreover, many of the respondents also noted their imposter feelings prevent them from seeking to teach anything other than skills-based courses. As one male legal writing professor stated, “If I were to attempt to teach a doctrin[al] course, I fear that some of [my] colleagues would believe that I am unqualified.” This attitude—a clear result of past hierarchical treatment of legal writing professors—contributes to the “siloing” of skills professors by ensuring they teach only the courses for which they were originally hired.

3. Relationships with Students

Many skills professors also noted in their questionnaire responses that their experience with imposter syndrome detrimentally impacts their relationships with students. For some skills professors, their imposterism manifests in a reluctance to open up to students or to provide thoughtful advice or mentorship. One respondent who teaches academic success and bar prep courses

129. See Merritt, *supra* note 54, at 237; see also Judith D. Fischer, *The Use and Effects of Student Ratings in Legal Writing Courses: A Plea for Holistic Evaluation of Teaching*, 10 LEGAL WRITING 111, 111 (2004).

stated, "I am often worried that students will see me as a fraud, so I am hesitant to develop relationships with them," while another female clinical professor wrote, "I sometimes worry that [my students] will not take my advice and supervision seriously." These responses validate research performed in the early 1990s showing that university faculty members with low levels of imposter syndrome served as more effective academic advisors.¹³⁰ The damaging force of this is clear: not only are skills professors severely impacted by imposter syndrome, but their students are also disadvantaged by being denied useful advice and mentorship.

However, another group of respondents recognized that their self-doubt causes them to lean into the "mothering" nature that is often expected of female skills professors, and especially those of legal writing courses. Indeed, the gendered nature of legal writing and the recognition that female faculty are usually more burdened by activities and emotional meetings with students often leads to student misperception of female law professors as "other mothers."¹³¹ This perception is especially true of female skills professors, and even more so of female legal writing professors.¹³² The role of a legal writing professor closely resembles that of a mother, with expectations that they not only teach, but also "guide with a gentle hand," "listen to complaints" and solve problems, and "respond to the students' emotional concerns about legal writing, law school and, at times, life in general."¹³³ This phenomenon of associating female skills professors with mothers impairs students' perceptions by causing students to view them not "as leaders with positions of power, but instead as caretakers."¹³⁴ Moreover, these cultural and gender norms render female skills faculty even more vulnerable to students, as they may be punished through unfavorable evaluations "for not

130. See Christiane Brems et al., *The Imposter Syndrome As Related to Teaching Evaluations and Advising Relationships of University Faculty Members*, 65 J. HIGHER ED. 183, 189-91 (1994).

131. See DEO, *supra* note 2, at 59.

132. See Jan M. Levine, *Leveling the Hill of Sisyphus: Becoming a Professor Legal Writing*, 26 FLA. ST. U.L. REV. 1067, 1074 (1999); see also Liemer & Temple, *supra* note 64, at 425 (explaining that law schools often hire legal writing professors who they believe will "mother" their students by demonstrating caring and patience).

133. Ann C. McGinley, *Reproducing Gender on Law School Faculties*, 2009 B.Y.U. L. REV. 99, 129 (2009).

134. See Marcia L. Bellas, *Emotional Labor in Academia: The Case of Professors*, 561 ANNALS 96, 96 (1999) (noting that the emotional labor associated with counseling students is not highly rewarded in terms of promotions or higher salaries compared to research and administration); see also Homer, *supra* note 113, at 40.

conforming to the gendered expectations that law schools have encouraged students to have.”¹³⁵

One legal writing professor recognized the gendered hierarchical structure in her law school that led to her mothering approach to students, stating:

I involuntarily assume more of a nurturing, almost “motherly” role with my students. I routinely hear my male (older, white, tenured) colleague in the office next-door do and say things to students that they just laugh off (e.g., “What do you want?,” “Go away, I’m busy now,” etc.)—but if I were to act that way, I would be labeled a “B” and my student evaluations would tank. I have to be available, competent, and at the top of my game 100% of the time or I am a failure . . . whereas he and his similarly situated colleagues essentially act however they please and the students not only respect them but regularly give them teaching awards.

Other respondents validated this perspective. One female legal writing professor recognized, “I feel like my students like me because I am maternal and nurturing—it’s a very gendered reaction they have toward me,” while another wrote, “Students come to me because . . . I feel ‘safe.’”

