# IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT: MEANS OF MITIGATING THE EFFECTS OF SEX-STEREOTYPING IN ORGANIZATIONS

**Impression management: Means of mitigating the effects of sex-stereotyping in organizations**

**Abstract**

Sex-stereotyping is a major barrier to advancement of women in organizations. Since sex-stereotypes are based on role attribution, they are less amenable to change through measures such as legislation and education. Women need to strategically manage the roles attributed to them such that they are reflective of their roles in the organization, rather than that of a generalized notion of women. Adoption of such measures, over time will bring about a reconfiguration of perceptions about women in organizations and make it easier for women to embrace their multiple roles and identities more effectively. This is a conceptual paper on how women can leverage the power of impression management to mitigate the negative effects of sex-stereotyping in organizations.

**INTRODUCTION**

The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates that in 2008 there were approximately 3 million women in managerial positions, of which only 6.5% reached chief executive level. These data are disheartening. While this indicates an improvement over the past, it is still a very small proportion when compared to the still relatively small total population of approximately 16 million women in management roles. Although there was only a 2% difference in the numbers of female and male general managers, there are twice as many male CEOs as female.

Women's success in overcoming entry barriers suggests that the threshold requirements of education, skills and commitment have been met. Yet, their inability to overcome organizational barriers to progress indicates that there are issues that still need to be addressed. One of the reasons given for paucity of women in critical roles and higher positions in such roles is sex-stereotyping (Davies-Netzley, 1998; Oakley, 2000). Sex-stereotyping is the super-imposition of generalized notions about women on to the role-identity of individual women. This implies that women, regardless of the roles played by them in the workplace, are perceived primarily by a generalized stereotype of women. Such stereotypes could range from that of a nurturer to a sex-object. The attributes attendant to these sex-stereotypes have been shown to be persistently contrary to the attributes, perceived by the majority, to be required in career professionals (Schein, 1973; 1996; 2007), and women continue to be particularly disadvantaged by such stereotyping (Ryan & Haslam, 2007; Hopkins O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2006). Consequently, it is essential for women to manage the perceptions that are held by pertinent others in the organizational context. Such management includes creating non-pejorative images, and

managing extant perceptions to resonate with these right images. Impression management is the array of behaviors; verbal and non-verbal, by which women can accomplish this objective.

Much of the literature on gender-discrimination has focused on alleviating the problem either at a system level through policy and legislation or at the individual level by focusing on educating or penalizing a perpetrator. But, studies of gender discrimination also show that discriminating acts can be very subtle and hard to identify as being discriminatory rather than benign. It can thus be surmised that while legislation, education and penalty are essential to mitigating the problem of gender discrimination, transformation of the stereotype associated with the sex is an important element of the change process. As we will draw out in the section on sex-stereotyping, it is also an area in which women can take control of the situation and feel empowered by playing an active part in the mitigation of discrimination against them. It is our contention that impression management is that approach to containing the influence of sex-stereotyping.

Ironically, impression management has largely been constructed as a "falsification" tool used to deceive others and protect oneself against unfavorable projection by others (Deluga, 1991; see Bolino, Kacmar, Turnley & Gilstrap, 2008 for review). However, a study of the roots of impression management from social role theory (Hartley & Hartley, 1952) to self-presentation (Goffman, 1959) shows that the genesis of impression management was based on principles of influence through self-monitoring and strategic presentation. Therefore, at its source, impression management is a means of creating images that resonate with the contextual roles played by individuals. Much of recent literature on impression management is focused on its use in organizational contexts such as interviews, performance reviews, crises, or the ubiquitous handling of supervisors (Elsbach & Sutton, 1992; Stevens & Kristof, 1995; Kacmar &

Carlson, 1999; Singh & Vinnicombe, 2001; Bolino, Varela, Bande & Turnley, 2006). The studies that link women and impression management are about gendered differences in the use of impression management in organizations (e.g. Singh, Kumra & Vinnicombe, 2002; Guadagno & Cialdini, 2007). Overall, these studies have established that women perceive the notion of impression management negatively. Some of the respondents in these studies admitted to losing organizational battles to colleagues who managed their image perceivably better than the women respondents. Less studied are use of impression management by potential victims of sex-stereotyping and the influence of such strategies on their career.

