

I never realized I had “otherized” one of my roommates until this self intervention. This roommate frequently talks about how stressful one of her projects is but another friend who works with her never stresses out about the same project. Because of this, I had always brushed off her complaints as exaggerations especially after hearing from the other friend’s account of the same situation and because my roommate always seemed to pull through in the end. Once I stopped to really think about this, I realized that my roommate does not have the same experience in the subject as my other friend and it was because of this that the smallest problems (to me and the other friend) may seem like huge obstacles for my roommate. I know how it feels like to sit in a group being the least experienced on a topic so I should have treated her with the same courtesy that I would have wanted and be more empathetic when listening to her own worries. If I was in the same position, I would have wanted to talk about my worries with someone I trusted in order to alleviate some stress too. Overall, I think this experience has made me more aware of how I treat people and has reminded me of the different perspectives people may have on the same subject.

The other week I saw a maintenance worker at Valencia wearing a jacket that was stolen from my roommate a few weeks prior while he was doing laundry. There was no mistaking this jacket, it was customized with his last name on it as a part of a club he is in. The guy wearing the jacket was getting into his car to go home so I was not able to ask him about it, but I saw what he was driving and brought it up to my roommate.

At first we were mad at the guy, my roommate had to scramble to get new clothes to wear since his entire load of laundry was taken. However, after some discussion, we realized that for someone to steal laundry from his place of work and then wear what he stole back to work, he must not be in a stable financial situation. Perhaps his children needed clothes and this man had to do what he could to provide for them, keeping only the oversized jacket for himself. While we wanted to report the incident, we realized that a single load of laundry is not worth getting this man fired if he is desperate as he seems to make ends meet.

I was buying some Gatorades from the corner store, and got to the checkout lane. I realized, surreally, that I had made some generic small talk with the cashier without noticing that I was doing it or what I was saying. I realized that, if I were the cashier, I would probably be doing something similar. I’d be feeling bored with this mundane transaction, and just going through the motions for the shift. I’m pretty tired, as it’s getting late in the day and it’s my second shift. I’m feeling a bit dejected in general, if I stop to think about it, since I’m middle aged and working a corner store, making enough to live but not enough to save. I’m concerned about the parts of my family that are still overseas, and I’m feeling some self-loathing regarding my mildly depressed state since my condition is still much better than many I know well. In light of this, I’m not thinking too much about each customer except to use conversation with them as a means of escapism when possible, and to avoid prolonged conversation the rest of the time, as it can be a bit tiring. In general, my thoughts are elsewhere, and I’m feeling pretty alone despite the constant flow of people in and out of my store.

I learned how difficult it can be to not “otherise” people on a near-constant basis. Since we’re so often interacting with people’s social or professional personas, it’s easy to forget that there is also someone behind the curtain. I am not sure how helpful this exercise is, as I consider this sort of thought-exercise to be a near-necessity in interacting with anyone in a meaningful way when you are first getting to know them. To be perfectly honest, I thought this exercise was something most people did on their own, multiple times a day. I didn’t feel too much during this exercise, as personal struggles and motivations seem to generally form their own scale within

the mind of the individual. So feeling his struggles as my own didn't feel too different from my normal living experience, except that they took a different form.

I was watching game 7 of the NBA playoffs between the Toronto Raptors and Philadelphia 76ers and I "otherized" Philly's star center, Joel Embiid. SPOILER ALERT: With the game tied and four seconds left on the clock, Kawhi Leonard received the inbound pass and dribbled to the wing. Joel Embiid was covering him, and with one second left on the clock Kawhi fired a deep, high arcing two. Embiid contested the shot, but Kawhi got it over him and got the shooter's bounce and hit one of the most insane game and series winners ever in NBA history. On his way to the locker room, Embiid was crying and I laughed at him. A little background on him, he is a very outspoken guy and likes to talk a lot of shit. He's not necessarily mean, but for how much shit he talks it's hard to feel bad for him and I found it funny for him to be crying after he lost. He gives off a very care-free persona and had some instances in these playoffs where it seemed like he didn't care about the outcome as much as some of the other players. But anyhow, after I laughed at him I tried to imagine what it would be like to be in his shoes. If I were a pro basketball player, basketball – and winning – would be very important to me. To lose a win-or-go-home game like that, especially when I was guarding the game winner, would be demoralizing. It would obviously be a very emotional time for me and I would definitely feel bad. I felt bad for laughing at him and I hope he gets over the loss soon. Even though he gets paid millions of dollars to play basketball, he still has feelings and that game meant a lot more to him than it did to me and I shouldn't laugh at anyone in pain.