While developing mentoring relationships with students is a critical asset of teaching skills courses, taken to the extreme—as mentioned in these respondents’ open-ended answers—has detrimental impacts. One female legal writing professor recognized, “I can feel resentful that they take up so much of my time because they’re afraid to bother their ‘podium course’ professors.” Indeed, by encompassing a motherly approach, and being “highly available to students,” skills professors are often interrupted or precluded from other work that could advance their career, such as scholarship, administration, and service.¹³⁶ Given that doctrinal faculty—especially male professors—are approached by students less often for

135. Homer, *supra* note 113, at 40–41; *see also* Paula A. Monopoli, *The Status Gap: Female Faculty in the Legal Academy*, UNIV. MD. FRANCIS KING CAREY SCHOOL L. FAC. SCHOLARSHIP (2014) (noting a student’s evaluation of whether a male professor is “accessible” will differ significantly from the “accessibility” of a female professor).

136. *See* Homer, *supra* note 113, at 40.

advice and emotional support, they do not experience the same distractions and interruptions,¹³⁷ allowing them to proceed with research and scholarship and to validate their position at the top of the law school hierarchy.

4. Scholarship

The impact of imposter syndrome on scholarship was also starkly evident in the skills professors' questionnaire responses. Specifically, these responses reflected that skills professors' experiences with imposter syndrome deter them from starting, publishing, or promoting their scholarship, with many of them fearing experts would find significant flaws in their scholarship.

These responses are understandable given how many law schools treat skills professors' scholarship. Many non-tenured or tenure-track skills professors are not contractually required by their institutions to publish scholarship, and as such, generally do not receive significant support, resources, or rewards from their institutions to engage in research.¹³⁸ Often, law school administrations use this lack of a contractual requirement to publish as a justification for paying skills professors less than their doctrinal counterparts.¹³⁹ As Professor Stanichi notes, this rhetoric implies that skills professors "are to blame for their own poor salaries, when the reality is that law schools, by a number of methods, block [these] professors from opportunities to publish."¹⁴⁰

However, even without a contractual requirement to publish or rewards for doing so, and when a lack of resources and time makes publication a "practical impossibility,"¹⁴¹ many skills professors still "engage in deep and meaningful scholarship on a wide variety of topics, including doctrinal, rhetorical, pedagogical, empirical, and

137. See *id.* (noting that "a common aspect of female-gendered work is that it is considered to be much more interruptible").

138. See Stanichi, *supra* note 9, at 483; see also Susan P. Liemer, *The Quest for Scholarship: The Legal Writing Professor's Paradox*, 80 OR. L. REV. 1007, 1019–20 (2001); Beazley, *supra* note 74, at 283–84 (noting that legal writing professors may not always be entitled to grants for scholarship or even money to pay student research assistants).

139. See Stanichi, *supra* note 9, at 482–83; see also Robbins et al., *supra* note 88, at 1175–76 (explaining how librarians are generally deprived of the time to conduct scholarly research).

140. Stanichi, *supra* note 9, at 482–83.

141. *Id.* at 483.

theoretical works.”¹⁴² Even so, their scholarship—especially when focused on skills-based topics like legal writing subjects—is often discounted as not sufficiently “intellectual,” not “properly theoretical or doctrinal,” and “not fit for publication in mainstream law journals.”¹⁴³ Not only do these arguments lack support, but they are easily disputed by a growing field of academic scholarship focused on legal writing and rhetoric.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, legal writing and rhetoric has fully emerged as a scholarly discipline with two peer reviewed journals—*Legal Writing: The Journal of the Legal Writing Institute*¹⁴⁵ and *The Journal of the Legal Writing Institute and Legal Communication & Rhetoric: JALWD*¹⁴⁶—as well as several other scholarly academic outlets, such as *The Scribes Journal of Legal Writing*,¹⁴⁷ devoted to exclusively publishing works pertaining to legal writing, communication, and rhetoric.¹⁴⁸

Yet, even in the face of this adversity, many skills professor respondents indicated they desire to produce academic scholarship,

142. Ruan, *supra* note 6, at 25. For instance, according to a 2006 compiled bibliography of legal writing professors’ scholarly works, only 25% of law review articles published by legal writing professors involved legal writing topics. See Terrill Pollman & Linda H. Edwards, *Scholarship by Legal Writing Professors: New Voices in the Legal Academy*, 11 LEGAL WRITING 3, 10 (2006).

