

# Let's Name It to Tame It: Reframing Imposter Syndrome

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

In the spirit of reconciliation, Melbourne Business School acknowledges that we are on the lands of the Wurundjeri people who have been custodians of this land for thousands of years. We also acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community, and pay our respect to their elders past and present.

**How many of you have ever felt like you didn't belong, or weren't good enough, despite clear evidence to the contrary?**

**We all feel discomfort, nerves, or doubt when we're stretching ourselves.**

**So why is it that only women  
tend to call themselves  
imposters?**



# IMPOSTER SYNDROME

## ORIGINS

The term "Impostor Phenomenon" was first introduced in 1978 by psychologists Pauline Rose Clance and Suzanne Imes.

Their research focused on high-achieving women who, despite evident success, felt like frauds and attributed their accomplishments to luck or external factors rather than their abilities.



# IMPOSTER SYNDROME

## SPREAD



Over time, the concept evolved and spread widely, reframed as “Imposter Syndrome,” implying a clinical pathology.

The idea was picked up in mainstream media, business books, and TED talks.



It has become a catch-all diagnosis for normal human feelings of self-doubt.

By making self-doubt into a syndrome, we place the problem *in* women, rather than in the systems and environments that cause those feelings.





*Impostor syndrome is a  
distraction.*

*It's a way to keep us  
concentrated on our alleged  
inadequacies...*



Reshma Saujani  
Founder  
Girls who Code



shift the narrative  
from  
  
self-blame  
  
to  
  
systemic and self-awareness



# SYSTEMIC ISSUES

## UNDERREPRESENTATION AND ISOLATION

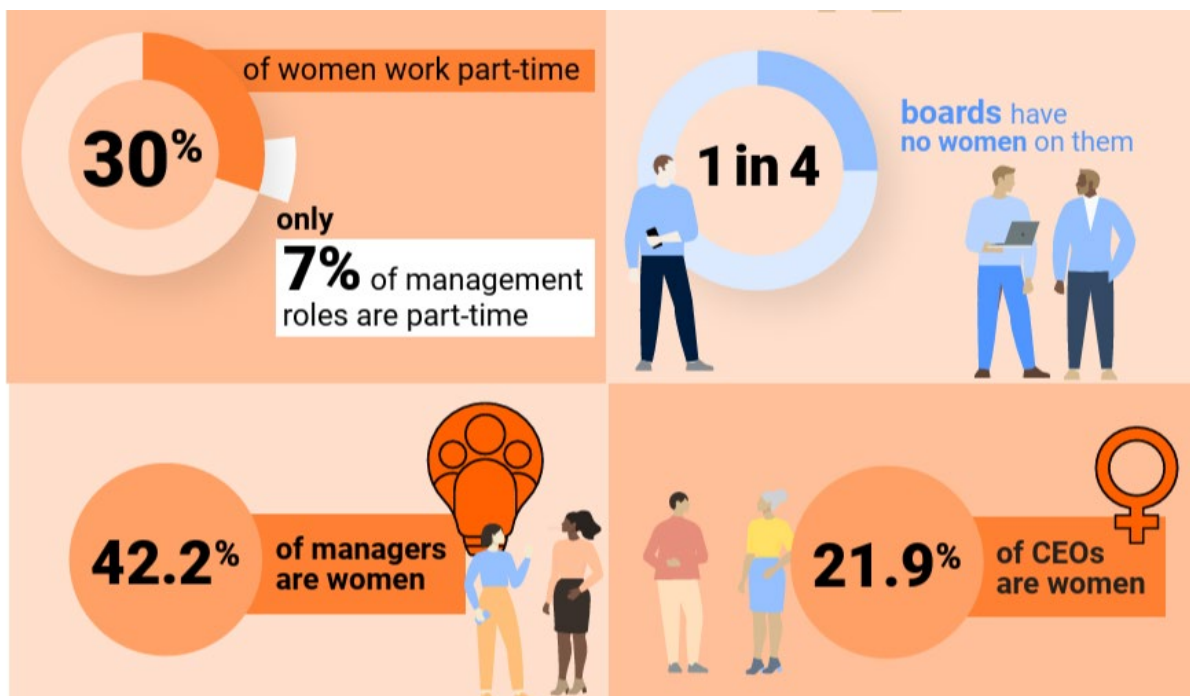
- Lack of psychological safety → talk less → less risk-taking → self-doubt.
- Emotional tax – emotional labour of ‘fitting in’ and self-monitoring → drain confidence over time.
- Questioning legitimacy – by others and yourself.

