

A large, stylized graphic on the left side of the slide. It consists of several overlapping triangles in shades of blue, green, and yellow, forming a larger, abstract shape that points to the right. The text 'Cal Poly Pomona' is positioned to the left of this graphic.

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A Fearless Campus

Fearless Classroom Asynchronous Workshop

*Overcoming Stereotype Threat
& Impostor Syndrome*

Alex Madva

Associate Professor of Philosophy
California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, CA

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Stereotype Threat

- Being reminded of stereotypes about your group
- Anxiety about confirming those stereotypes
- Reduces test performance
- Reduces amount of practice before test
(Stone 2002)
- Reduces sense of belonging and valuing of a domain



Cues in the Environment

What does it take to remind folks of stereotypes about their group?

Very little!

Suppose you're an impressionable student walking into your first computer-science class...







Cues in the Classroom

(Cheryan et al. 2009, 2011; Masters et al. 2016)

“Geeky” comp-sci classrooms:

- reduce women’s interest and expected success in computer science,
- but have no effect on men (... with exceptions!)



Girls & women: up to 3x more likely to express interest in comp-sci if in the neutral room – also tested in virtual classrooms

Environments “influence students’ sense of ambient belonging... or feeling of fit in an environment”

What messages about “who belongs” are we sending in our Bb pages, Zoom video backgrounds, syllabi, and textbooks?



Impostor Syndrome

- **Chronic feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and fraudulence that persist even in the face of information to the contrary**
(<http://counseling.caltech.edu/general/>)
 - Perfectionist procrastination
(anxiety getting started because “I’m not good enough to do a good job”)
 - Perfectionist over-preparation
(“if I put in enough effort in advance, they can’t know I’m a fraud”)
 - Ignoring or downplaying successes
 - Attributing success to pure luck
- **About 70% of people (across all social identities) experience moments of impostor self-doubt**



Small Group Exercise

2 Truths and 1 Lie: Impostor Edition

- **Spend 5 minutes reflecting on your own impostor thoughts and behaviors**
- **Write down 2 truthful examples (things you have actually felt or done) and 1 fake example**
 - (If you have trouble coming up with your own examples, or you'd rather not discuss them, maybe write down examples from others)
- **Then group members try to guess which one is fake**
- **Teacher goes first to get the class warmed up...**



2 Truths & 1 Lie

Alex's Examples of Impostor Thoughts

- All my ideas are plagiarized from other people
- The only reason I was admitted into my PhD program was because of social connections between my undergrad and grad professors, not because I was qualified
- I can't let someone else "beat me" in an argument because they'll realize I'm not smart



So what can we do...

- ... about **Stereotype Threat & Impostor Syndrome?**
- **Things to tell students (or ourselves!)...**
 - on the syllabus, before or after exams or papers, and just general reminders throughout the semester
- **If you want to pose this question explicitly to students, you might frame it like this:**
 - If a close friend confessed to having impostor feelings, what would you want to say to them?



Do's...

- **Own your achievements**
 - Don't deflect, say "thanks!"
- **Keep a record of compliments, support, and well wishes**
- **Label your stress**
 - "This is Impostor Syndrome!"
- **Talk about Impostor Syndrome with peers, mentors, and advisers**
- **Accept that you're not perfect**

...and Don'ts

- **Don't dwell on comparisons with others**
 - Take a social media break!
- **Don't just try harder**
- **Don't blame it all on luck**
- **Don't blame yourself for your second thoughts**
- **Don't make big decisions while you're down**



Mindset Goes a Long Way

- **Adopt an “approach-oriented” mindset to your tests, projects, and interactions**
- **Instead of thinking about how to “prevent” or “avoid” making mistakes or being embarrassed,**
- **focus on the goals you want to “promote” or “approach”**
- **Which goals or mindsets should we promote?**



Reframing Impostor Syndrome & Stereotype Threat

Reframe tests and education...

- not measures of fixed ability
- indicators of gradual progress toward skill

Reframe anxiety and stress...

- not indicators of weakness
- “normal” experiences that happen to everyone
- motivational “fuel” for success
- College is hard!

Reframe failures...

- not signs that you don’t belong
- learning & achievement depend on trial & error

Reframe successes...

- not just pure luck
- celebrate the skills you’re mastering thru dedication



If-Then Plans for Impostor Syndrome & Stereotype Threat

- **“If I start a new problem,
then I will tell myself: I can solve it!”
(Bayer and Gollwitzer 2007)**
- **“If I am feeling stressed out before a test,
then I will remind myself that stress is normal
and everybody feels it!”**



Brainstorming Exercises

- **Think about specific contexts at risk of Impostor or Stereotype Threat**
 - (e.g., students can draw from their own examples from 2 Truths & 1 Lie)
- **What are some plans for response to put in place?**
- **Plan structure:**
 - If [description of context],
 - Then [I will act in a certain way]!
- **5 minutes of brainstorming in small groups**
 - Each person talks about a context where they might struggle
 - Group members help to brainstorm a response
- **Groups share and workshop some if-then plans with the whole class**



Thanks!

Email me with follow-up questions!
ammadva@cpp.edu

Feeling Like an Impostor Is Not a Syndrome

It's a totally normal part of experiencing success.

By L.V. Anderson



Sources & Resources

- [Sarah Ballard's Impostor Syndrome Workshop](#)
- [Grad Logic: Fighting Feeling like a Fake](#)
- [Reducing Stereotype Threat](#)
- [Active Bystander Strategies](#)



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