The present theoretical exploration offers a means by which women can exercise some control over their career advancement through strategically amplifying contextually appropriate behaviors. Contrary to typical perception, impression management is applied in this study to minimize the application and strength of negative stereotypical perceptions; and not for self-promotion. We propose that application of negative stereotypes can be minimized by replacing the negative stereotypes with positive stereotypes that resonate with the changing realities of women in organizations. We refer to this process as stereotype transformation because a stereotype vacuum is not a plausible option. Stereotyping is a useful mechanism, necessary for managing complex sets of information. The focus of our study is the replacement of an erroneous stereotype with one that resonates more accurately with the current reality about women in organizations and the implications of such transformation on organizational norms. The female professional in an organizational set up should be perceived as professional first as that is her primary role in that situation. The outcome corresponding to such a perception is greater equity in recruitment, compensation and career advancement. Therefore, an effective stereotype women can create is that of a professional characterized by her functional expertise and personal ability

supplemented by the quality of communality, fairness and fortitude that characterize her as a woman.

Through this discourse, we hope that the utility of impression management in alleviating the effects of stereotyping on women's career progression in male-dominated professions will receive attention. We begin with an elaboration of the concept of sex-stereotyping and a summary of the existing literature on the major stereotypes held about women and the ways in which sex-stereotyping affects women in organizations. The theoretical foundation of impression management and its application in the workplace is the second part of the paper. Finally, we develop a theoretical model of the role of impression management in mitigating sex-stereotyping in organizations finally resulting in a change in organizational norms.

## SEX-STEREOTYPING AS A BARRIER TO CAREER ADVANCEMENT

There is universal agreement on the fact that women's careers generally do not advance on par with equivalent men's careers. One of the causes forwarded to explain this lag is discrimination based on sex-stereotyping. Stereotypical assumptions about women, based on their sex and corresponding attribution of social role are that they lack the attributes required in managers (Heilman, Block & Martell, 1995; Hopkins, O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2006); attributes required in managers being those demonstrated by men (Schein, 2007). Just as men who chose to be home-makers are likened to women or attributed with feminine characteristics. Hence, it is prudent to acknowledge the basis of sex-stereotyping while staying grounded in the mission of creating a stereotype of managers that is more gender-neutral and thus inclusive.

Sex-stereotyping creates strong barriers to the career advancement of women in several ways. The first is an entry barrier to certain roles that are argued to be more suitable to men than

women. Sex-segregation literature reveals that such barricaded positions are typically those that are more central to the operations of the organization; involve handling of important resources, involving visibility to and perhaps interaction with those who hold power in the organization (Oakley, 2000; Furst & Reeves, 2008). Consequently, women get herded into roles that are peripheral to the business, have little scope for influence and visibility. Barriers are also erected in such a way that it is hard to distinguish discrimination from benevolent sexism (Benokraitis, 1997).

Another way in which women are dissuaded from aspiring to penetrate male bastions is more insidious and less covert. Women receive lower evaluations on both performance and potential (Eagly, Karau & Makhijani, 1995; Eagly, Makhijani & Klonsky, 1992). Lower evaluations are justified by either setting lower standards in goals or misattributing the cause of performance. Being devalued in this way consistently can lead to sufficient demotivation among women that they either become disengaged with the process of career advancement or seek a different environment. This has been shown in studies where career paths of men and women have been found to be disparate on advancement processes (O'Neil, Hopkins & Bilimoria, 2008). Women tend to ascend the organizational ladder by moving to other organizations at significant rungs in the ladder, while men ascend to similar positions with the same organization (Cox & Harquail, 1991). To have to move to a different organization at each significant level may result in women taking longer to reach the same position as their equivalent male colleagues.

