

Impression Management: Means of Mitigating The Effects of Sex-Stereotyping In Organizations

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

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INTRODUCTION

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The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates that in 2008 there were fewer than 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 less than 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 superimposition 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 the “right” 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.

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

66 Ironically, impression management has largely been constructed as a “falsification” tool
67 used to deceive others and protect oneself against unfavorable projection by others (Deluga,
68 1991; see Bolino, Kacmar, Turnley & Gilstrap, 2008 for review). However, a study of the roots
69 of impression management from social role theory (Hartley & Hartley, 1952) to self-
70 presentation (Goffman, 1959) shows that the genesis of impression management was based on
71 principles of influence through self-monitoring and strategic presentation. Therefore, at its
72 source, impression management is a means of creating images that resonate with the contextual
73 roles played by individuals. Much of recent literature on impression management is focused on
74 its use in organizational contexts such as interviews, performance reviews, crises, or the
75 ubiquitous handling of supervisors (Elsbach & Sutton, 1992; Stevens & Kristof, 1995; Kacmar &
76 Carlson, 1999; Singh & Vinnicombe, 2001; Bolino, Varela, Bande & Turnley, 2006). However,
77 there have been no studies that explore the application of impression management in mitigating

78 the subtle yet intensely pervasive problem of stereotyping in organizations. Given that
79 stereotyping as a construct is too large to be examined in any depth in one study, I have restricted
80 this paper to drawing some theoretical conclusions about sex-stereotyping alone, particularly
81 with respect to women in organizations.

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

89 The present theoretical exploration offers a means by which women can exercise some
90 control over their career advancement through strategically amplifying contextually appropriate
91 behaviors. Contrary to typical perception, impression management is applied in this study to
92 minimize the application and strength of negative stereotypical perceptions; and not for self-
93 promotion. I propose that application of negative stereotypes can be minimized by replacing the
94 negative stereotypes with positive stereotypes that resonate with the changing realities of women
95 in organizations. I refer to this process as stereotype transformation because a stereotype vacuum
96 is not a plausible option. Stereotyping is a useful mechanism, necessary for managing complex
97 sets of information. The focus of my study is the replacement of an erroneous stereotype with
98 one that resonates more accurately with the current reality about women in organizations and the
99 implications of such transformation on organizational norms. The female professional in an
100 organizational set up should be perceived as professional first as that is her primary role in that

101 situation. The outcome corresponding to such a perception is greater equity in recruitment,
102 compensation and career advancement. Therefore, the stereotype I seek to create is that of a
103 professional characterized by her functional expertise and personal ability supplemented by the
104 quality of communality, fairness and fortitude that characterize her as a woman.

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

113 **SEX-STEREOTYPING AS A BARRIER TO CAREER ADVANCEMENT**

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

123 Sex-stereotyping creates strong barriers to the career advancement of women in several
124 ways. The first is an entry barrier to certain roles that are argued to be more suitable to men than
125 women. Sex-segregation literature reveals that such barricaded positions are typically those that
126 are more central to the operations of the organization; involve handling of important resources,
127 involving visibility to and perhaps interaction with those who hold power in the organization
128 (Oakley, 2000; Furst & Reeves, 2008). Consequently, women get herded into roles that are
129 peripheral to the business, have little scope for influence and visibility. Barriers are also erected
130 in such a way that it is hard to distinguish discrimination from benevolent sexism (Benokraitis,
131 1997).

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

144 A third way in which sex-stereotyping contributes to deceleration in women's careers is
145 through misguided assumptions about women's life-choice preferences. As illustrated by the

146 famous investigation at Deloitte and Touche (McCracken, 2000), male supervisors make
147 stereotypical assumptions about women employees, which on verification may more often than
148 not prove to be erroneous. Women are assumed to have an immutable preference for home and
149 family to work aspirations. Changing demographics are evidence that this is not a universal truth.
150 Just as there are women who prefer to either build their lives around their families or subordinate
151 their careers to the needs of the family; there are women who choose to privilege their career
152 ambitions. Such sex-stereotyping prevails even in highly intellectual and sophisticated
153 organizations.

