

Costs of Impression Management pt 1

How does image control correlate with diminished life experience?

Summer 2025

Leading with A Good Face vs. Satisfaction

Perhaps "Facades of Conformity" feel a bit extreme. So what are the issues correlated with "Impression Management"? Today, let's dive into a new paper.

summary

This conversation delves into the complexities of impression management, exploring its impact on life satisfaction, sense of control, and loneliness. We talk about the paradox of seeking approval through impression management, which can ultimately lead to feelings of isolation and dissatisfaction. Practical solutions are offered for navigating social contexts while maintaining authenticity, emphasizing the importance of genuine relationships

takeaways

- Impression management is a common part of daily life.
- Early upbringing can create core beliefs that lead to inauthenticity.
- Impression management can be laborious and stressful.
- There is a negative correlation between impression management and life satisfaction.
- Loneliness is exacerbated by impression management.
- Sense of control is undermined by the need to manage impressions.
- Social media amplifies the effects of impression management.
- Authenticity in alternate relationships can mitigate the negative effects of conformity.
- Research shows, genuine connections are essential for life satisfaction. We can't fake it til we make it.

keywords

impression management, life satisfaction, loneliness, mental health, authenticity, conformity, social relationships, psychological well-being, self-esteem, social media

So let's say you've heard these past couple eps on Facades of Conformity and thought... "meh... bit much."

"Perhaps I, yes, am not completely authentic in my daily environment and it drives me to discomfort at times... but FOCs? That seem too extreme. I'm not THAT fake."

I feel you.

I don't generally end up in places that are SO unaligned with my real values that this full abandonment of values is my regular experience, even in the most demanding workplaces.

It's more accurate to say my early upbringing created fucked up core beliefs (FUCBs) which became Facades of Conformity (FOCs) that I didn't know were inauthentic to me. These essentially drafted a personality that was enforced by the environment – by the people IN the environment and society at large. Creating a false, mimicked, personality of survival (POS) that, unfortunately, was reinforced, in some ways, in many branches of society.

(Which loves POS's.)

So that, later, full blown, Facades of Conformity were never very necessary....

But I would say that obsessively worrying about "impression management" (Imp Man as I'll be referring to it) is a standard part of my daily existence. And if you're wondering how THAT can affect a motherfucker... I raise you the peer-reviewed paper:

The Cost of Impression Management to Life Satisfaction: Sense of Control and Loneliness as Mediators

Psychology Research and Behavior Management, 2020

Today we're going to talk about the major findings.

And next time I'm going to reveal the REAL KICKER from this paper. The ironic way that impression management, itself, creates exactly the circumstances we try to avoid and ultimately fucks us.

Cool, let's get started.

They say:

Impression management is the process by which people manage the impressions that others form of them. The impression that one gives to other people plays a pivotal role in determining how they are perceived and evaluated. Therefore, some people pay particularly strong attention to maintain a positive public image in order to avoid negative evaluations against them.

Berinsky finds that demographic variables including gender and age are associated with

individuals' impression management; females and those older in age scored higher on the impression management scale.

Impression management is an important motive for those who actively participate in social networking sites; impression management is positively related to the number of virtual friends they have.

(there's a sentence to sit with. "impression management is positively related to the number of virtual friends they have.")

Impression management is also influential for consumers, who intentionally balance their shopping basket compositions in order to maintain positive impressions.

*(sidenote, in case you have doubts about how ridiculous impression management can be: I looked into that reference, it's from a paper called **Balancing the basket: the role of shopping basket composition in embarrassment**. And it uses research to discuss that individuals strategically purchase things to draw attention away from items they are embarrassed about, so absolute strangers at a store don't judge them. That's wild. And relatable.)*

Mixed evidence has been found that both benefits and risks can be brought by impression management.

On one hand, individuals who manage their impressions can enjoy and benefit from possessing a positive social image. On the other hand, they also have to expend much effort in this process, which may be laborious and stressful.

(Nods to people pretending to buy things at Walmart so nobody has an extra thought about their purchases. That does suggest a life that is both laborious and stressful. But to get to the point:)

There is little empirical evidence showing that impression management is negatively associated with life satisfaction. Nonetheless, some existing research has shed an initial light on this relationship.