A third way in which sex-stereotyping contributes to deceleration in women's careers is through misguided assumptions about women's life-choice preferences. As illustrated by the famous investigation at Deloitte and Touche (McCracken, 2000), male supervisors make stereotypical assumptions about women employees, which on verification may more often than

not prove to be erroneous. Women are assumed to have an immutable preference for home and family to work aspirations. Changing demographics are evidence that this is not a universal truth. Just as there are women who prefer to either build their lives around their families or subordinate their careers to the needs of the family; there are women who choose to privilege their career ambitions.

Based on the above discussion, the perceived gaps in the identity of women as professionals are most profound in the areas of ability, effectiveness and commitment. It is on these three grounds that women are significantly disadvantaged by existing sex-stereotypes.

**Ability**

Masculine jobs in organizations are line jobs, not only due to demographic dominance by men but also the associations with greater power, resources and criticality to the organization (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989; Lyness & Heilman, 2006). Women in line positions present a higher incongruence than women in staff jobs. Therefore, it is stereotypically assumed that women lack the ability required of the job. From the interview stage, women are held at a disadvantage as both male and female interviewers tend to rate women lower than men for 'masculine' roles or positions with male subordinates (Rose & Andiappan, 1978). Consequently, they receive less support in organizations for opportunities to demonstrate their ability. Studies have shown that women in sex-role congruent jobs received higher evaluations than those in sex-role incongruent jobs (staff vs. line), women in line jobs had to achieve higher evaluations than men to be promoted (Lyness & Heilman, 2006). In situations where women do demonstrate the ability to succeed, the counter-stereotypical outcome is distorted through attributions like external help, to resonate with the stereotype (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1993). The tendency of women to attribute successes to external factors may allow them to participate in such

distortions. Evaluations of behavior also lend themselves readily to stereotypical assumptions. Studies have shown that in the absence of irrevocable evidence, information will be more readily distorted to align with stereotypical assumptions (Nieva & Gutek, 1980). As organizations move from mere task evaluation to task and behavioral evaluations, such assumptions have greater implications for women employees. Persistent devaluation of performance on the basis of subjective evaluation criteria may lead to a loss of valence for the outcomes associated with such evaluations.

**Effectiveness**

Women have been shown to manage and lead through a more democratic and communal leadership style than men (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). This has been commonly attributed to sex-role socialization. As has been discussed, women managers who adopt masculine styles successfully are found to be more negatively evaluated than feminine, successful women (Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs & Tamkins, 2004). Yet, women are required to display agentic qualities in order to be considered suitable for positions of greater responsibility. In order to manage this dissonance, women are forced to adopt a conciliatory management style in order to maintain harmony in the work group and also a task orientation in order to be considered effective (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989; Eagly, Makhijani & Klonsky, 1992). Despite this, it was found that women in masculine roles were found less effective than their male counterparts (Eagly, Karau & Makhijani, 1995; Oakley, 2000). Further, jobs in organizations are becoming more inter-dependent, with implications for personal resourcefulness. Women have been found to be lacking in networking abilities (Van Emmerik, 2006) which could be inferred as inability to perform interdependent tasks effectively. Several studies have shown that women build relational networks rather than instrumental (Ibarra, 1992; 1993; Burke, Bristor & Rothstein, 1995). Such

apparent difficulties of women have been stereotyped as their inability to be resourceful and hence effective in the organizational context.

**Commitment**

Given the biological and attending psychological characteristics of women, it is inevitable that child-bearing and rearing will form a large part of the life aspirations of a majority of women. Or at least that is a popular perception residing at the core of stereotypical assumptions about women. Perhaps a more subliminal basis of this assumption is the need for men to propagate their race (Sidanius & Veniegas, 2000). The proportion of working women has been consistently increasing yet the impending transition to this role is at the root of the stereotypical assumption that women do not have a long-term commitment to their careers. A corollary to this assumption is that even if commitment to the career is intact, it will still be secondary to the commitment to family. This greatly harms the probability of success for those women who are both high on potential and commitment to their careers (Jerdee & Rosen, 1976).