# 33.5%

of senior management roles  
are held by women  
in the mid-market.

Source: Grant Thornton IBR

Grant Thornton



# SYSTEMIC ISSUES

## VISIBILITY PARADOX – DOUBLE BURDEN

- Actions, mistakes, and performance are more closely observed, scrutinised, and remembered.
- Feel like you “represent all women” or need to prove you belong.
- Leads to intense pressure to perform flawlessly.

### Hypervisibility



- Despite standing out visually, ideas may be overlooked or dismissed.
- May be interrupted more or credited less.
- Left out of key networks and informal decision-making.
- Feel like you have presence but not always power.

### Invisibility in Influence



# SYSTEMIC ISSUES


## GENDER BIAS AND FEEDBACK

High-performing women are significantly more likely to receive negative feedback compared to their male counterparts.

- 76% of high-performing women receive negative feedback
- 2% of high-performing men experience the same

Much of the criticism directed at women focuses on their personality rather than the quality of their work.

- 88% of the negative feedback women receive is personality-focused
- 12% of the feedback for men shares this non-constructive nature. (Textio 2024)



*Women are critiqued so often that they're conditioned to be receptive to feedback, to take it seriously and personally, to want to take it on board and improve.*

Cindy Gallop and Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic HBR 2022



# SYSTEMIC ISSUES

## GENDER BIAS AND FEEDBACK

### Vague feedback is not actionable

- Women don't know what to improve.

### Style-focused feedback reflects double standards

- Penalised for the same behaviour rewarded in men.

### Bias undermines confidence and creates uncertainty

- Women question themselves, even when performance is strong.

### Personality-based feedback leads to doubt

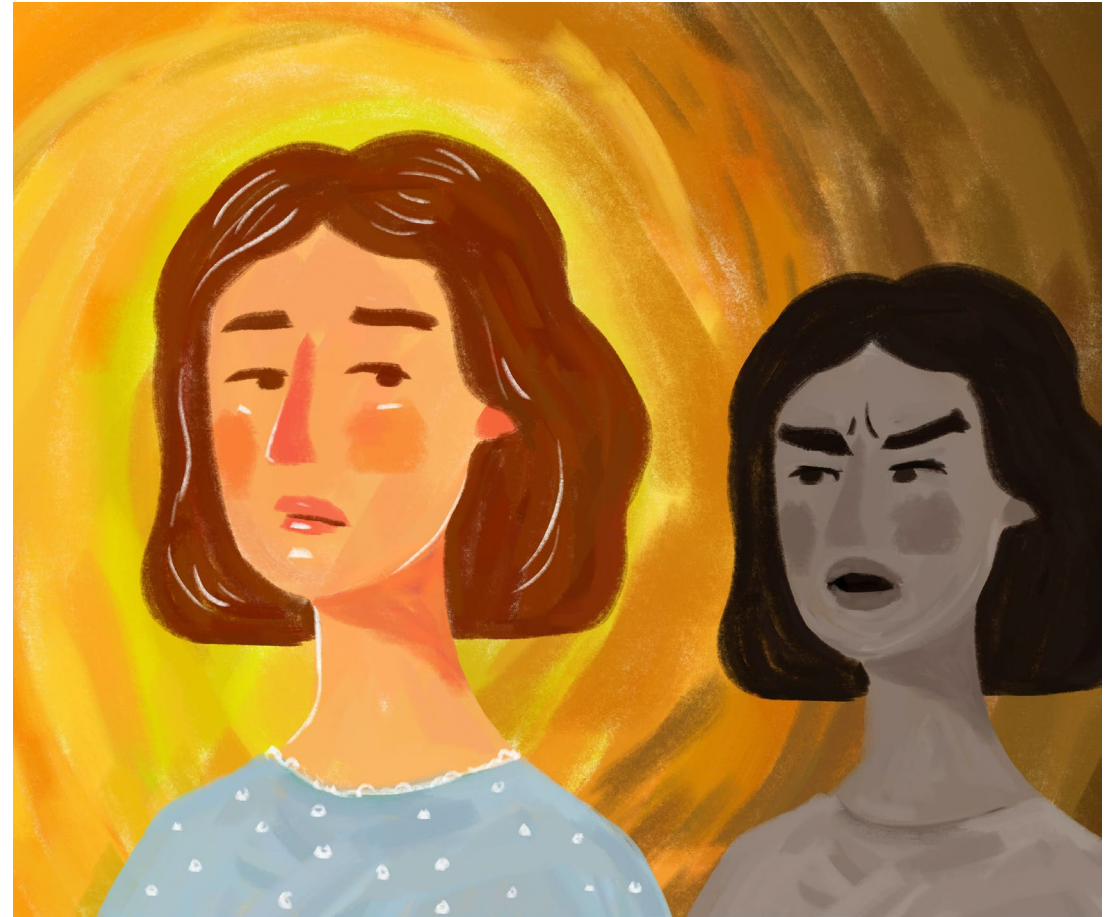
- Identity-based doubt, not just skill-based doubt.