For instance, impression management is found to be negatively associated with a supervisor's evaluation of job performance, which is a key predictor of job and life satisfaction of subordinates.

Similarly, Impression managers fear negative evaluations that spoil social image, and such fear has a negative impact on psychological well-being.

.... People are more likely to be under psychological pressure if they are concerned too much with what others think of them, which can even increase health risks related to cancer, HIV, and substance abuse.

And

With the increasing popularity of social media, more impression managers have switched to the

online battlefield (great language there) where they can build and maintain their social images without the limit of time and space. For example, they post genuine or nongenuine posts and selectively display advantageous personal profiles to manage their desired impressions.

Some papers indicate the strengths of online impression management, such as convenience. However, a larger body of research points out the negative consequences of impression management through social media, such that it is closely linked to mental health problems.

... Impression managers on social media are more likely to engage in upward social comparison, which is harmful to mental health. Similarly, online impression management is shown to be related to depressive symptoms.

(Here comes the surprise to no one. Again:) This effect is more pronounced among females.

Berryman, Ferguson, and Negy show that impression management on social media is tied to decreased empathy and even suicidality. Moreover, poor mental health is associated with low satisfaction with life.

Consistent with this line of research, we hypothesize that impression management (And to be clear, we're speaking of real-life Imp-Man, not only online) damages life satisfaction.

Greater attention to how you're being perceived and effort controlling those perceptions... lesser sense of life meaning.

But that's not all it might be related to! They say:

Impression Management, Sense of Control, and Loneliness

Sense of control, also known as perceived control, refers to the subjective expectations about one's ability to exert influence over life circumstances and outcomes.

We propose that impression management undermines one's sense of control. The reason is that the process of managing impressions is filled with difficulties, uncertainties, and even risks, which in turn undermine perceived control.

First, impression management is difficult. For example, for employees who are not politically skilled, the more impression management work they conduct, the more undesirable social images they make in their supervisors' eyes.

Second, impression management is full of uncertainties. This is because people have contrasting standards in evaluating what is good or bad. It is usual that certain behavior in line with the norm in one's view is regarded as inappropriate by others. As a result, people in most cases are unable to know whether they have effectively built positive images even after

expending considerable effort, as the results are completely determined by others.

Third, impression management is risky. Research indicates that impression management is usually associated with deception and faking behavior, which embed the risk of being exposed. People who engage in impression management are aware that if others notice their deception or faking behavior, impression management work will backfire and their social images can be even worse. Therefore, even if impression management is successful in the short term, one is still concerned about how long the ideal result can last.

AKA, it's stressful. On top of the stress of not feeling like you're "appropriate" when you behave like yourself.

So, while we might use Imp Man to attempt to make life easy and predictable.... The actual result is neither of those things.

People don't know what's expected of them, if they're doing it right, or what the consequences of those actions will be. Trying to manhandle life, then, can be emotionally, physically, and mentally costly... and the results of those trials can be additionally emotionally, physically, and mentally costly... backfiring and creating MORE problems, rather than paving the way, as hoped.

And it doesn't stop there!

On loneliness

Loneliness is an aversive state characterized by pessimism and depression. This is because humans are social animals, and they have a fundamental need to seek and maintain relationships with others.

If social connectedness is absent (for example, when being socially excluded), one will suffer from loneliness.

Loneliness causes a series of negative consequences. It triggers negative emotions, including anxiety and depression. Loneliness has also been found to be associated with decreased self-esteem.

Moreover, lonely people's social behavior can be distorted. Research indicates that people suffering from loneliness have social skills deficits and improper patterns of self-disclosure.

The aversion of loneliness is also self-evident by the compensatory or reactance responses that people adopt to cope with it, such as impulsive consumption, decreased prosocial behavior, and increased self-defeating behavior.

Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2a: Impression management is negatively related to sense of control.

H2b: Impression management is positively related to loneliness.

H3a: Sense of control mediates the relationship between impression management and life satisfaction.

H3b: Loneliness mediates the relationship between impression management and life satisfaction.

Measurements

Sense of Control

We used 12 items adapted from Lachman and Weaver to create this measure. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which each of the statements described them using a seven-point scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). Sample items are “When I really want to do something, I usually find a way to succeed at it” and “I often feel helpless in dealing with the problems of life”.