143. Ruan, *supra* note 6, at 25; Kristen K. Tiscione & Amy Vorenberg, *Dismantling the Two-Track System for Legal Research and Writing Faculty*, 31 COLUM. J. GENDER & L. 47, 61 (2015); Mary Beth Beazley, *Revisiting Langdell: Legal Education Reform and the Lawyer’s Craft*, 51 WAKE FOREST L. REV. 275, 298 (2016) (noting that legal writing scholars are often told “that their scholarship is not ‘legitimate,’ and that we should write about something else”).

144. See Kristen Davis, *Transcript—Afternoon Session of the Mercer Law Review Symposium*, 61 MERCER L. REV. 803, 808 (2010) (recognizing legal rhetoric scholarship as that which focuses “on the study and the practice of interpreting, imagining, and composing effective legal arguments”).

145. See *About the Journal*, LEGAL WRITING: THE J. OF THE LEGAL WRITING INST., <https://www.legalwritingjournal.org/about> (last visited Mar. 22, 2022) (explaining that the Journal publishes work focused on the “theory and the practice of legal writing; in composition, rhetoric and linguistic theory; in the design of courses and curricula; and in teaching and learning theory as applied in the classroom and practice”).

146. See *About*, LEGAL COMMUNICATION & RHETORIC: JALWD, <https://www.alwd.org/aboutlcr> (last visited Mar. 22, 2021) (explaining that the Journal encourages and publishes scholarship focused “on the substance and doctrine of legal writing”).

147. See *The Scribes Journal of Legal Writing*, SCRIBES, <https://www.scribes.org/the-journal-of-legal-writing> (last visited Mar. 22, 2022).

148. Additional publications such as *Perspectives: Teaching Legal Research and Writing*, and *The Second Draft*, a peer-reviewed publication of LWI, also provide outlets for a more practical-focused exchange of ideas pertaining to teaching legal research and writing courses.

but recognized their imposter syndrome often prevents them from doing so. A number of respondents believe their ideas for scholarship are not sufficiently formal, intellectual, or unique, likely given how skills-based or practical scholarship has been viewed in the legal academy. For many, this self-doubt manifests as procrastination or a reluctance to finish works in progress. Several respondents noted that their imposter syndrome keeps them from “jumping right into” their scholarship and causes them “to make excuses” that result in “writer’s block or a lack of motivation.” For others, “ideas start[,] but they never get off the ground.”

Those skills professor respondents who have managed to overcome these avoidance techniques and complete and publish scholarly works continue to note self-doubt with their work product. As one professor of academic success and bar prep courses wrote:

I have won awards for my scholarship, but I feel like I won them because the chair of the reviewing committee just liked me or the subject about which I wrote. . . . I definitely feel as if others know so much more than I about my research and that a large part of what I do every day is acting: acting like an expert, acting like a good writer, and pulling the wool over everyone’s eyes and blinding them to the fact that I am really just fumbling around in the dark.

The responses also indicated that skills professors often limit the journals and conferences to which they submit their articles. Some respondents who teach legal writing courses admitted they do not submit proposals to non-legal writing related conferences, while others refuse to play the “expediting game”¹⁴⁹ to improve their placements in academic journals. One respondent who primarily teaches empirical legal studies and analytic skills courses even explained that she “hold[s] onto articles instead of submitting them.”

Imposter syndrome also prevents many skills professors from effectively promoting their scholarship. One legal writing professor discussed feeling “foolish” promoting herself. She wrote: “I also feel

149. Michael D. Cicchini, *Law Review Publishing: Thoughts on Mass Submissions, Expedited Review, and Potential Reform*, 16 U. N.H. L. REV. 147, 155 (2017) (“When professors submit their article to a law journal, they are not doing so with the goal of actually publishing in that journal. Rather, they want to receive an offer they can then use to send expedited review requests to higher ranked journals.”).

[imposter syndrome] for being a legal writing teacher vs. a podium teacher, as though I don't teach 'real' courses. That makes me hesitant, too, to promote my work."