The direction of research thus far has been to describe the systemic shortcomings that have constrained women from achieving success in organizations. Systemic shortcomings have by definition originated in the 'other': males dominating the organization and the systems in organization, which are created for the males in the organization. While this perspective has been deeply explored and several measures taken to counter it, by way of legislation and activism to increase the number of women in organizations; very little has been done to explore the other side of the situation, namely the role of women in the situation. Therefore, it is essential to recognize that while systemic shortcomings persist, women can also acknowledge their role in the creation and propagation of stereotypes. Such acknowledgement will create the space for

women to participate in transforming the organizational landscape to better suit the changing demographics of women.

### Self-fulfilling nature of sex-stereotyping

Stereotypes are shared perceptions of characteristics common to a group (Tajfel & Forgas, 2000). Inferences about people from behaviors to traits underlie development and maintenance of stereotypes (Gawronski, 2003). By definition, stereotypes are perceptions and as such the perceived also has a role in the creation of stereotypes (Stangor & Schaller, 2000). Therefore, if there are certain stereotypical assumptions made about women, such have a basis in observed behavior of women. Women in organizations have been found to be uncomfortable at initiating negotiations (Walters, Stulmacher & Meyer, 1998; Small, Gelfand, Babcock & Gettman, 2007) and directing action (Eagly, Karau & Makhijani, 1995). Women have been found to hesitant to apply their expertise, relying on relational influences to lead and direct (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). The inability of women to leverage networks and collegial relations has also been a significant contributor to the persistence of the stereotype that women are not resourceful (Bierema, 2005). Perhaps the greatest yet rather subtle reason that men have been able to penalize counter-stereotypic behavior has been the perception of lack of confidence among women in their ability and suitability (Eagly & Johnson, 1990, Hopkins, O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2006).

While such self-effacing qualities may be advantageous to them in other arenas, in organizations they lead to self-propagating cycles of low-confidence, lack of progress and resignation to status quo (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989). In order to create a more egalitarian environment, where women do not have to suffer negative consequences no matter what they do

(Eagly, 2007), they need to take greater control of the perceptions projected upon them. Women have to consistently monitor the interaction between their professional-role and sex-role identities to avoid perceptual biases. Impression management is one such avenue of creating definitions of role-identities and interactions within the contextual framework of organizations.

In the introduction, we advanced the idea that women who seek career advancement may be able to reduce the negative effects of sex-stereotyping using impression management. We also proposed that while the popular understanding of impression management is falsification; there is another aspect to impression management that has hitherto not been explored in the context of stereotype management in organizations. The next section presents our perspective on impression management, which is both positive and transformative. The last section will elaborate on the model of transformation of stereotypes as applied in the context of women seeking career advancement in organizations.

**IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT**

Impression management is the array of behavior – verbal and non-verbal, used to control information, to influence the perception of others about us and their behavior towards us (Rosenfeld, Giacalone & Riordan, 1995). As such impression management is a composite of both "what" and "how" (Goffman, 1959) e.g. a handshake itself conveys adherence to the social norms of greeting and the quality of the handshake is perceived as an indicator of the quality of the person. Communicating an impression requires that both layers of behavior be controlled and synchronized to convey a consistent image (Tedeschi, Bonoma & Schlenker, 1972; Tedeschi, 1981). The process by which one consciously and deliberately manages this interaction in order to project the pertinent self is called impression management (Schlenker, 1980).

Impression management is composed of two parts: impression motivation and construction (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). The motivation to manage the impressions one creates is based on the salience of projecting certain impressions of oneself, expectancy of success at attaining the desired outcomes, and perceived distance between desired and current image (Schlenker, 1980; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Singh & Vinnicombe, 2001; Roberts, 2005). This is particularly relevant for women in organizations as correcting stereotypical assumptions will have an impact on outcomes distorted by their application. The impression of a professional is not restricted to one incident or audience, it a stable impression across situations and audiences in one context, the organization (Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984; Wayne & Liden, 1995; Roberts, 2005). Therefore, creating and maintaining a professional image is an exercise in projection as represented in Figure 1.

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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Strategic self-presentation is a pattern of self-presentation intended to maximize approval and minimize disapproval (Doherty & Schlenker, 1991). For women in organizations, this would mean enhancing those attributes that contribute to their success. At the same time, it is also important that such attribution is not clouded over by the qualities that make them successful professionals. This is an important distinction, as this is often used as a basis for sex-stereotyping (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1993). A woman who attains success in a business project, who tends to portray her relational qualities in success rather than expertise or effort, is creating space for misattribution of the source of her success. Therefore, strategic self-presentation is focusing on those professional qualities that contributed to her success.