Loneliness

We used Russell’s UCLA Loneliness Scale to assess participants’ loneliness. On a four-point scale ranging from “never,” to “always,” participants rated how often they felt the way described. Sample items are “How often do you feel that you lack companionship” and “How often do you feel that there is no one you can turn to”.

Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction was measured using a scale developed by Diener et al On a seven-point scale, participants indicated their agreement with each item. Items include “In most ways my life is close to my ideal,” and “The conditions of my life are excellent.” We averaged scale items to create a composite score for life satisfaction.

Discussion

The present research found that impression management was negatively related to life satisfaction and sense of control; whereas it was positively associated with loneliness.

SO, the more readily people use impression management, the less likely those individuals are to feel satisfied or in control of their lives. And they’re more likely to lack meaningful social connections.

In addition, sense of control and loneliness was positively and negatively related to life satisfaction, respectively.

The more we feel in control of life, the more satisfied we are. And the less loneliness we experience, the more satisfied we are.

Now how does this include impression management?

The full mediation model indicated that impression management affected sense of control and loneliness, which in turn influenced life satisfaction.

SO, they're saying increased impression management decreases sense of control and increases loneliness, and together, this decreases life satisfaction.

Of course... I have thoughts about the chicken and the egg here.

If we're lonely and feeling out of control in life, I would hypothesize (from experience) that THIS is when we tap impression management into the ring. Lonely and floundering on my own is when I try "to be who I need to be" to rectify the social and practical problems, so I can change circumstances, so I can re-obtain life satisfaction.

For me, impression management doesn't come from nowhere... it has roots in these other issues, which I'm attempting to fix, THROUGH imp manning. Feeling as though what I've been doing clearly has been incorrect, so I need to figure out what's wanted from me and do THOSE things... and hopefully my need fulfillments will fall into place again.

I'd like to know your thoughts.

What comes first, the loneliness, decreased life satisfaction, and sense of control... or the impression management?

But what these authors CAN say about correlation and not causation is the following:

First, impression management is associated with lower life satisfaction.

Second, we empirically demonstrate that the effect of impression management on life satisfaction takes place through sense of control.

Third, we propose that impression management, as a proactive behavior, can also make one lonely.

Because, as we all know... it doesn't matter if people approve of you if you aren't being your real self. You'll still feel lonely if you aren't being seen for your authentic personhood, and, instead, are using impression management to pretend to be someone else. Real connection won't be possible. The unmet social needs will remain.

In other words, “Just be yourself or be lonely and unhappy, anyways!”

And from this high level of understanding, which, as usual, misses some of the experiential, compassionate, and empathetic points that cause the rest of us, actually dealing with loneliness, dissatisfaction, and lack of control to scoff...

What do the authors say we can do with this information?

What can we do with this?

Our research has several practical implications.

Although some previous studies show that impression management positively contributes to self-esteem and desired identities, our research reveals the possible dark side of impression management. Our findings are consistent with a larger body of research indicating that a good impression manager does not necessarily have a good life.

Research has shown that impression management may increase fear and pressure, while decreasing physical and mental health levels.

In addition, we also note that impression management impedes life satisfaction through increasing the loss of sense of control and loneliness.

Thus, if impression management is inevitable in certain social contexts, individuals may prevent their life satisfaction from decreasing by building new social relationships and participating in social activities to avoid feeling lonely,

In other words... and hopefully, slightly more useful ones... yeah, a lot of people will require you to conform to their expectations. To be an Imp Man for them to accept you.

And if that is the case?

It's important to create or maintain relationships of authenticity, where that is not the case, to balance out the fakeness.

So, you can, hopefully, create a life framework that DOES allow you to be yourself. And, ideally, transition towards a life with less imp-manning, more simply-being.

Experience ease. Acceptance. Support and connection.

And the end result of increased life satisfaction – finally – becomes graspable.

With that, let's WRAP.

So the CPTSD-IMPMAN crossover is, as usual, thick.

Loneliness, loss of control, and life dissatisfaction are correlated with impression management.

Those are cornerstones of the CPTSD experience.

