

# Self-presentation and Underachievement

Among young adolescents identified as gifted

## Self-presentation



Present yourself always  
As who you would be,  
And that is the person  
The world will see.

Robert Brault

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## Overview

- ▶ Definitions
- ▶ Context:
  - Who am I? How **DO** I fit in? How **CAN** I fit in? Connection. Forced choice
- ▶ Research questions
  - Responses
- ▶ Self-presentation 101
- ▶ Examples in situ
- ▶ Findings
- ▶ Recommendations
- ▶ Questions

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## Self-presentation definition

- ▶ Self-presentation (Goffman, 1959), Impression Management (Schlenker, 1980)
- ▶ Definition:
  - Use of strategic interpersonal behaviours to intentionally regulate/shape/influence impressions that observers have of oneself (Goffman, 1959)
  - Desire to control/attempt to control the projection of self-relevant images.

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## Underachievement

- ▶ Plethora of definitions:
  - discrepancy between **potential** and **performance** (Reis & McCoach, 2000)
  - low achievement (Gorard & Smith, 2004)
  - failure to do well at school (Hoover-Schultz, 2005)
  - failure to **develop/use potential** (Hoover-Schultz, 2005; Reis & McCoach, 2000; Rimm, 1997).

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## Context



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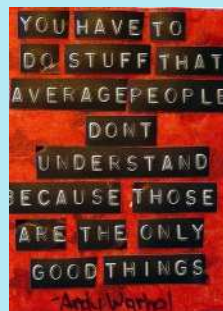
## Stephen

- ▶ Trapped
- ▶ Nothing new since Year 3
- ▶ Real work
- ▶ I want to learn



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**Achievement**  
Achievement is reaching the goals you set for yourself.

Autonomous learner (Neihart, 2010)

### Ability

I think I'm above average, academically, I understand more concepts, and get better marks than the majority of my age group and year group.

### School experience

Well in my, the last term in my regular grade, everything was boring, I wasn't really participating in the class, I was there in a corner sitting down doing worksheets and I don't like working like that.

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## Amanda



- ▶ 10 years of age
- ▶ Year 6/7 class
- ▶ Teacher
- ▶ Accelerated
- ▶ Ballet
- ▶ Film and TV

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## Amanda

### Sense of self in relation to environment

I had to like what they liked, do what they did. I had to be like them to really fit in. When I started being my own person, which was when I went to ballet school, and I had a spot where I could be myself, I learned that I could be myself, and when I was being myself, I kind of got ditched.

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## Blayde



- ▶ Year 8
- ▶ Aged 13
- ▶ Disillusioned
- ▶ Sameness
- ▶ Refusal to accept challenge
- ▶ Invisible

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## Blayde

Underground gifted (Neihart, 2010)  
Denial of ability

Image is everything to teenagers.

I just become invisible, I guess.

I just want to be the same.

I'm not as smart as they think I am.

Don't ruin it for yourself. Like don't say things that other people don't like and then eventually when you find yourself alone with no friends and everyone is bullying you

I hate being singled out.

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## The gifted adolescent



- Unique
- Perceptions of self
  - Giftedness creates different organisation of self (Silverman, 1998)
- Person-context interaction
- Behaviours to attempt to control image
- Facilitate/hinder achievement

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## Connection

- Humans desire to be perceived positively.
- Ongoing concern with self-presentation (Leary, 1996)
- Aligns with fundamental need for belonging/ social connection (Bosson, Weaver & Prewitt-Freilino, 2012)
- Gifted connection may be challenging
  - Difference
  - Stigma (Coleman & Cross, 2005)

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## Forced-choice dilemma

- Forced choice dilemma (Gross, 1989)
  - Two competing drives:
    - Achievement or affiliation
  - Affiliation : deny achievement/ability drive to gain acceptance
  - Achievement: exclusion from the social group and isolation (Gross, 1989; Nelhart, 2006)
  - Conflicting drives-confusion- underachievement

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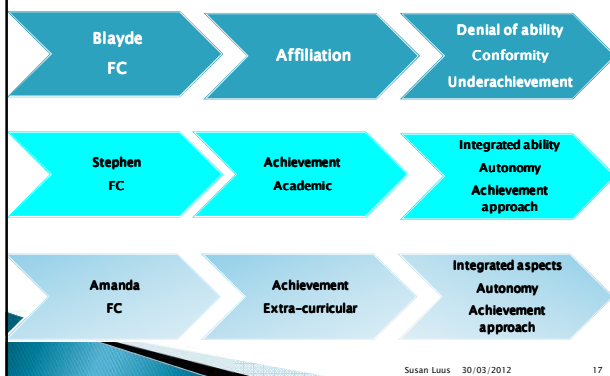
## Research Questions

- What relationship exists between self-presentation strategies and underachievement?
- What self-presentation strategies were adopted by the participants?
- How did the adoption of strategies influence fulfilment of potential?