# MEANS OF IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

Women have been found to be averse to using impression management tactics (Singh & Vinnicombe, 2001; Guadagno & Cialdini, 2007), probably based on the characteristics of artifice and deviousness associated with it. Taking such aversion into account, we suggest three impression management methods that can be considered compliant with the self-concept of women which also promote their image as professionals rather than female professionals. The three methods are exemplification, ingratiation and demonstration. Exemplification and ingratiation are maneuvers defined by Jones and Pittman (1982) and demonstrative impression management was discussed by Bolino et. al. (2008) as other-focused impression management tactics. Women tend to prefer protective methods of impression management to acquisitive; even the acquisitive methods they engage in tend to be defensive rather than directive (See Guadagno & Cialdini, 2007 for review). Therefore, the methods we have focused on are other-focused but directive so that they may be more acceptable than using methods that call for a radical change of mindset.

## Exemplification

Exemplification is defined by Jones and Pittman (1982) as demonstrating exemplary behavior through integrity and self-sacrifice, that is worthy of being emulated by others. Volunteering for tough assignments and going beyond the call of duty are some of the behaviors associated with exemplification. Exemplification also overlaps with the concept of altruism in the literature on organizational citizenship behavior (Bolino, 1999). Altruism and exemplary behavior have a gendered construction given their strong correspondence with the idea of communality. In OCB literature, altruism is found to not reap as great rewards for women as for

men due to the expectancy of communality among women (Kidder & Parks, 2001). Similarly, unless positioned strategically as befitting the notion of impression management, exemplary behavior can be misconstrued as either stereotypical of women or invite backlash for being martyr-like behavior (Harris, Kacmar, Zivnuska & Shaw, 2007). Therefore, women need to redefine exemplification to meet their needs of highlighting exemplary behavior while ensuring that it is not attributed to altruism. The fact that it was beyond the call of duty or involved sacrifice should be brought into focus such that there is some degree of reciprocity attached to it. Exemplary behavior should be used to highlight their commitment to their career as opposed to building merely relational networks. Women should also ensure that exemplary behavior is construed as effort expended towards career progress and not just creating impressions of favorability, as they have generally been wont to do (Lewis & Neighbors, 2005).

*Proposition 1: Women who perform exemplary work will be noticed by the supervisor more than those who do not*

*Proposition 1a: Women who project their exemplary work in both relational and task-oriented terms will benefit more in terms of opportunities than those who use only relational terms to define exemplary work*

### Ingratiation

Doing favors for others to be liked is the definition of ingratiation. According to impression management research, ingratiation is a precursor to achievement of a self-serving motive (Jones & Pittman, 1982). Therefore, ingratiation in its completeness could be defined as doing favors for others, to be liked, in order that such favors can be reciprocated by others. This fact, when supplemented by the other fact that almost no organizational function can be

accomplished by one person in isolation of other members of the organizations, renders ingratiation a necessity. Effectiveness is a notion that gains credibility only when shared by a supervisor and subordinates, if any. Hence, ingratiation is an integral component of effectiveness perceptions (Eagly, Karau & Makhijani, 1995).

However, as with any other impression management method, ingratiation bears with it the risk of misinterpretation if not conveyed strategically. Particularly, in the case of women, ingratiation can be easily misconstrued as supplication. In order to avoid such misunderstanding, ingratiation can be conveyed by ways other than doing favors. They can take the form of genuinely extending a helping hand, without sacrificing self-interest, based on a promise of reciprocity. It can take the form of building professional friendship based on mutual professional goals. Providing confirmation of a colleague's output in front of a supervisor when necessary can also be conveyed as ingratiation, when such action is conveyed to the colleague in question.