5. Personal Health & Wellbeing

For many of the skills professors surveyed, the imposter syndrome they experience in their academic roles has spilled over into other areas of their lives, including their mental and physical health and wellbeing. As one legal writing professor respondent wrote:

I feel like work and my professional career is such a big part of me that the insecurities on a daily basis have infiltrated the rest of my life and the very essence of my being. I used to be self-confident and had a successful career as a prosecutor before teaching. Now, the constant bombardment of unequal treatment has sunk in[,] and I question my abilities constantly.

Psychologists have recognized imposter syndrome can often lead to increased stress, anxiety, depression, panic attacks, exhaustion, and eventual burnout.¹⁵⁰ This is particularly true for those who respond to imposter syndrome feelings by overworking or over-preparing.¹⁵¹ The skills professors' open-ended responses largely reflected these symptoms. Specifically, many respondents recognized their imposter syndrome-induced workaholic tendencies, by noting that they spend significantly more time than necessary preparing for class, either causing them to burn out or putting them on the path to doing so. As one female legal writing professor who has been teaching for several years wrote: "My fears drove me to over-prepare. I worked extremely hard during my first few years of teaching and continue to work incredibly hard even now. My hours are long Overall, I think it makes me a better teacher, but the pace is not sustainable." Likewise, another legal writing professor similarly recognized that the "inordinate amount of time" she spent preparing for class during her

150. See Clance & Imes, *supra* note 4, at 242; see also Rakestraw, *supra* note 17, at 471, 473.

151. See Rakestraw, *supra* note 17, at 471; see also Parkman, *supra* note 16, at 52.

first few years of teaching helped her, but in hindsight, the “stress and anxiety severely affected [her] quality of life.” Not only does this overwork impact mental health, but as one professor of library skills noted, her overpreparation wasted time that she could have devoted to administration or scholarship.

Moreover, while several skills professors recognized that they had been able to limit their workload and overpreparation as they became more experienced, others have not, with profound detriment to their wellbeing. As one female professor of academic success and bar prep courses stated:

It is difficult not to feel hopelessly inadequate when I can never do enough to live up to [the] ideal—not working 80+ hours per week, not constantly keeping my office door open, not responding to messages at nights and on the weekends, not spending hours prepping for every potential question in class, not coming in at 4:30 a.m. so I can work on scholarship when my students don’t need me. It’s never enough and hence I feel like I can never *be* enough.

IV. THE SELF-PERPETUATING CYCLE OF IMPOSTER SYNDROME & THE NEED FOR CHANGE

Drawing on the open-ended responses highlighted in the previous section, this section will first identify the themes I pulled from the survey. Notably, it will explain how the effects of imposter syndrome perpetuate the rigid hierarchical constructs of the law school caste system, thereby promoting a recurring cycle of classism and discrimination against skills professors within legal academia. Not only does this chronic cycle of imposter syndrome harm skills professors in the rendering of their academic responsibilities and in their personal health and wellbeing, but it also serves as a detriment to skills professors’ students, as well as their law school administrations and faculties. This section will then argue for institutional change to eradicate the classist, hierarchical structure present in legal academia. Without this necessary change, imposter syndrome will continue to plague skills professors and law schools alike.

A. Imposter Syndrome as Fuel for Inequality

The legal skills professors' responses to the questionnaire reflected many concerning themes regarding the detrimental impact that hierarchical-fueled imposter syndrome has on skills professors and legal academia in general. However, one of the most telling takeaways from the survey was the reciprocal relationship between the law school hierarchy and the skills professors' imposter syndrome. Many of the skills professor respondents noted that the classist hierarchy present in legal academia contributed to their imposter syndrome feelings, yet at the same time, their open-ended responses reflected that the effects of this imposter syndrome were further perpetuating the rigid hierarchical constructs. These findings were not necessarily surprising, as imposter syndrome can often be a self-fulfilling prophecy, in that self-doubt can lead to negative thoughts and feelings which can cause mistakes and present the sufferer as unqualified.¹⁵² In the context of legal academia, the engrained hierarchy and biases against skills professors exacerbate feelings of imposter syndrome, which prompts skills professors to "stay in their lanes," thus providing greater fuel for administrations and doctrinal colleagues to keep skills professors in their low castes.