# INNER CRITIC

Over time, this leads to the internalisation of the belief that there is something inherently wrong with us.

When achievements occur, instead of recognising our strengths and capabilities, we may attribute success to luck or external factors.

Confidence is further eroded, making it difficult to trust our abilities or celebrate personal wins.



# QUIET THE INNER CRITIC

The inner critic loves to work in silence  
It thrives when we confuse it with truth.

Start by identifying the critic's  
voice.



```
graph TD; A[Start by identifying the critic's voice.] --> B[This is not truth. This is my critic.]; B --> C[Hello my old friend, I have heard enough from you today.]
```

*This is not truth. This is my  
critic.*

*Hello my old friend, I have  
heard enough from you today.*





**These simple phrases create space between the  
thought and your sense of self.**



# FLIP THE SCRIPT

Once you've named the critic, you can reclaim the narrative.

*The story I've been listening to is...*

*But a truer story, grounded in evidence, is...*

*If I believed that story, I could...*

This doesn't mean ignoring challenges.

It means anchoring your self-belief in real, lived experiences.



**Building strength-based narratives.**

# REFLECT WITHOUT JUDGEMENT

Not everything goes perfectly, and reflection is essential.

But there's a difference between learning and blaming.

Healthy reflective prompts:

*What's true?*

*What's fear?*

*What's feedback I want to keep?*

This helps you distinguish growth opportunities from noise.



Reflection should leave you wiser,  
not smaller.





# NAME AND TAME SYSTEMIC SIGNALS

When feedback, expectations, or dynamics feel uneven, pause and name it.

*"This feels inconsistent, I'm noticing a pattern."*

*"This feedback says more about tone than performance."*

*"I'm sensing a double standard here."*

Naming the issue interrupts internalisation and reframes doubt as data.

## Recognise the Signal

## Contextualise the experience

Gather perspective from trusted peers, mentors, or sponsors.

*"Have others had similar experiences?"*

*"Does this align with how feedback is given more broadly?"*

*"If I believed in my ability and not this bias, how would I act?"*

This builds a clearer, fairer story. One grounded in evidence, not assumptions.

Choose how to respond, not react.

*Do I challenge this constructively?*

*Do I gather allies or sponsors who can help shift perception?*

*Do I set boundaries or adjust how I engage with this environment?*

Your response doesn't need to be loud to be powerful, it just needs to be yours.

## Respond with Intention



**The goal is to balance self-awareness with systemic awareness.**

**Knowing what's yours to work on, and what's the system's to change.**

# STAY CONNECTED AND SEEN

Self-doubt thrives in isolation.

Leadership, especially for women in male-dominated environments, can be lonely.

It is essential to find spaces where you are seen and supported.

Peer networks.

Leadership programs.



## Women in Leadership Program

### LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

II. Early career, Mid-career

📍 Carlton

🕒 2 modules over 5 days

📅 Sep, Nov



## Women in Senior Leadership Program

### SENIOR MANAGEMENT

II. Executive, Senior Executive

📍 Carlton (Residential)

🕒 5 days

📅 Oct

**Surround yourself with mirrors, not microscopes.**

**Microscopes look for flaws.**

**Mirrors reflect your presence, power, and potential  
—especially on the days you can't see it yourself.**





# WHY A WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PROGRAM?

Opportunities for women to lead in new and different ways are growing.

Organisations are increasingly recognising the value of diverse leadership styles, and there is more space than ever to lead with purpose, empathy, and authenticity.

Leadership can feel isolating.

Many women report a lack of support, mentorship, and safe spaces to reflect on and grow their leadership.

We need more than inspiration, we need evidence-based tools.