Building such credits will ensure that examples of one's effectiveness are supported and supplemented. Supervisors tend to rate women who are liked by their colleagues more favorably regardless of actual performance. Colleagues support female colleagues who are effective and supportive, rather than just effective. Communality in women can be thus played to their own advantage rather than being a barrier to advancement. This can be achieved by managing the impression of being communal with that of being effective, to project the image of effectiveness to a wider audience.

*Proposition 2: Women who ingratiate themselves to colleagues and supervisors are recalled more favourably by them than those who do not*

*Proposition 2a: Women who ingratiate themselves to colleagues with an express wish of reciprocation benefit more in terms of help from others than those who merely ingratiate themselves*

*Proposition 2b: Women who ingratiate themselves to colleagues will be perceived favourably by supervisors than those who do not*

**Demonstration**

Though not a widely studied means of impression management, it is relevant to the problem of mitigating sex-stereotyping, as it refers to a demonstration of knowledge about the organization. Having established their trustworthiness through exemplification and ingratiation methods discussed above, women can create a new image of themselves as holders of information. Research shows men to be strategic and women to be communal (See Eagly and Wood, 1991 for a review). However, the communality of women can be pursued to their advantage, in creating channels of information from disparate sources. Women who are able to tap their social networks both within and outside their organization for information will be able to gain positions of strength. Demonstration of an ability to not just collect information but use it strategically to inform supervisor's and team's decisions will improve their professional image and credibility in the team. Such an improvement can lead directly to creating impression of ability that has eluded women thus far (Lyness & Thompson, 1997).

*Proposition 3: Women who demonstrate a diverse variety of organizational information will be perceived to be resourceful by supervisors*

*Proposition 3a: Women who demonstrate a diverse variety of information will have more inter-departmental opportunities than those who do not*

Above we have depicted a few scenarios in which impression management can be put to use to create context-appropriate perceptions. As roles change and the resource-available varies correspondingly, more strategies also become available. With the passage of time, we anticipate that a stereotype that is accurate today may become invalid. Neither stereotypes nor society are static entities, therefore it is important to understand the bases of our propositions regarding the role of impression management in social reconfiguration.

Having elaborated on a few means of impression management, we feel that it is important to reiterate one of the biggest advantages of impression management: it allows for individualistic application. There is no prototype of the right impression or the right way of managing impressions. It is however possible to engage in circumspection in the manner of self-presentation so that irrelevant information and behaviors do not overshadow relevant contribution. Consequently, women in organizations should see that it is not necessary for them to portray one specific kind of behavior to be perceived as professionals; just as not all successful men in organizations are aggressive or ambitious. One of the significant outcomes of such a realization will be the individual adaptation of impression management methods by women regardless of the level or function they occupy in organizations. It is hoped that by portraying the image of eligibility for success, such women will pave the way for future generations of women to be perceived not from the lens of stereotypes of women in general but that of qualified women capable of success. Therefore, our model is based on the belief that not only can professional women change the stereotypes applied to them individually but through persistence, they can also change the stereotypes about professional women as a collective image in society. Such a transformation of stereotypes should contribute towards supplementing legal measures taken to mitigate the effects of sex-stereotyping in organizations.

# IMPLICATIONS OF IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

The expected effect of impression management is a change in the perceptions of professional capability of individual women who practice impression management. Practiced consistently, impression management should allay the application of stereotypes to such individual women, thereby modifying existing stereotypes to those that are more representative. This is the effect that is expected in individuals through dyadic interactions. At the group level – work group or organization, this model will hold well only if the majority of women in the group project impressions that are contextually appropriate. It is our belief that the advantages perceived by the individual women will create the traction necessary to change the stereotype itself, without the necessity of any concerted action.

Outcomes subsequent to transformation of stereotypes are a change on the norms of organizational behavior such as recruitment, evaluation and consequently career advancement. An organization in which women are perceived more as professionals than as women professionals will bring a greater degree of fairness to evaluation of female candidates during recruitment. Stereotypes that are more congruous with the capabilities of professional women will lead to dispassionate appraisal of their performance and outcomes consequent to such processes.

The methods are relevant to the individual women in the organization by providing an opportunity to every individual woman to alleviate the application of existing wrongful stereotypes to her through the use of impression management. we also believe that given sufficient number of women practicing impression management, the existing stereotypes of

women will undergo a transformation to a stereotype that resonates more accurately with the true image of women in organizations.