This intervention made me think about a book I read a book once called "How to Win Friends and Influence People" by Dale Carnegie. What I got from this book is basically that the main thing people care about is themselves. In general, most people do not spend all that much time thinking about people other than themselves. This intervention was cool because it forced you to stand in someone else's place and try imagine what a mile was like in their shoes.

I frequently find myself "otherising" one of my roommates and I catch myself and try to think how he is feeling. When he is home, he goes straight into his room and shuts the door and practically never interacts with us. We try to reach out and it seems like he never reciprocates. From his point of view – My room is my safe place where I can unwind and actually feel comfortable after a long day. I know my roommates are there and support me but it seems like they are always hanging out without me which is kind of a lonely feeling. This thought makes me sad and want to lay in bed all day. This is what growing up was like anyways, always alone in the safe space of my room. – When I step back and try to look from his point of view it makes me realize that maybe it isn't a conscious decision to try and shut us out or that it is just a habit he has developed throughout his life. I definitely felt lonely and sad when I adjusted to his viewpoint of being alone with no human interaction in my room all the time.

I was walking through downtown SLO with my roommate when a random man called out to us. I don't remember exactly what he said, but he visibly looked us up and down and nodded as we passed. Both my roommate and I looked forward and did not acknowledge him. Interactions like these always make me insanely uncomfortable. I don't know why anyone would think it's okay to call out to young girls, what do they expect to gain from this experience? I also never know how to react. I'm fearful if I called him out he would follow us or worse. Being a girl in this world is terrifying sometimes. I don't think I could defend myself if I was alone. I think it's very easy to other-ise what you fear. If there is anything my mom taught me, it's that no one is a bad person, they are just misunderstood. This does not excuse their actions, of course, but everyone has a reason for why they act the way they do. I like to think maybe this man was just extremely

lonely. The world can be a cruel place and maybe he hadn't had recent luck with women. Maybe he has mild aspergers and says what comes to mind a little easier than neurotypicals. Perhaps he really was trying to be friendly and pay a compliment to strangers walking by. I'm sure if he feels he has to reach out to young girls his home life cannot be pleasant. Perhaps his parents never taught him to respect women as a child so he grew up not understanding how his actions affect other people and make women uncomfortable. Perhaps he did not grow up with a maternal presence or sisters to give him a female perspective and before he knew it, he was a middle-aged man who had gotten in a pattern he did not realize was unacceptable. I still don't appreciate his actions, but this intervention made me try to understand why he felt the need to follow through with them. How can you know something is wrong if you were never taught it? Or if you grew up conditioned to gain a response, even if it was not a pleasant one? Instead of responding with anger, perhaps we need to respond with a call to educate.

When you first brought this up in april I had one event that really stood out to me. I went shopping at Trader Joes the day before easter around 5, which was a bad move because of all the traffic. As I pulled in I immediately saw a mother and her two young children standing right in front of Trader Joe's with a sign reading, "Anything will help." My thought process was peculiar to me. It went from a sort of a degrading, "she is really using her kids to get money," to thinking that it was a very smart place to come to get money or other things. As I drove up in my car, a rather nice car that I am very privileged to have, I started to feel guilty about how much I have to be grateful for, going to Cal Poly, having a nice car, and not having to worry about where my next meal is coming from. As I walked into the store the Mom said hello. I was checking out and I decided to grab a box of chocolate covered dried fruit that looked like easter eggs for the family. I automatically assumed that they were christian or catholic because they were of spanish descent (I believe) and handed the kids the box of chocolate fruit and even said, "Happy Easter." After I was thinking about the situation some more and thought it was strange that I got them "easter eggs" and said happy easter when I am not religious and was raised jewish. I jumped to so many conclusions about this family without knowing anything about them but I didn't see anyone else give them anything as they walked by with shopping carts full of food. It was shocking to see so many affluent people not even able to look at the family. From the eyes of the family, it is probably hard to see so many people ignore you or look down on you, but the mom is just trying to support her family. I believe that nobody wants to ask for help, especially from strangers, unless they really need it, so if you can give to others, you should.