This theme was especially clear in considering how imposter syndrome affects skills professors' relationships with their colleagues. Many respondents recognized that imposter syndrome prevents them from socializing or seeking help from their doctrinal colleagues, thereby creating an even sharper sociological divide between skills and doctrinal professors. They also associated their imposter syndrome with a reluctance to make proposals or offer input in faculty meetings. While this reluctance is more than understandable, considering the long-running trend of administrations and doctrinal, tenured professors discounting skills professors' ideas,¹⁵³ it relegates skills professors to an even more inferior position in the law school. It deprives them of the opportunity to influence the trajectory of their law school's teaching and administration and to promote small steps for skills professors' equality in their institutions.¹⁵⁴

152. See Debra Austin, *Windmills of Your Mind: Understanding the Neurobiology of Emotion*, 54 WAKE FOREST L. REV. 931, 964–65 (2019).

153. See Dickerson, *supra* note 56.

154. See Suzanne E. Rowe & Susan P. Liemer, *One Small Step: Beginning the Process of Institutional Change to Integrate the Law School Curriculum*, 1 J. ASS'N LEGAL

The respondents' open-ended responses on how their self-doubt impacted their teaching and relationships with their students further reflects the self-perpetuating impact of imposter syndrome on the law school hierarchy. As noted above, several respondents recognized that imposter syndrome deterred them from seeking to teach non-skills courses that are generally in the purview of tenured or tenure-track professors. Likewise, a number of respondents recognized their reluctance to open up, provide mentorship, or act authentically with their students, thereby perpetuating the falsehood that skills professors are not sufficiently qualified to advise or mentor their students in areas outside of their teaching curriculum.

Skills professors' approaches to scholarship also corroborated the self-perpetuating nature of the law school hierarchy. Given the lack of resources, the lack of time to devote, and the degradation of skills professors' scholarship, many skills professors have adopted an avoidance approach to scholarship. Indeed, for many respondents, feelings of imposter syndrome prompt concerns that their scholarship is inadequate, insufficiently academic, or—as one respondent put it—“just totally awful.” These beliefs often stop skills professors from researching, publishing, or beginning to write in the first place, not only depriving their institutions and the academy as a whole of the benefits of their scholarship, but further validating the institutional stereotype that skills professors do not publish.

Moreover, the open-ended responses also revealed how skills professors' hierarchical-induced imposter syndrome detrimentally impacts their students and their law school more broadly. Indeed, the impact of imposter syndrome among skills professors has the significant potential to impede law students' education and to disrupt effective law school administration.

From the administrative perspective, skills professors' heightened proclivity to burnout as a result of their hierarchical-fueled imposter syndrome can easily lead to high turnover,¹⁵⁵ requiring significant law school efforts and funds to be allocated to repetitive recruiting and hiring.

Moreover, qualified new applicants will be much less willing to accept a position at an institution in which imposter syndrome is

WRITING DIRECTORS 218, 219–20 (2002) (noting that for small steps to equality to be successful, skills professors need to know the faculty at their school and the school's institutional culture).

155. Edwards, *supra* note 69, at 95 (noting that as of 1997, “the turnover rate for legal writing teachers [was] among the highest in the Academy”).

rampant due to classist treatment of skills professors. Accordingly, in addition to experiencing instability as a result of high turnover, schools who fail to address issues of imposter syndrome may find themselves limited to hiring less qualified or effective legal writing faculty, which in turn, will hurt their students.

Further, when it comes to decision making, many law schools are already at a disadvantage by prohibiting or limiting skills professors' voting rights in faculty meetings. Limitations and prohibitions on voting rights prevent skills professors from engaging in the democratic decision-making processes that are critical to law school governance.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, even those skills professors who are entitled to express their opinions or vote on administrative issues may be reluctant to do so because of their imposter syndrome. As J. Lyn Entrikin, Lucy Jewel, Susie Salmon, Craig Smith, and Kristen Tiscione have recognized, the limiting of skills professors' input on administrative or academic decisions—either by policy or practice—has the potential to enable “poor decisions infected by bias, groupthink, or a failure to understand the knowledge that comes from teaching” skills courses.¹⁵⁷