## PITFALLS IN IMPLEMENTATION OF IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

Women, it has been found, are averse to the conscious use of impression management tactics. This is despite knowing that their male counterparts benefit disproportionately by engaging in impression management (Singh, Kumar & Vinnicombe, 2002). In another study, Singh & Vinnicombe (2001) showed that women begin to engage in impression management more as they progress in their careers. It is evidence of the importance of impressions in organizations. But, by waiting too long to engage in it, women have to not only counter the impressions of others but also overcome their own previous experiences. It is an indicator of the importance of embracing the advantage of impression management early in their careers.

Reluctance to engage in impression management arises from the socialization, value systems and ironically, its stereotypical association with men (Rudman, 1998). The nomenclature of impression management tactics viz., self-promotion, supplication or intimidation also contributes, probably in an indirect psychological way to the negativity image of impression management. This does not deter from the fact that such behaviors are engaged in unconsciously in the daily business of life: the merchant who promotes himself, the customer who tries ingratiation to get a better deal, claims of entitlement made to relatives and friends and attempting exemplification to influence the behavior of children. The imperative is to understand that in a situation that is unfairly disadvantageous, it is a responsibility and a right to protect one's self-concept by amplifying the appropriate image against the incorrect stereotype.

Impression management behaviors enacted towards those from whom one does not stand to gain materially may be perceived as justifiable because the outcomes are either insubstantial as with bargaining or linked to emotional objectives, which make them less mercenary. Organizational outcomes being directly material or linked to material outcomes make impression management in the organizational context seem mercenary. However, the fact is that impressions are managed in organizations on a daily basis, sub-consciously. Employees project themselves as social, professional, collegial and informed. Sometimes, this is done despite not being so in reality at that particular point in time, in order to project the appropriate image of the self in the eyes of pertinent others. Therefore, women need to appreciate the principle on which impression management is enacted and overcome their reluctance to use it appropriately to balance the disadvantage created by erroneous stereotypes.

Impression management tactics usually fail in two circumstances: when they are not based on authentic information and when they are used prematurely. Information that cannot be confirmed by behavior leads to not only the information being discredited but also the source. Premature build-up can be dangerous as it becomes contingent on actualization of the claim. Therefore authenticity and credibility should be the yardstick by which any impression management strategy is evaluated.

Keeping the objective of impression management as a tool to improve one's image is the key to being successful in creating the right impressions. The ability to control reactions in situations where its effect may not be apparent sometimes also works towards making the right impression. This is especially true for women as it works towards negating the stereotype of 'emotional' women. Using impression management tactics to claim victories when used by women, especially in period of time before the desired identity has been created, usually brings

about negative consequences. Both team members and supervisors will view such behavior as typical of the 'tyrannical' woman whose aim is to derogate her male co-workers. It is important to choose one's battles because discretion is the better part of valor.

It is paramount to remember that the position at stake is not that of women *as relative to men* but of women as an independent social category. The imperative is creating positive associations with the identity group of working women. Therefore, behavior that seems to be about concern for the collective ego of male co-workers is really about diminishing the interference of the said male ego in their perception of female co-workers. Therefore, self-confidence, self-awareness and self-control need to be exercised in order for women to create an environment in which the interference of sex-stereotypes is minimal.

## CONCLUSION

Sex-stereotypes affect women because they are more often than not antithetical to their role as working women. It is in the interest of women to control the behavior of others, particularly in response to their own conduct. This control can be achieved by influencing the definition of the situation by pertinent others. Influencing such definitions means expressing oneself in such a way that the impression they receive will lead them to voluntarily act in consonance with one's objectives (Goffman, 1959). Impression management is a powerful tool, which if utilized with discretion and skill, can lead to ameliorating the negative consequences of sex-stereotyping in organizations. Though wrongly discredited as deceitful, impression management is merely a strategic representation of the self in its true state, in order to control the communication and consequences of one's actions. Impression management can be used to great

effect in amplifying those behaviors that otherwise get lost in communication due to the strength of stereotypes in the mental framework of the target.