I try to be as empathetic as I can be, but I definitely "otherise" people. One time I noticed this during the week was at a sorority meeting when a girl was talking about her social anxiety. In the past I have dismissed her as a partier and kind of different from me, but when she opened up about her anxiety I tried to really understand where she was coming from with wanting to go out and have fun downtown, but also balancing social pressure. I don't necessarily have this anxiety but I can empathize with her in terms of trying to balance responsibilities and have a social life. Another time I realized I otherised someone was with a Taco Bell employee. I have seen this employee before and he has a reputation for being kind of terrifying because he yells out orders and doesn't put up with drunk college students. My friends and I have talked about how "scary" he is, but from his perspective he is just trying to get people their orders and that Taco Bell is super busy. It's an effective method and he has never been outwardly mean to me or my friends; he's literally just doing his job and it sucks to deal with drunk college students (having been DD a lot, I get it). After considering it this week, I understand why he does his job

that way. This week definitely made me more aware of quick judgements I make about people and how I should consider others' feelings.

I plan to focus this self-intervention on one of my roommates over the next week because he is the only one I do not know well. He was just the friend of my friend, so I assumed we would get along fine with each other. However, I have never made it a priority to get familiar with him at all. He is very introverted and usually spends time in his room by himself or is out all day, so that hasn't helped either. Spending more time trying to get to know him hopefully won't make me come off as a pesky roommate.

Monday:

He usually cooks something and relaxes on the couch on Mondays and Wednesdays, so I took advantage of that and came out to eat with him. He actually was very talkative and had a pretty dry sense of humor (very nice), and he said he was down to do work and study more on Wednesday.

Tuesday:

I didn't really see him around so I didn't get much of an update on anything.

Wednesday:

So I did end up studying with him from 10pm to 1:30am, and it turns out there were a lot of things I didn't know about him. I knew he was an Aerospace Eng. Major, but it turns out he is also double majoring in Physics as well. It turns out he is a pretty great guy and I have a lot of respect for his heavy workload.

Thursday:

Just like Tuesday, I didn't see him at all for the whole day.

Friday:

Today I went with him to the Cal Poly Rec to workout with him and he told me more about where he's from and what his life was like before coming to the university.

Reflecting in his shoes:

Every weekend brings me an incredible amount of stress because there is not a moment when I either have to do work or I have to go meet with the CubeSAT club to help with projects. Since I am taking over twenty units every quarter so I can graduate in five years, there isn't a minute to waste. My sleep schedule is very inconsistent and it can give me feelings of anxiety throughout the week. I spend a lot of time in my room either studying to maintain a near 4.0 GPA or listening to different genres of music.

Although I can come off as an introvert, I really am not. I definitely would love to socialize more often. This unfortunately cannot be the case for me most of the time because my education will always remain as my main priority. Diligence has always been a trait of mine that I value, and I will do my best to ensure that it remains that way. After I graduate, I want to do work related to space exploration since it is an occupation I have always dreamed of doing. When I forget to take breaks from my work to eat, it causes me to feel more mentally exhausted than usual. This can go unnoticed by me until I have a blaring headache.

Even so, I do enjoy what I am learning here at Cal Poly and I wouldn't wish for it to be any other way. The small amount of friends I have made here are all people I know I can depend on if I ever need to talk about any issues, and my loving family has and will always support me no matter what. I am confident in myself to obtain a degree with this double major and I look forward to the future more and more each day.

Reflecting in my own shoes:

Learning more about my roommate on a personal level has allowed me to not only befriend him, but it has allowed me to sympathize with many of the struggles he has in his life. He clearly feels lots of pressure to succeed due to his own expectations, which is not helped at all by his ambitious decisions. Because of this, I have gone from seeing him as my third roommate to seeing him as an actual person who I have a lot of respect for.