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

157 **Ability**

158 Masculine jobs in organizations are line jobs, not only due to demographic dominance by
159 men but also the associations with greater power, resources and criticality to the organization
160 (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989; Lyness & Heilman, 2006). Women in line positions present a
161 higher incongruence than women in staff jobs. Therefore, it is stereotypically assumed that
162 women lack the ability required of the job. From the interview stage, women are held at a
163 disadvantage as both male and female interviewers tend to rate women lower than men for
164 ‘masculine’ roles or positions with male subordinates (Rose & Andiappan, 1978). Consequently,
165 they receive less support in organizations for opportunities to demonstrate their ability. Studies
166 have shown that women in sex-role congruent jobs received higher evaluations than those in sex-
167 role incongruent jobs (staff vs. line), women in line jobs had to achieve higher evaluations than
168 men to be promoted (Lyness & Heilman, 2006). In situations where women do demonstrate the

169 ability to succeed, the counter-stereotypical outcome is distorted through attributions like
170 external help, to resonate with the stereotype (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1993). The tendency
171 of women to attribute successes to external factors may allow them to participate in such
172 distortions. Evaluations of behavior also lend themselves readily to stereotypical assumptions.
173 Studies have shown that in the absence of irrevocable evidence, information will be more readily
174 distorted to align with stereotypical assumptions (Nieva & Gutek, 1980). As organizations move
175 from mere task evaluation to task and behavioral evaluations, such assumptions have greater
176 implications for women employees. Persistent devaluation of performance on the basis of
177 subjective evaluation criteria may lead to a loss of valence for the outcomes associated with such
178 evaluations.

179 **Effectiveness**

180 Women have been shown to manage and lead through a more democratic and communal
181 leadership style than men (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). This has been commonly attributed to sex-
182 role socialization. As has been discussed, women managers who adopt masculine styles
183 successfully are found to be more negatively evaluated than feminine, successful women
184 (Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs & Tamkins, 2004). Yet, women are required to display agentic
185 qualities in order to be considered suitable for positions of greater responsibility. In order to
186 manage this dissonance, women are forced to adopt a conciliatory management style in order to
187 maintain harmony in the work group and also a task orientation in order to be considered
188 effective (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989; Eagly, Makhijani & Klonsky, 1992). Despite this, it was
189 found that women in masculine roles were found less effective than their male counterparts
190 (Eagly, Karau & Makhijani, 1995; Oakley, 2000). Further, jobs in organizations are becoming
191 more inter-dependent, with implications for personal resourcefulness. Women have been found

192 to be lacking in networking abilities (Van Emmerik, 2006) which could be inferred as inability to
193 perform interdependent tasks effectively. Several studies have shown that women build relational
194 networks rather than instrumental (Ibarra, 1992; 1993; Burke, Bristor & Rothstein, 1995). Such
195 apparent difficulties of women have been stereotyped as their inability to be resourceful and
196 hence effective in the organizational context.

197 **Commitment**

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

208 The direction of research thus far has been to describe the systemic shortcomings that
209 have constrained women from achieving success in organizations. Systemic shortcomings have
210 by definition originated in the 'other': males dominating the organization and the systems in
211 organization, which are created for the males in the organization. While this perspective has been
212 deeply explored and several measures taken to counter it, by way of legislation and activism to
213 increase the number of women in organizations; very little has been done to explore the other

214 side of the situation, namely the role of women in the situation. Therefore, it is essential to
215 recognize that while systemic shortcomings persist, women can also acknowledge their role in
216 the creation and propagation of stereotypes. Such acknowledgement will create the space for
217 women to participate in transforming the organizational landscape to better suit the changing
218 demographics of women.