And furthermore – as we keep talking about at-risk populations, their higher stress levels, and the resulting ways that they live their lives – it bears re-mentioning this point:

Berinsky finds that demographic variables including gender and age are associated with individuals' impression management; females and those older in age scored higher on the impression management scale.

AKA, those who are less empowered in society (and often lonelier) are more likely to feel like they have to be continually positively evaluated.

How does all of this interplay with physical illness? I have thoughts. There's a reason women have like 85% of the autoimmune disorders.

But, to stay on topic and out of hypotheticals: from this paper mixed with grounded life experience I think we can say....

It's okay to need to control how others perceive you sometimes. It's normal. It's mandatory, in some times and places, for most.

But those times and places will drain you.

They're energetically costly. Emotionally expensive. Mentally draining.

And, overall, dissatisfying.

For all the resources they demand, environments of conformity do not pay you back sufficiently. They do not register as human connection. They do not make you feel more "in control of an easeful, predictable experience." They do not improve your life.

And we can say... they might actually make it far worse. In a confusing, counterproductive manner that – for me – has taken many sleepless nights to figure out.

Next time, we'll come back to hit on one point that I mostly excluded from our rundown today... the most ironic outcome of impression management. Something that all the MFs who pretend to be "fine" will probably relate to heftily.

What happens when all these attempts to be who you need to be... give everyone the wrong idea about who you fucking are, and only move you farther away from obtaining what you need?

Notes (fill in blank)

Berinsky finds that demographic variables including gender and age are associated with individuals' impression management; _____ and _____ scored higher on the impression management scale.

On one hand, individuals who manage their impressions can enjoy and benefit from possessing a positive social image. On the other hand, they also have to expend much effort in this process, which may be _____.

Impression managers fear negative evaluations that spoil social image, and such fear has a negative impact on psychological well-being. People are more likely to be under psychological pressure if they are concerned too much with what others think of them, which can even increase health risks related _____, _____ and substance abuse.

Impression managers on social media are more likely to engage in upward social comparison, which is harmful to mental health. Similarly, _____ impression management is shown to be related to depressive symptoms.

Berryman, Ferguson, and Negy show that impression management on social media is tied to decreased _____ and even suicidality. Moreover, poor mental health is associated with low satisfaction with life.

Impression management undermines one's sense of control. The reason is that the process of managing impressions is filled with difficulties, uncertainties, and even risks, which in turn undermine _____.

Reasons why Imp Man undermines control: First, impression management is difficult (requires skill). Second, impression management is full of uncertainties (_____). Third, impression management is risky (can backfire if interpreted as fake).

Lonely people's social behavior can be distorted. Research indicates that people suffering from loneliness have social skills _____ and improper patterns of self-disclosure. (which may promote Imp Man while also making it less likely to be effective).

The aversion of loneliness is also self-evident by the compensatory or reactance responses that people adopt to cope with it, such as impulsive consumption, decreased prosocial behavior, and increased _____ behavior.

The present research found that impression management was _____ related to life satisfaction and sense of control; whereas it was _____ associated with loneliness.

The full mediation model indicated that impression management affected sense of control and loneliness, which in turn influenced _____.

My words: Which comes first, the loneliness or the Imp Manning? If we're lonely and feeling out of control in life, I would hypothesize that THIS is when we tap impression management with the intention of changing _____ and re-obtaining life satisfaction.

This research showed: First, impression management is associated with lower life satisfaction. Second, we empirically demonstrate that the effect of impression management on life satisfaction takes place through sense of control. Third, we propose that impression management, as a proactive behavior, can also _____.

Although some previous studies show that impression management positively contributes to self-esteem and desired identities, our research reveals the possible dark side of impression management. Our findings are consistent with a larger body of research indicating that a good impression manager does not necessarily have _____.

Solution? If impression management is inevitable in certain social contexts, individuals may prevent their life satisfaction from decreasing by building _____ and participating in social activities to avoid feeling lonely,

For all the resources they demand, environments of conformity do not _____ . They do not register as human connection. They do not make you feel more “in control of an easeful, predictable experience.” They do not improve your life.

Impression Management strategies might actually make life experience far worse... In a confusing, _____ manner that – for me – has taken many sleepless nights to figure out. We'll talk about that next time.