As a practical matter, treating skills professors in an inequitable way so as to promote imposter syndrome sends the clear message to students that skills courses are less important than doctrinal courses, which many students take to heart.¹⁵⁸ This message is both ironic and devastating, given the recognized importance of legal writing as a “primary value” of the field of law,¹⁵⁹ as well as recent reforms across legal education to graduate “practice ready lawyers.”¹⁶⁰ As Professor Ruan has recognized, law students' recognition of the message that skills courses are unimportant poses several critical harms to the law school mission, including by jeopardizing experiential learning goals,

156. See Liemer, *supra* note 105, at 363; see also Entrikin et al., *supra* note 58, at 25.

157. Entrikin et al., *supra* note 58, at 41.

158. Edwards, *supra* note 69, at 99–100 (noting that doctrinal professors will explicitly “warn” students about spending “too much” time on legal writing while ignoring their “important” doctrinal courses”).

159. Homer, *supra* note 113, at 38.

160. See Keene, *supra* note 74, at 468; see also Robert J. Derocher, *What's Going on in Legal Education?*, AM. BAR ASS'N, https://www.americanbar.org/groups/bar_services/publications/bar_leader/2011_12/spring/legaled/ (last visited Mar. 22, 2022); see also Ruan, *supra* note 6, at 15 (“The irony posed here is apparent: as law schools are strongly encouraged to provide more experiential learning opportunities for their students, law schools systemically marginalize the very faculty that teaches those skills to a lower-caste status.”).

by failing to develop students' legal research and writing skills, and by "decreasing the chance that students will be the best advocates they can be in the legal system."¹⁶¹

Indeed, the harm to students from their skills professors' imposter syndrome extends even further. As noted in the questionnaire responses, skills professors recognize their imposter syndrome impacts their treatment of their students. Some admitted to being overly lenient and not pushing them hard enough, others declined to form close mentoring relationships with them, and some chose not to incorporate creative teaching methods into their classrooms. All of these have obvious detrimental effects on law students, who should be challenged, mentored, and intellectually stimulated.

The effects of skills professors' imposter syndrome on students can also be less obvious. The questionnaire responses evidenced that hierarchical-fueled imposter syndrome has significant mental health impacts on skills professors, ranging from increased stress and anxiety, burnout, and depression and demoralization. These changes in attitude are often easily perceived by law students, who already suffer from anxiety disorders and emotional distress at staggering rates.¹⁶² Likewise, "negative morale, low job satisfaction, and a disincentive to work toward the future creates an impoverished academic environment in which law students lose."¹⁶³

None of the findings identified in this section are intended to shame skills professors for their reluctance to engage with their institutions or to promote their work. Instead, this reluctance is an intended byproduct of the unjust law school caste system. It is my hope that these findings inspire administrations to make the changes necessary to limit the presence and impact of imposter syndrome among their skills professors by fostering more egalitarian and less classist environments.

B. Dismantling the Hierarchy to Empower the Imposters

Much has been written about the mechanisms for dealing with imposter syndrome, yet almost all of these mechanisms focus on

161. Ruan, *supra* note 6, at 31; see Edwards, *supra* note 69, at 99–100.

162. See Ian Ayres et al., *Anxiety Psychoeducation for Law Students: A Pilot Program*, 67 J. LEGAL ED. 118, 119–20 (2017).

163. Entrikin et al., *supra* note 58, at 41.

internal changes that must be “fixed” by the individual sufferer.¹⁶⁴ For instance, psychologists, career coaches, and academics—myself included—generally recommend individuals cope with imposter syndrome by discussing their imposter feelings with others, seeking out mentors, welcoming self-compassion, and taking time to acknowledge their accomplishments.¹⁶⁵ However, as researchers have noted, this focus on individualized cures “misses an important piece of the puzzle—how the social context may shape one’s tendency to feel like an impostor.”¹⁶⁶

Putting the onus exclusively on the individual sufferer—usually a female, minority, or other member of a low societal rank or oppressed class—does nothing to rectify the discrimination and elitist hierarchical structures which often serve as the primary causes of imposter syndrome.¹⁶⁷ Indeed, even if an individual utilizes all of the resources available to her to minimize her imposter syndrome, feelings of imposterism—and their aforementioned significant detriments—will continue so long as the institutionalized “hierarchies, barriers, and biases remain instituted.”¹⁶⁸ Directing those affected by imposter syndrome—especially those whose imposterism arises from prolonged classism and discrimination—to “fix” themselves, furthers the narrative that they are at fault for their imposter feelings.¹⁶⁹ One respondent to the questionnaire acknowledged the gendered problems with viewing imposterism as a self-induced problem. As she noted, “Our current fixation with impost[e]r syndrome is its own expression of patriarchy—the labeling of a behavior traditionally associated with women (humility) as a deficit . . . and a thing to counter by acting more male (confident).”