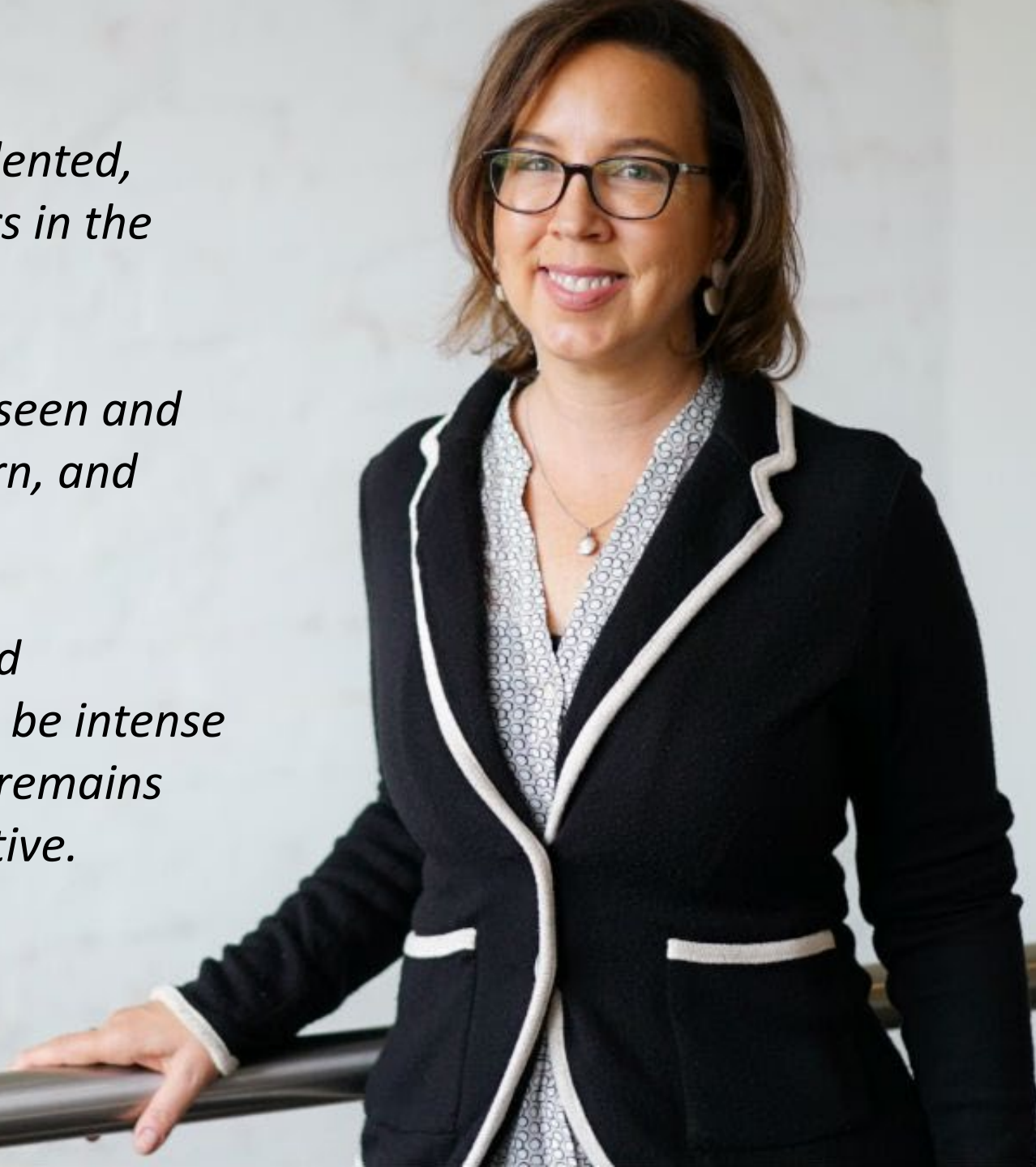
Our programs are grounded in research and designed to help women navigate complexity, build influence, and lead with confidence and clarity.

*A group of impressive, talented,  
thoughtful women leaders in the  
room.*

*The feeling of being fully seen and  
given space to speak, learn, and  
grow.*

*The fact that practical and  
intellectual challenge can be intense  
and yet the environment remains  
supportive and collaborative.*

Associate Professor Jen Overbeck



Confidence

Capability

Curiosity

Connection