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## Responses

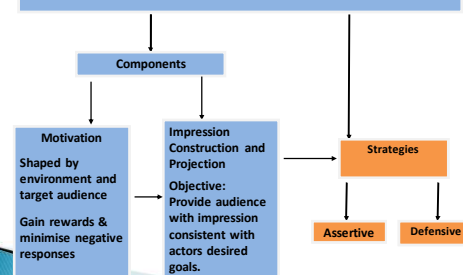


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## Self-presentation...in a nutshell

Strategic interpersonal behaviour used to shape/influence impressions of others (Jones & Pittman, 1982)  
Control/attempt to control the projection of self-relevant images



## Functional Categories

*Composite of Functional Categories of Self-Presentation Strategies (Leary, 1996; Tedeschi & Lindskold, 1976).*

Assertive Strategies	Defensive Strategies
<b>Ingratiation</b>	<b>Apologies</b>
Complimentary other enhancement- (flattery)	<b>Accounts</b>
Conformity	Excuse
Performing favours	Justification
Attractive self-descriptions	Avoiding (Refusals)
<b>Intimidation</b>	<b>Disclaimer</b>
<b>Supplication</b>	Hedging
<b>Entitlement</b>	Faulty memory
<b>Enhancement</b>	<b>Sandbagging</b>
<b>Basking and Blasting</b> (twin strategies)	<b>Self-handicapping</b>

Self presentation Strategies & Strategy Subtypes	Blayde	Stephen	Amanda
<b>Assertive Strategies</b>			
Ingratiation	***	**	*
Exemplification	0	***	0
Self-Promotion	0	***	***
Entitlement	0	**	***
Basking and Blasting	***	0	*
<b>Defensive Strategies</b>			
Accounts			
Excuses	**	*	**
Justification	***	*	*
Disclaimers			
Hedging	*	**	0
Faulty Memory	*	**	0
Sandbagging	***	0	0

## Ingratiation

### ► Blayde:

- Peers-Conformity
  - Sometimes when you are around big groups of people that have a different opinion than you, you can't say what you really think because everybody else they'll ridicule you for that.
- Achievement as betrayal of the group

### ► Stephen

- Teachers and administration
  - Reliability and maturity

### ► Amanda

- Peers- temporary use

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## Exemplification: Virtue

### ► Stephen:

Well in my schoolwork, I have a good work ethic. Other things, I don't tease anyone, and I don't call people names or anything like that. I cross at the traffic lights, one of the few people who do; I always try hard to achieve something. I probably see myself as the most involved person at my school in my grade.

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## Self-promotion: Competence

### ► Stephen:

- I think I'm above average, academically. I think I am gifted in some areas, Maths and Technology.

### ► Amanda:

- I would rather stand out, I like being better than other people.

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## Entitlement: Reward for effort

### ► Amanda

- Secondary acknowledgement of competence at school.
- Prevalent in the sparse praise for excellence at ballet and competitions
- I danced 30 hours a week leading up to exams and well, I got first.

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## Basking and Blasting

- ▶ Basking in reflected glory– connections with successful others (to increase self-esteem)
- ▶ Blasting– cutting off reflected failure– by disparaging others who are different
- ▶ Groups in school:
  - Who to belong to and who not
  - Blayde's group "cool kids, popular and who did their work", not Rebel kids who did "illicit narcotics" or Nerds who played "Yugioh at lunch."

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## Accounts



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## Disclaimers: explanation in advance

Yeah, a guy in my last year was so paranoid about people bullying him when they actually weren't, he got sent to the support class twice that year when nobody else did and he thought that everyone else was bullying him. He was like a massive 'goodie two shoes'. So on free dress day, he had this shirt and my friend was like, 'I like your shirt' and he was being serious, and Andrew was so paranoid about everyone bullying him when like pretty much no one does. People only started bullying him because he was like so paranoid about it.

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## Amanda

### On school– A prevailing experience

I feel like, they don't know what to teach us, so they go 'Aw, we'll just teach them something they already know'. Like the whole of first semester, I was being taught Maths and Science, something I already knew. Actually, I feel that's the problem in schools, the students are doing something that they've already done. Same things over, and over, it's like they don't know what to teach us. They've run out of subjects, they've run out of things to tell us.

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## Sandbagging

- ▶ Demonstration of behaviour designed to present an image of inability or low ability
- ▶ Disclaiming ability through false claims
  - Understating skills and abilities
  - ▶ "I'm just not as good at it as you think."
- ▶ Often used with individuals with high social anxiety.

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## Findings

### Affiliation/Social goals

- Collaborative/ relational goal structure
- Defensive strategies and ingratiation
- Focus– peers
- Conformity
- Ambivalent about achievement
- Underachievement in areas of giftedness –personal choice.

### Achievement goals

- Individualistic goal structure
- Assertive strategies
- ▶ Focus: adults with expertise & power
- ▶ Achievement
  - Continued high
  - Selective achievement
  - Sustained drive albeit elsewhere
- ▶ Underachievement due to external factors
- ▶ Autonomous

## Recommendations

- ▶ As a means to fostering best practice:
- ▶ Student
  - Listen to student voice
  - Grouping and systematic talent development
  - Opportunities to develop self-awareness
- ▶ Parental
  - Encourage development of all strengths, allow prioritisation of achievement goals
  - Awareness of strategic use of s-p
- ▶ Educators
  - Collaboration with students
  - Alert to s-p use as possible indicators for underachievement
  - Flexibility

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## Self-presentation: A final message



Do not dilute who you are to please others. The energy of not being true to yourself nibbles inside of you long past the time when anyone remembers what you said or did. You are worthy of so much more.

Denise Linn

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## Questions

- ▶ Who
- ▶ How
- ▶ Where
- ▶ What
- ▶ Why

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