Notes Key

Berinsky finds that demographic variables including gender and age are associated with individuals' impression management; _____ and _____ scored higher on the impression management scale.

females and those older in age

On one hand, individuals who manage their impressions can enjoy and benefit from possessing a positive social image. On the other hand, they also have to expend much effort in this process, which may be _____.

laborious and stressful

Impression managers fear negative evaluations that spoil social image, and such fear has a negative impact on psychological well-being. People are more likely to be under psychological pressure if they are concerned too much with what others think of them, which can even increase health risks related _____, _____ and substance abuse.

to cancer, HIV,

Impression managers on social media are more likely to engage in upward social comparison, which is harmful to mental health. Similarly, _____ impression management is shown to be related to depressive symptoms.

Online

Berryman, Ferguson, and Negy show that impression management on social media is tied to decreased _____ and even suicidality. Moreover, poor mental health is associated with low satisfaction with life.

Empathy

Impression management undermines one's sense of control. The reason is that the process of managing impressions is filled with difficulties, uncertainties, and even risks, which in turn undermine _____.

perceived control

Reasons why Imp Man undermines control: *First, impression management is difficult (requires skill). Second, impression management is full of uncertainties (_____). Third, impression management is risky (can backfire if interpreted as fake).*

results are determined entirely by others

Lonely people's social behavior can be distorted. Research indicates that people suffering from loneliness have social skills _____ and improper patterns of self-disclosure. (which may promote Imp Man while also making it less likely to be effective).

Deficits

The aversion of loneliness is also self-evident by the compensatory or reactance responses that people adopt to cope with it, such as impulsive consumption, decreased prosocial behavior, and increased _____ behavior.

self-defeating

The present research found that impression management was _____ related to life satisfaction and sense of control; whereas it was _____ associated with loneliness.

Negatively ; positively

The full mediation model indicated that impression management affected sense of control and loneliness, which in turn influenced _____.

life satisfaction

My words: Which comes first, the loneliness or the Imp Manning? If we're lonely and feeling out of control in life, I would hypothesize that THIS is when we tap impression management with the intention of changing _____ and re-obtaining life satisfaction.

Circumstances

This research showed: *First, impression management is associated with lower life satisfaction. Second, we empirically demonstrate that the effect of impression management on life satisfaction takes place through sense of control. Third, we propose that impression management, as a proactive behavior, can also _____.*

make one lonely

Although some previous studies show that impression management positively contributes to self-esteem and desired identities, our research reveals the possible dark side of impression management. Our findings are consistent with a larger body of research indicating that a good impression manager does not necessarily have _____.

a good life

Solution? If impression management is inevitable in certain social contexts, individuals may prevent their life satisfaction from decreasing by building _____ and participating in social activities to avoid feeling lonely,

new social relationships

For all the resources they demand, environments of conformity do not _____. They do not register as human connection. They do not make you feel more “in control of an easeful, predictable experience.” They do not improve your life.

pay you back sufficiently

Impression Management strategies might actually make life experience far worse... In a confusing, _____ manner that – for me – has taken many sleepless nights to figure out. We’ll talk about that next time.

Counterproductive

Multiple Choice Notes/Quiz

Berinsky finds that demographic variables including gender and age are associated with individuals' impression management; _____ and _____ scored higher on the impression management scale.

females and those older in age

males and younger individuals

females and younger individuals

males and those older in age

On one hand, individuals who manage their impressions can enjoy and benefit from possessing a positive social image. On the other hand, they also have to expend much effort in this process, which may be _____.

easier with time

a helpful structure in social interactions

laborious and stressful

Impression managers fear negative evaluations that spoil social image, and such fear has a negative impact on psychological well-being. People are more likely to be under psychological pressure if they are concerned too much with what others think of them, which can even increase health risks related _____, _____ and substance abuse.

to mental breakdowns

to depression, anxiety,

to cancer, HIV,

to heartburn, insomnia,

Impression managers on social media are more likely to engage in upward social comparison, which is harmful to mental health. Similarly, _____ impression management is shown to be related to depressive symptoms.

