

## Sonja Falck - Abstract

### Title:

**The Child, the Emperor, and the Fabulous Clothes: Constructing a theory of how interpersonal difficulty in gifted adults arises, is perpetuated, and can be overcome.**

### Abstract

In the literature and research on giftedness there are ubiquitous references to interpersonal problems. This project investigated this by comprehensively bringing such references together and analysing them (textual analysis), and by interviewing 20 gifted adults about their interpersonal experiences. A Constructivist Grounded Theory methodology was employed to build a theory grounded in research data that could explain how interpersonal difficulty in gifted individuals arises, is perpetuated, and can be overcome. A Psychosocial (Hollway 2016) interpretation of the data examined not just its explicit cognitive and behavioural content but also the more hidden nuances of intersubjective experience – termed ‘unconscious processes’ – that the giftedness literature neglects.

An ‘Overview Model of Giftedness’ was constructed to organize the research findings, which emphasizes the importance of person-environment interaction, belonging, competition, and collaboration. Interpersonal difficulty was found to arise predominantly through relating categorized as naïve (‘Child’, including autism) or arrogant (‘Emperor’, including narcissism). It was demonstrated how interpersonal difficulty is perpetuated through unconscious processes such as transferences, valencies, and intersubjective complementarities. It was found that interpersonal difficulty was overcome by changing environments (gaining contact with more similar others); changing the level of self-expressiveness (‘hiding self’); or changing the nature of self-expressiveness (such as tempering naivety and arrogance through improving interpersonal understanding and skill). These findings were consolidated in an original model titled ‘Giftedness and Interpersonal Relating’ that shows the optimal movement away from being interpersonally inhibited, despairing, or provoking, towards thriving.

*Conclusion:* Atypically efficient neural functioning, and minority status, make gifted individuals vulnerable to interpersonal difficulty. Recognising the individual differences involved, their impact, and their unconsciously perpetuating intersubjective patterns, and taking this into account when communicating with others, improves interpersonal relating and the actualizing of gifted potential.

The project’s main products are a website offering services designed to “help high-ability adults thrive”, and a book proposal.