This self-intervention was definitely different from anything I expected to be doing in a Physics class, but I think it is a really interesting activity. I feel good about having done this because now I see myself as good friends with all of my roommates and now can see him for more than just another person who happens to live in the same apartment as me. I hope to spend more time studying and/or working out with him in the future since he is a genuine person.

Last weekend I was camping with a huge group of friends, including my girlfriend and her sister. Her sister and I don't have a great relationship. In fact, most of the time we can't stand each other. My girlfriend and I planned to come home a day earlier than everyone else. Without asking, my girlfriend invited her sister to ride home early with us in my car, even though she knows her sister gives me headaches. My initial thoughts were "Why is she not thinking about me?", "Does she want me to have a headache?" and "How am I going to make it through this 2-hour drive?" This is when I realized I was other-ising my girlfriend. All she was doing was being a good big sister and making sure her little sister got home in time to do her homework. She also recognized her sister was tired and really wanted to leave. She was thinking about me, and how I might get annoyed, but she also thought about how big of a heart I have and how I would gladly welcome her sister if I felt love in the moment. I learned that sometimes its ok to be annoyed, but not if it means complete disconnect from love. I'm not the only person in the world my girlfriend loves. That means compromise. Why is it so common to otherise people? And what would it take to break this habit for good? Are two questions I'm left with.

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During the first few days of this intervention, I did not notice too many ways in which I outcast people as 'others.' The closest encounter that I had was seeing someone fall off their bike while discussing with my lab partners. At first instinct, my reaction was to smile or chuckle; but, I realized that it is not funny and a trivial accident. I told my lab partners not to stare because I imagine that the biker would not want the unneeded attention. I feel like she did what I would have, laugh it off and continue riding.

This is simple, and not really much empathizing. Later as the week panned out, I had three encounters with random strangers who I imagine are homeless. I went home to attend my sister's graduation, so I was around the train station a lot. On my walk there, I pass the train underpass and saw a man wrapped in his sleeping bag. I avoided contact and tried to keep on the far side of the sidewalk. I am sure that it is easy to recognize simple signs through behavior. I know if I was in his position, I'd pick up on the shift in direction on the sidewalk and the purpose avoiding, wandering eyes. I would feel awful because these patterns are very condescending. I would be treated less than human, just for trying to stay warm or taking a break to eat.

The other instance was during my return. A lady was sleeping at the train station and she asked me if there was any way that I can spare a few dollars. I told her that I didn't have money on me and I have everything digital. She asked if there was any way that I can try to get cash to give. In her shoes, I imagine that I was tantalized with this encounter. I imagine most people ignore the homeless on the train station. Just getting someone's attention must feel better than being ignored. She was nice and sincere. I imagine getting ignored and rejected by people can be heavy on the mind. I know myself, and I would succumb to cynicism. The discourse of our conversation made it seems like I would be able to help, but I didn't. I hope it wasn't tantalizing. I am aware of the biases that I have. I try to disassociate from it, but I need work still to continue acknowledging them to stop them. I think it is important to consider how your behavior impacts others, but it requires a lot of work.

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So after thinking about this for a couple of weeks now and asking some of my friends and family. The only thing that I "otherise" are people who lack empathy and/or understanding for

others. I can't tolerate acts of bullying or abusing people, I can see it's not right, they can see it's not right, and they do it anyway. This goes for direct or not. I saw two girls wearing black face outside my apartment complex last Friday and I became so flustered and upset (I hope rightfully so). I can't imagine what was going through their heads to make them think that was ok (especially with the whole incident last year).

I feel like since I was always the one being bullied or left out growing up, it really left an impact on how I treat and understand others. I spent a lot of time thinking about why I was always the one being bullied growing up, and most of it ending up being a result of peer pressure from the other kids (I confronted a couple of the other students in my high school who were a little less bad about it and they did confirm that). It was a scenario where I was being utilized as a common ground for "otherising" so they would have something in common. It sucked for me, but I understood why they did it. It made growing up hard, but it did teach me something. I don't forgive my small school for it, and that is why I think I have a hard time otherising people. To the point where I "otherise" the "otherisers".