17

Office

Community

Family

Online

Berryman, Ferguson, and Negy show that impression management on social media is tied to decreased _____ and even suicidality. Moreover, poor mental health is associated with low satisfaction with life.

Happiness

Family contact

Empathy

FOMO

Impression management undermines one's sense of control. The reason is that the process of managing impressions is filled with difficulties, uncertainties, and even risks, which in turn undermine _____.

attempts at impressing social circles

perceived control

being appropriate

Reasons why Imp Man undermines control: *First, impression management is difficult (requires skill). Second, impression management is full of uncertainties (_____
_____). Third, impression management is risky (can backfire if interpreted as fake).*

results are determined entirely by others

“good and bad” are individual opinions

may not impress others

being “correct” is not a definitive measure

Lonely people’s social behavior can be distorted. Research indicates that people suffering from loneliness have social skills _____ and improper patterns of self-disclosure. (which may promote Imp Man while also making it less likely to be effective).

To leverage

To unlearn

Deficits

Innately

The aversion of loneliness is also self-evident by the compensatory or reactance responses that people adopt to cope with it, such as impulsive consumption, decreased prosocial behavior, and increased _____ behavior.

desperate

sexually risky

self-defeating

The present research found that impression management was _____ related to life satisfaction and sense of control; whereas it was _____ associated with loneliness.

Negatively ; positively

Positively ; negatively

Not ; negatively

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Circumstances

Ourselves

Our luck

Strategies

This research showed: *First, impression management is associated with lower life satisfaction. Second, we empirically demonstrate that the effect of impression management on life satisfaction takes place through sense of control. Third, we propose that impression management, as a proactive behavior, can also _____.*

enhance life contentment

make one lonely

fix us

improve our experience

Although some previous studies show that impression management positively contributes to self-esteem and desired identities, our research reveals the possible dark side of impression management. Our findings are consistent with a larger body of research indicating that a good impression manager does not necessarily have _____.

anything to worry about

difficult times

a good life

social issues

Solution? *If impression management is inevitable in certain social contexts, individuals may prevent their life satisfaction from decreasing by building _____ and participating in social activities to avoid feeling lonely,*

a real backbone

a sense of self

better social facades

new social relationships

For all the resources they demand, environments of conformity do not _____. They do not register as human connection. They do not make you feel more “in control of an easeful, predictable experience.” They do not improve your life.

cause much harm

pay you back sufficiently

impact individuals significantly

Impression Management strategies might actually make life experience far worse... In a confusing, _____ manner that – for me – has taken many sleepless nights to figure out. We’ll talk about that next time.

Clusterfucky

Self-ascending

Counterproductive

CPTSD-therapizing

Notes/Multiple Choice with Key

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impression management

sense of control

life satisfaction

autonomy

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Ourselves

Our luck

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make one lonely

fix us

improve our experience

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25

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difficult times

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social issues

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Reflection Qs

Do you use impression management in life?

In what environments or circumstances?

Why?

Do you remember “deciding” to do so?

Does it feel like a requirement?

What are the effects of impression management on your?

Mentality?

Emotions?

Body?

Relationships?

Success?

Do you sense a connection between feeling out of control and impression management?

In what direction? (which comes first?)

Are you more or less lonely after impression management tactics?

What about before Imp Manning?

Does impression management help to meet any of your other needs?

How predictably does it work?

Per the last six Qs - Is there a catalyst that inspires your brain to “fake it”? A “trigger point” that kicks off Imp-Manning behaviors?

And what are the usual results when this influence is at work?

Do you ever feel that impression management has counteractive repercussions that work against your best intentions, practically or personally?

Do you feel fulfilled and satiated after an interaction that heavily utilized impression management?

Do you feel more connected?

Do you feel more or less in control of life?

Does it seem to be worth the effort?

Do you believe you can “quit it” in any environment and “just be yourself”?

If not, what does that suggest about the environments you’re surrounded by?

What does it suggest about how you evaluate yourself vs. others?

What does it suggest about your history of acceptance and core beliefs?

Are you willing to change the energy and effort that you put into presenting yourself to others if it could lead to an easier and more fulfilling life experience?

If so, how can you take one step in this direction?

Who can you show yourself to?

How will you measure success or failure?

How can you use knowledge of RSD to constructively interpret the results?