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# Feeling Like a Fraud: Part Two

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## **About the Author**

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## **Abstract**

*This talk, a sequel to *Feeling Like a Fraud* (Stone Center Work in Progress No. 18, 1985), posits a baseline sense of authenticity which gives one the ability to have feelings of fraudulence. The sense of authenticity creates the awareness of a lack of fit between what one feels and what is said about one's virtue or competence, or expected in public behavior. Vignettes of situations inducing feelings of fraudulence are contrasted with vignettes of experiments in teaching or public speaking which involve newly-invented forms and which have brought feelings of authenticity in public performance. The talk is cast in the metaphor of a house tour, and features both a greenhouse and a Madwoman in the Attic. The analysis is placed in context of a theoretical model of a double and conflicting structure within the psyche and the society, in which over-rewarded, vertically-oriented elements are contrasted with laterally-oriented, affiliative, informal elements of a "home-sense." Invention of less fraudulent forms for public performance may be made possible by taking a complex and pluralistic home-sense seriously. Such home-work is seen as societally desirable personal work for the creation of more broadly useful theory and public policy.*

I first gave a talk on this subject in April, 1984, as part of an earlier Stone Center series. I proposed a dual view of feelings of fraudulence, using a Moebius strip as metaphor and as visual aid. This strip, when twisted once and fastened at the ends, becomes a loop on which both of two apparently opposed statements turn out to be, so to speak, "on the same side." I suggested both that "We must not let them make us feel like frauds," and that "We should continue to spot fraudulence in the public roles we are asked to play." I praised the observer in us which may feel uncomfortable when rising in hierarchies which purport to be meritocracies, if we know they are not that. I applauded the part of the self which hesitates to claim isolating titles and rewards, and said that there are pretenses in official language and behavior which may imply that we are more than we feel we really are in terms of merit and singularity, and less than we feel we are as human beings embedded in matrices of circumstances and relationships.

I suggested that we trust some feelings of fraudulence or apology and analyze them more closely. I think that many of our feelings of fraudulence come from deep and wise sources. The trick is to trust the very feelings of discomfort that are giving us the most trouble, and try to follow them where they may lead. Recently they have been leading me to look for what I imagine must be some feelings of *authenticity* which give us the ability to recognize our feelings of fraudulence. Some baseline sense of authenticity in us must be responsible for our registering a lack of fit between our own sense of ourselves and what is said about or around us.

This talk builds on, italicizes and extends the previous discussion. But this time I am shifting the emphasis from what's wrong with "them" to what's right with "us." I want to focus not on the pretenses of "official" worlds which may make us feel like impostors but on some authentic elements of life in us which I think prize-giving systems usually miss, and which seem to me fundamental and central grounds of

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our being.

Because of my excitement in making this shift from the subject of fraudulence to the subject of authenticity, I had been eagerly looking forward to this talk for months. I knew that the first talk on feeling like a fraud had triggered a flash of recognition in many people, and I was happy at the opportunity which the Stone Center gave me to go into that subject once again, in the company of many people whose work I value. The atmosphere could not have been more welcoming. I wrote page after page of new ideas. But I couldn't organize those pages. The day of the lecture approached and still I couldn't outline the talk. And so, naturally, I began feeling like...

As I have said, the trick in this matter of fraudulence is to try to hold onto the very feelings that are giving you the most trouble, and trust them to lead you to some new ground, some new way of seeing or being. Given months' accumulation of animated notes, why could I not outline the talk? It dawned on me, then, that the outline itself makes me feel fraudulent. In my 1984 talk, I described the student who finds the formal expository style fraudulent, given her sense that language is an invention and that life doesn't come in sentences, paragraphs or arguments. For me, the outline now joined the argumentative paper as a problematical form, requiring pretenses such as subordinating all ideas to one "main" or governing idea. I realized that for me the outline is, and always has been, a fraudulent form. My genre, I realized, is the *list*.

What is the difference? What makes the outline give me such discomfort, the list such relief? On a list, everything matters; you need not rank, subordinate and exclude; you can add or subtract, elaborate or delete. The sequence doesn't much matter; sequence doesn't claim to provide a governing logic for a list. With an outline, one must (pretend to) justify the sequence, and to know and deal appropriately with the relative significance of each item or idea. One cannot be generous in an outline. One must decide that some things matter a lot and others hardly at all. Vertical and hierarchical outlines force one to (pretend to) link ideas, to rank, to judge and to eliminate. They force what are for me unacceptable simplifications.

The list allows me to keep everything, to expand, to add at any time. There is no pretense that everything in a list has been sorted out. The outline pretends to have a place for everything and everything in its place; it implies that what's left out didn't fit, and that what got in all fits together.

I knew that I wanted to talk here about several different encounters with feelings of fraudulence and

five or six attempts to track and act on feelings of authenticity. I also knew that no single idea seemed to be more important than the others, and that starting with any one of them as *the* most important distorted my sense of the whole matter.

At that perception, the topic turned metaphorically from an argument into a house. The talk turned into a house tour of places where I go when I am thinking about feeling like a fraud, and trying to get better grounded. I will show you some of the rooms; we can start or finish anywhere. Within the house metaphor, I do not feel like a fraud. I do not have to demonstrate to you that the living room in any sense *follows from* the kitchen, or the attic from the bedrooms. The only danger is that I will talk too much on this tour, since now I feel *at home*.

Though we could start the house tour anywhere, I will first take you to the shelves where I have accumulated some key readings since my last talk. But to tell the truth, papers and books lie in heaps everywhere around the house. For this is a house, not an outline. One thinks with the help of others in all rooms of life. But here are some key readings which have fetched up on the shelves of one particular paper-laden room. Blythe Clinchy and Claire Zimmerman, in "Growing Up Intellectually: Issues for College Women," described "connected" and "separated" knowing, and drew on Peter Elbow's contrast between playing "the doubting game" and playing "the believing game," as described in Elbow's book, *Writing Without Teachers*. This paper has been important to me in identifying as "the believing game" a learning mode I find congenial, non-fraudulent. Further work along the same lines is in Belenky, Clinchy, et al., *Women's Ways of Knowing*. Next comes Jane Martin's recent book, *Reclaiming a Conversation: The Ideal of the Educated Woman*, and several of her articles advocating that we educate for the 3 C's: care, concern and connection, as well as the 3 R's. Here is Alfie Kohn's book, *No Contest: The Case Against Competition*, which I consider to be, along with Mark Gerzon's *A Choice of Heroes*, among the most important books by men on the damage done to the whole society when socialization forces men into postures of dominance. Here is P. R. Clance's 1985 book, *The Impostor Syndrome*, which focuses, like her earlier work with Imes, on the pathology of feelings of fraudulence. Next comes Carol Cohn's paper, "Sex and Death in the World of Defense Intellectuals," and the paper by Carol Gilligan and Jane Attanucci called "Two Moral Orientations: Gender Differences and Similarities." Here is an unpublished paper on "double helix management style" by Helen Regan of Connecticut