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My empathy self intervention was centered around one of my roommates who experienced a death of a close friend recently and has been struggling to cope and get back into a normal work flow for school. I wanted to do this because at face value I couldn't relate to his tendencies of not following through with academic responsibilities despite his original plan to graduate this quarter. As I really started to ponder the idea of what it would feel like to lose a close companion I started to think about losing my girlfriend and what kind of emotional impact it would have on my life. Depression is the most obvious outcome of this happening and is the case for my roommate as he has trouble getting out of bed or out of the house due to apparent anxiety and depression that he is facing. Symptoms of depression are inevitable but I believe that what defines you is how you respond to these traumatic experiences and what my friend has done is he has begun seek out help and motivating activities to bring himself out of this period and onto a refreshed mentality. He has sought out therapy and surrounded himself with friends whenever possible, and also pursued legal action to affect change in the schooling system where his friend died due to drug overdose. I would have never noticed this if I did not focus on empathizing with him and originally thought that he was dwelling too much on the situation. I now feel more empathetic for people that experience deaths of close friends or family and understand that it is a matter of what you do with situation rather than the initial symptoms of trauma that you may experience.

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During the past couple of weeks, I notice that I demonize and disregard people who have differing political opinions than myself. This is devastating to me because I thought that I was open-minded and could always find something to agree on with someone from across the aisle. I first noticed this on social media then I saw a post about abortion, and I thought those people were "stupid" and a waste of my time. When I realized that I thought of a group of people that I am no better than people who instigate hateful speech which is counterproductive. When this intervention was assigned, I tried, really tried to view things from the other sides point of view. I found that they were wanting something that I could really get behind, but it was still against my morals to agree with them. I had to talk to them more to fully understand what they want and how they view the situation without the guise of cameras recording their every conversation. With this newfound knowledge, I now know their point of view better, but I still chose to disagree with them on the base of my morals and my sense of right and wrong. I do believe that they think that it is a just cause and I can see that now since I spent a long time contemplating this topic. Now I no longer see them as someone I despise, but merely someone I disagree with,

which is a huge step in the right direction to finding middle ground and eventually a compromise. Hopefully others and see the same point of view that I can see through now and know that they are not ridiculous but are just passionate about what they believe and want. I also hope that the people on the other side of this argument can also see it through my eyes and know that we are also fighting for what we think is right. I enjoyed this intervention for it opened my eyes to really delve into what other people are thinking and it has improved my skill to communicate and compromise with people that I do not agree with.

I found this intervention to be quite hard and difficult to wrap my head around but is well worth the effort. It has really opened my eyes to the views of other people and has allowed me to talk to them in a more respectful and constructive manner. I am going to go forward and try to do this with other topics that I disagree with people on to try to better understand their point of view and take that into consideration before I judge someone.

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Just yesterday I was FaceTiming by best friend Elizabeth from high school, whom I have known since I was very young. Our parents went to college together and we've been close for years. I am not from California, and for me, Cal Poly is extremely far away from home. Elizabeth goes to school about an hour away from where we grew up. Elizabeth has definitely always been a home-body, but she has more recently started to feel a the desire to get out of her comfort zone and to experience new things. I have an internship this summer where I grew up and I will be living at home, very close to Elizabeth, and have been super excited about being able to spend time together like the good 'ol days, but in our recent conversation she told me she had just heard back from a company based in a different state and that she may take their offer to work for the summer. I was fairly sad about this because I was planning on us being together all summer and this came as a shock.

Since Elizabeth has lived near home since I moved away for school, I see her as essentially being there all the time and I have forgotten to look at things from her perspective. From her side, living near home for so long has become stagnant, unchanging, and passive. She applied for this job so she'd have the opportunity to see a new place, meet strangers, and get out of her comfort zone! This job will probably be exactly what she wants and needs to mix up her life a bit. I was only thinking about myself during our conversation and about how she would be leaving me back in our "boring home town" alone. Taking time to forget about my own wants and needs, even just the slightest break from that mindset, makes it clear that I was thinking selfishly, even if I didn't say any of those thoughts out loud.