Successful impression management has consequences beyond merely alleviating the ill-effects of stereotyping. Like self-fulfilling prophecies, authentic impressions, credibly conveyed can result in enhancing the qualities on which such impressions are based. Therefore, a woman able to successfully convey her competence finds herself exercising such competence in a variety of situations, which she may not otherwise have risked.

Stereotypes, though often used indiscriminately, are also important tools of social interaction. It is impossible to conceive of a complex society operating without the use of stereotypes. Therefore, transformation of a stereotype is essentially modifying an existing stereotype to resonate better with existing realities. An existing reality is that women invest a great deal of resources in acquiring and demonstrating professional capabilities and as such deserve commensurate rewards.

Figure 1: Modes of self-presentation
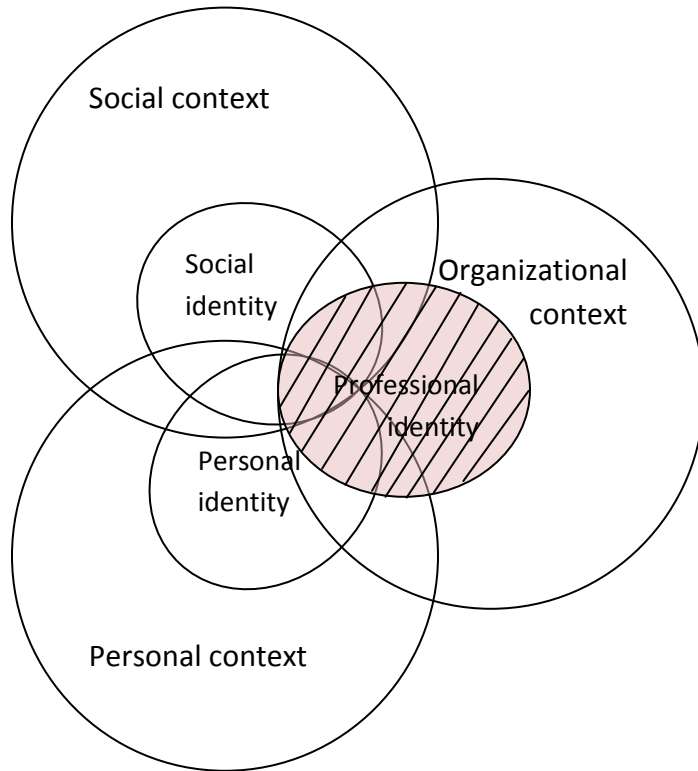


Non-Strategic self-presentation
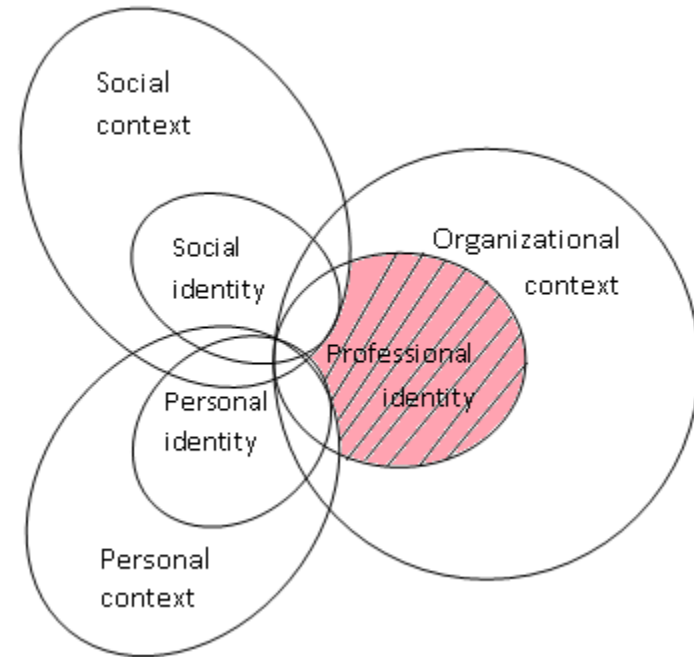
Strategic self-presentation

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