164. *E.g.*, Feenstra et al., *supra* note 11, at 2.

165. See Sara L. Ochs, *Imposter Syndrome: Lessons for Millennial Legal Academics & Law Schools*, in *MILLENNIAL LEADERSHIP IN LAW SCHOOLS: ESSAYS ON DISRUPTION, INNOVATION, AND THE FUTURE* (Ashley Krenelka Chase 2021); see also Tulshyan & Burey, *supra* note 14; Alexandra Patzak et al., *Buffering Impostor Feelings with Kindness: The Mediating Role of Self-compassion Between Gender-Role Orientation and the Impostor Phenomenon*, 8 *FRONT. PSYCHOL.* 1289 (2017).

166. Feenstra et al., *supra* note 11, at 2.

167. See Tulshyan & Burey, *supra* note 14 (“Workplaces remain misdirected toward seeking individual solutions for issues disproportionately caused by systems of discrimination and abuses of power.”).

168. Christine Liu, *Imposter Syndrome Isn’t the Problem—Toxic Workplaces Are*, *QUARTZ* (May 23, 2018), <https://qz.com/work/1286549/imposter-syndrome-lets-toxic-work-culture-off-the-hook/>.

169. See Tulshyan & Burey, *supra* note 14 (noting that even the term “imposter syndrome,” promotes images of “criminal fraudulence” and “female hysteria”).

Imposter syndrome is an institutional, not an individualized, problem and must be addressed as one. Rather than placing burdens solely on marginalized communities to simply overcome their feelings, or to “fake it [until] [they] make it,”¹⁷⁰ the accountability for mitigating imposter syndrome and its detrimental effects must be shifted to the institution or industry responsible for cultivating imposter feelings through elitism and discrimination.¹⁷¹ Indeed, it is “important for institutions to consider how they may have treated people like they aren’t worthy, and how they’ve contributed to [an] environment where imposter phenomenon is common.”¹⁷²

Legal academia is an institution which has fostered imposter syndrome through its pervasive use of hierarchies, barriers, and ranks. Despite copious literature and numerous calls for change, law schools continue to maintain and uphold the law school caste system, thereby minimizing skills professors’ achievements. It is unsurprising that such an environment would nurture feelings of imposterism and diminished self-worth among skills professors, who are constantly treated as “less thans” in the law school hierarchy. Until law school administrations recognize the detrimental impacts of their superficial distinctions between doctrinal and skills professors, imposter syndrome will continue within law school faculties.

For decades, widespread calls have been made for greater parity between doctrinal and skills professors, with scholars, administrators, and organizations like the Association for Legal Writing Directors (ALWD), the Legal Writing Institute (LWI), and the Association of American Law Schools (AALS) advocating for improved job security, status, pay, and other benefits for skills professors.¹⁷³

170. HEIDI K. BROWN, *THE INTROVERTED LAWYER: A SEVEN-STEP JOURNEY TOWARD AUTHENTICALLY EMPOWERED ADVOCACY* 32 (2017) (explaining that urging people to “fake it till they make it,” can result in self-censoring and disregarding of authentic potential).

171. See Tulshyan & Burey, *supra* note 14.

172. Ashley Abramson, *How to Overcome Impostor Phenomenon*, AM. PSYCH. ASSOC. (Mar. 8, 2021), <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2021/07/impostor-phenomenon>.