It is impossible to fully connect and understand other individuals when you only have yourself in mind. The selfish mindset makes it all too easy for me to have a skewed perception of the relationships I have. I am going to try to work on practicing empathy more consciously in my day to day life. Thinking about my conversation with Elizabeth made me realize that I should have been much more enthusiastic, excited, and supportive about her decision instead of being simply "happy for her". I think that empathy is one of the most important factors in maintaining positive relationships and I learned that thinking in the empathetic mindset instantly makes me feel closer to people and more understanding of what they say and do.

Despite empathy being one of my strengths based on the tests from StrengthsQuest, I still have moments where I categorize people as "them" and dehumanize, or "otherize" them to more easily justify

their difference of opinion or my anger with them. I tend to “otherize” my roommates most of all, as I have been noticing more and more this week. When they leave a mess out in the living room or dishes in the sink, it tends to make me see them as lazy, or think that they don’t care about keeping a clean household. However, if I take the time to empathize and see it their way, they are not much different from me. We are all busy people, with many commitments and responsibilities to our schoolwork and jobs. It can be hard to find the energy or time at the end of a long day to perform these tasks such as tidying up. It is not from a headspace of malice that they leave messes or dishes undone. It is most likely that they just did not have the time or may have forgotten. I also do this on occasion, so I empathize completely with the feeling. Once I stop and took the time to empathize with how they are most likely feeling in these situations, it helped me to realize and understand why they do what they do. When I learned this, it was harder for me to justify feeling angry or upset by their actions, as I too have felt and acted the same. I feel that in any situation where there is a conflict or difference in opinion, empathizing with the other side can control the argument to a discussion. While I do not advocate changing fundamental opinions or ideas for the sole purpose of ending an argument, I do advocate for empathizing with the other side’s thoughts and feelings, and using this humanization of them to nurture progressive discussion and sharing of ideas. Everyone acts for a reason, and it is important to attempt to understand the reasons and the headspace they are born from in order to understand the actions, opinions, and ideas of the individual. This is why empathy is so fundamentally important to everyone, and in all discussions.

I was watching the UCL semi finals between Barcelona and Liverpool. Jordi Alba was playing extremely poorly, more so than the rest of the team. All my frustration watching Barcelona blow a 3-0 lead became targeted towards the Barcelona left back. I cursed at the TV, and ultimately blamed him for the loss. However, it didn’t take long to realize I had “otherised” him, and realize I should be the last person to do so. I play soccer, and I play right back, and when my highschool team lost in the semi finals of CIF to a soft last minute OT goal, I was broken, last one to leave the field. When you lose, it’s easy to point fingers, but soccer is the ultimate team game. After the final whistle blew, I am sure Jordi Alba felt the same way I did a few years ago, running every play over and over again because 20/20 hindsight, any number of things could have gone differently that would have resulted in a better result. Athletes, especially at the highest level, know when they play below their potential, and while fans may think they care about their team winning, I have no doubt that Alba cares more.

My dad is visiting me right now, and he is pretty conservative. He mentioned my sister wanting to sell her Ford Explorer to get a Prius. Her reasoning was to save money on gas since she’ll have a longer commute. He thought it was a stupid idea and said it wouldn’t make enough of a difference anyway. In that moment, I saw him as a different type of person from me for not knowing or caring about the environmental impacts of each car. I reminded myself that he has grown and learned in a very different environment from what I have. I’m currently studying energy, emissions, and water quality while he is a crop advisor. He tells farmers what pesticides and fertilizers will help their crops. He sees the direct effects of choices and not the externalities. Even though we disagree on things, we are very similar people. I tend to be very understanding of others actions since each person is unique and has their own struggles, but I can have a hard time accepting others opinions when I feel they are damaging.

When I first read this intervention prompt I didn’t really think that I was assigning others as “other” in my mind, in the sense that they were inconsequential in my life and we could not relate in any meaningful sense. Well my goodness was that wrong of me.

I walk to school and on my walk I traverse a stripmall parking lot, going behind a good many businesses and usually walking through the employee parking section of the stripmall. There is a spot next to some type of electrical equipment where many of the employees of the stripmall businesses take

their smoke breaks. I frequently walk directly past this spot and see folks on their smoke breaks, never really thinking twice about them. Unconsciously I assume these people are inconsequential to me and I to them; what could I have to share with a cashier from Lassen's or a cook from Popeye's Chicken?

This intervention was probably the last thing on my mind when walking home on a day that had been particularly crappy. On my usual route home I stopped and asked an overweight, middle-aged man at this unofficial smoke spot, still wearing an apron and hairnet, if I might be able to bum a cigarette. He produced a pack of Marlboro Reds and a lighter and asked how my day was going. I explained that I had seen better days but was happy to be graduating soon and returned the question. He had also seen better days and was also close to graduating soon. He had a couple quarters left in his food sciences degree but was struggling with his grades, student loans, and full-time job. Holy shit I never would have pegged this guy for a Cal Poly student, instead judging this man based on his age and current attire. I finished my cigarette while we complained together about student loans, test-cheating frat boys, and the struggle of academic probation. He wished me well, and I him, and I finished my walk home.

I was very glad to have asked for a cigarette because I got the opportunity to interact with someone I likely would have never approached for any other reason. That man stopped being some "other" person in my mind and became somebody that I had a lot in common with. I would have not thought it possible to be able to empathize with him on very much and I was proven quite wrong.

This self-intervention made me think about all of the observing I do on a day-to-day basis. I don't know if it is because I was trained for 6 years to watch after people as a lifeguard or because I'm naturally just a curious person but I realized that I tend to observe a lot about the people around me. One person or group of people that I found myself considering as a "them" was women in the Cal Poly gym. On the bottom floor of the gym is where there are predominately men exercising. It is often obvious when a woman walks by because I have seen several heads turn mid exercise. If I were to put myself in their shoes I wouldn't feel comfortable working out in the open floors full of glaring eyes. Especially if I had self-image issues, which many people do, I would either feel inclined to only work out in secluded areas or not go to the gym at all. This self-intervention has made me realize the gym often isn't a healthy community to be around as a woman. Some people may enjoy the attention but I would tend to believe that most people, like myself, would prefer a much less intrusive environment for a place that is supposed to be supportive and secure in everyone's pursuit for self-improvement.

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This intervention was tough for me because I would consider myself to be a largely empathetic person and naturally find myself trying to understand people who act/think differently than I do. However, later in the week I found myself presented with a good opportunity for an empathy reflection: a "friend of a friend" who graduated last year returned to visit college friends this week. I usually don't find myself developing strong feelings about people that I don't know closely, but I had always really disliked this guy and felt that we were dissimilar in just about every way. Him returning to school this week provided a great opportunity to practice empathy and reflect on this relationship.

I approached my interactions with him with a fresh perspective and attempted to understand why he acted and thought in ways that were irritating to me. The more I tried to understand his perspective on things, the more I realized that my previously strong negative feelings towards him were largely baseless. I wouldn't say that I necessarily enjoyed our interactions any more than I had in the past, but throughout the week I found it more and more difficult to relate to the strong feelings I had towards him in the past. The more I focused on attempting to understand him the less and less he bothered me.

While I don't think this exercise left me with a newfound friend, it did leave me with some impactful revelations about the ways that I view other people. This intervention allowed me to release deep-seeded judgments about someone that I had disliked for years over the course of a few days – in the end, I couldn't even remember what ever caused me to dislike this person and its difficult for me to connect with my previous perceptions about this person. This was an

unexpected and startling result. I wonder how many people (or ideas, beliefs, etc.) that I have strong feelings about that are simply deeply embedded routine and wouldn't hold up under new scrutiny. This intervention is definitely going to make me revisit a lot of integral judgements and beliefs and see what is really worth holding on to.