173. See *e.g.*, Dauphinais, *supra* note 63; Beazley, *supra* note 74, at 312–21; Kathleen Elliott Vinson, *Improving Legal Writing: A Life-Long Learning Process and Continuing Professional Challenge*, 21 *TOURO L. REV.* 507, 540 n.136 (2005) (noting the work of LWI and ALWD towards “improving the status and conditions of the faculty teaching legal writing”); Dickerson, *supra* note 56. In May 2021, the AALS hosted a webinar entitled “Ensuring Equality in Legal Academia: Strategies to Dismantle Caste,” which drew more than 530 registrants and featured a discussion among law school deans of how to limit the inequities posed by the law school caste system. See *Ensuring Equality in Legal Academia: Strategies to Dismantle Caste*, ASS’N. OF AM. LAW

While these advocates have achieved promising improvements towards parity for skills professors,¹⁷⁴ significant change is still needed to place skills professors on equal footing with their doctrinal colleagues. Imposter syndrome breeds in a lack of representation and visibility and will continue to do so among skills professors until they are commonly seen as successful, governing members of their institution, with the same rights, rewards, and privileges as their doctrinal counterparts.¹⁷⁵ Moreover, movement towards parity cannot be limited to clear measurable “caste markers,”¹⁷⁶ like salary, tenure, and title. Instead, imposter syndrome will continue to fester among skills professors until they receive equitable treatment, meaning their law school administrations and doctrinal colleagues treat them as equals, with the same respect they afford to the top castes of the law school faculty.

V. CONCLUSION

Imposter syndrome is universal. As Manfred F.R. Kets De Vries has recognized, “To some extent, of course, we are *all* imposters. We play roles on the stage of life, presenting a public self that differs from the private self we share with intimates and morphing both selves as circumstances demand. Displaying a façade is part and parcel of the human condition.”¹⁷⁷ Indeed, almost all respondents to the questionnaire recognized that they had been impacted by imposter syndrome at least once in some way during their time in legal academia. Feelings of imposterism are not always accompanied by devastating effects. In small doses, feelings of being an imposter or an outsider can promote “intellectual humility” and foster critical

SCHOOLS, <https://www.aals.org/sections/list/legal-writing-reasoning-and-research/ensuring-equality-in-legal-academia-strategies-to-dismantle-caste/> (last visited Mar. 22, 2022).

174. See, e.g., Levine, *supra* note 66, at 1075 (noting changes in law schools’ treatment of legal writing professors); Dickerson, *supra* note 56 (recognizing that a few law school deans and “dozens of associate deans” are “from the legal writing, clinical, and academic support fields”).

175. See Stanchi, *supra* note 9, at 485–88.

176. Sheryl Nance-Nash, *Why Imposter Syndrome Hits Women and Women of Colour Harder*, BBC (July 27, 2020), <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20200724-why-imposter-syndrome-hits-women-and-women-of-colour-harder> (quoting Emily Hu, a clinical psychologist in Los Angeles, as saying “[w]e’re more likely to experience imposter syndrome if we don’t see many examples of people who look like us or share our background who are clearly succeeding in their field”).

177. Kets De Vries, *supra* note 47, at 2 (emphasis in original).

thinking, while also pushing professionals—and especially academics—to excel.¹⁷⁸

Unfortunately, for most skills professors who endure a barrage of daily inequities stemming from the law school caste system, imposter syndrome is not limited to small doses. Instead, feelings of being a fraud or of not being good enough are often all-consuming both within and outside the workplace,¹⁷⁹ with significant consequences for skills professors' work and wellbeing, as well as their students' educational experiences. Skills professors are often made to feel like frauds by the precise hierarchies and barriers in legal academia that were erected with the intent to marginalize and exclude them.

It will take concrete steps to dismantle the law school caste system and achieve equality among all castes. Until this change occurs, skills professors will continue to be treated as second class citizens, and the recurring cycle of imposter syndrome will persist, the effects of which will significantly deter the efficacy of law school administration and education. Addressing feelings of imposter syndrome and the sources of those emotions—either internally or institutionally—is far from a comfortable feeling. Yet, it is important to remember, as Dean Darby Dickerson has said, “[r]aising some up does not diminish the work of others. Instead, it improves the whole of legal education.”¹⁸⁰

178. BROWN, *supra* note 170, at 40–41.

179. See Queena Hoang, *Impostor Phenomenon: Overcoming Internalized Barriers and Recognizing Achievements*, 34 VT. CONNECTION 42, 42 (2013), (recognizing that those suffering from severe imposter syndrome are victims to “emotions, thoughts, and actions that can virtually control their lives”).

180. Dickerson, *supra* note 56.