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Finding a group that I “otherise” was difficult for me when I first began brainstorming, I tend to reject the classifying of races, genders, etc. The first time I noticed myself otherising a group of people was in my environmental engineering class. During a discussion on water scarcity, my professor showed a picture of a large group of people in India drinking and bathing in a river they called “the holy river.” This same river was filled with pollutants and sediments from upstream making it very unsafe for consumption. My first thought was, “what are these people doing?” how could they be drinking this water that is visibly unclean, and how could they think it was a good idea to bathe and drink in the same water? At first when I realized I had otherized this group, I thought it was based on their historic religious traditions, but I then realized a group I constantly otherize is “uneducated people.” They don't believe in global warming? They must be uneducated. They voted for Donald Trump? They must be uneducated.

Attempting to put myself in the shoes of these people I classify as “uneducated” I thought first of these people in the picture from India. This is a river that for centuries this community has used as a religious meeting place. Over these years, development in India has made this water unsafe, and maybe this group hasn't been help to understand the consequences of that, but it's very possible they have. To some, drinking water that may make you a little unwell is worth it for a closer connection to their religious practice, or the ceremony of going to this place with your loved ones has become too ingrained to simply stop.

After thinking about other beliefs or actions people can have or take, that would lead me to otherise them in this way, I realized an overarching theme. I tend to assume that people doing things that I don't understand are uneducated. This can be simply untrue to begin with, but it has always been used as an excuse for my own education. Not necessarily in a scholastic manor, but uneducated in the thoughts and understandings of others that lead them to their choices. I consistently observe actions and make assumptions based on how I interpret them, but I rarely ask for the interpretation of the people taking these actions. The elderly woman in the river may have gone there with her husband before passing and goes every year in his memory, the Trump voter may have been unemployed and helplessly grasping for Trump to bring jobs back to America. Are these their reasons? I will never know, because I didn't ask, and I think that is an important take-away from this activity for me. If I find myself assuming, just ask! No one is offended by being asked, “why do you do this” or “what motivates you to feel this way.” I think empathy is an important skill to have, but the only way to truly understand a person, is to talk to them.

The week before Thanksgiving, I had an quality interpersonal experience at Front Porch coffeehouse. It's not that this is unusual; the people there are generally warm, friendly, and *highly caffeinated*. So they're a good bunch. This particular night was “Porch Dinner,” wherein volunteers serve a free dinner to whomever shows up. It's always followed by a community discussion, in this case, about healthy expression of masculinity. I was in a Women's and

Gender Studies class that quarter, so this was all review to me. Or so I thought. It turns out, I was paying more attention to my nachos than my neighbors, because after a particularly rousing speech from a staff member, the whole room burst out in applause. I was embarrassed as I clapped along, not knowing what I was clapping for! The next person to speak must have read my thoughts, because he began speaking about *humanizing* the people around you. Too often, he said, we treat our neighbors as inanimate objects, with only marginal or habitual concern for their personhood. At that moment, I looked him in the eyes. He was the first person I had really *seen* that entire night. He was suddenly, surprisingly, startlingly human, rather than another talking statue. We talked for quite a while afterwards.

Our recent “Empathy Self-Intervention” drew me back to this memory. I haven’t dwelled much on it much since November, I’m sorry to say. Too many things tend to get in the way, like school and research. Life is getting in the way of seeing and knowing other living beings. This is a funny inverted relationship, isn’t it? Friends and family are the things that are supposed to make life worth living, but I haven’t looked my roommates in the eye in days! I could blame it on my introversion. But that’s a cop-out.

Last weekend my sports team had a wine and board game night. Topsy Catan is a fantastic game! The six of us have formed a tightly-knitted group, approaching the closeness I share with my friends from home whom I’ve known my entire life. This self-intervention was rattling around in my brain that night, and it made me try to *humanize* my relationship with these, the closest of my friends in SLO. Putting away so much concern for myself and my own affairs let me connect with the others in a way that, however much it may have hurt my self-interest in the board game, benefited our friendship that night.

The next morning, walking through Baker and *humanizing* a million random folks was harder. But if I can have a minute of empathy with a random man at Front Porch, and I can have a night of empathy with my friends, why not a moment of empathy with a few more strangers?