219 **Role of women in the perpetuation of sex-stereotyping**

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

235 While such self-effacing qualities may be advantageous to them in other arenas, in
236 organizations they lead to self-propagating cycles of low-confidence, lack of progress and
237 resignation to status quo (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989). Women who do have the confidence in
238 their ability may be constrained by other factors such as geographical restrictions and economic
239 needs. Therefore women operate under two types of constraints: their professional identity and
240 social identity. Yet women have managed these dual roles successfully for over four decades at
241 least. Despite this, they continue to face barriers on these bases. One of the reasons for this could
242 be that they have been successful because they were successful at hiding how they managed the
243 dual roles (Singh, Kumra & Vinnicombe, 2002). They have managed to portray the most
244 appropriate images at each level and overcome barriers of perception. This absence of
245 communication has resulted in the mutation of the organizational woman into the organizational
246 man, rather than a celebration of the organizational woman. While this may have been a
247 successful strategy for token women, as numbers increase it is becoming imperative that the
248 mould of the organizational woman be created. A significant task in this endeavor is a recast of
249 stereotypes about women in organizations.

250 In order to create a more egalitarian environment, where women do not have to suffer
251 negative consequences no matter what they do (Eagly, 2007), they need to take greater control of
252 the perceptions projected upon them. Women have to consistently monitor the interaction
253 between their professional-role and sex-role identities to avoid perceptual biases. Impression
254 management is one such avenue of creating definitions of role-identities and interactions within
255 the contextual framework of organizations.

256 In the introduction, I advanced the idea that women who seek career advancement may
257 be able to reduce the negative effects of sex-stereotyping using impression management. I also

258 proposed that while the popular understanding of impression management is falsification; there
259 is another aspect to impression management that has hitherto not been explored in the context of
260 stereotype management in organizations. The next section presents my perspective on impression
261 management, which is both positive and transformative. The last section will elaborate on the
262 model of transformation of stereotypes as applied in the context of women seeking career
263 advancement in organizations.

264 **IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT**

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

274 Impression management is composed of two parts: impression motivation and
275 construction (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). The motivation to manage the impressions one creates is
276 based on the salience of projecting certain impressions of oneself, expectancy of success at
277 attaining the desired outcomes, and perceived distance between desired and current image
278 (Schlenker, 1980; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Singh & Vinnicombe, 2001; Roberts, 2005). This is
279 particularly relevant for women in organizations as correcting stereotypical assumptions will

280 have an impact on outcomes distorted by their application. The impression of a professional is
281 not restricted to one incident or audience, it a stable impression across situations and audiences
282 in one context, the organization (Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984; Wayne & Liden, 1995; Roberts,
283 2005). Therefore, creating and maintaining a professional image is an exercise in projection as
284 represented in Figure 1.

285 -----
286 Insert Figure 1 about here
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287 Strategic self-presentation is a pattern of self-presentation intended to maximize approval
288 and minimize disapproval (Doherty & Schlenker, 1991). For women in organizations, this would
289 mean enhancing those attributes that contribute to their success. At the same time, it is also
290 important that such attribution is not clouded over by the qualities that make them successful
291 professionals. This is an important distinction, as this is often used as a basis for sex-stereotyping
292 (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1993). A woman who attains success in a business project, who
293 tends to portray her relational qualities in success rather than expertise or effort, is creating space
294 for misattribution of the source of her success. Therefore, strategic self-presentation is focusing
295 on those professional qualities that contributed to her success. This is different from self-
296 enhancement behavior such as praising oneself or boasting about one’s accomplishments.
297 Strategic self-presentation is a shift in focus from the attributes that would get attention such as
298 being lucky or being able to get help based on relational equations to professional expertise
299 applied to the problem at hand. Focusing on the “professional” attributes that contributed to their
300 success such as expertise and influence in the organization will enable them to counter the
301 barrier of misattribution.

324 offer them as positive behavioral methods rather than as Machiavellian attempts to deceive. It is
325 also my hope that the examples I provide in the next section will not be taken as prescriptions of
326 behavior. My intention is to offer them as illustrations, as methods lend themselves to adaptation.
327 Recognizing that it is ridiculous to propose that all women behave alike, I offer a theory of
328 behavior and hope that women may adapt it to their own aspirations and self-identities to create
329 an image that resonates with what they wish to accomplish. The next section clarifies the
330 impression management methods that can work towards reducing negative sex-role stereotypes
331 attached to women in organizations.

332 **Exemplification**

333 Exemplification is defined by Jones and Pittman (1982) as demonstrating exemplary
334 behavior through integrity and self-sacrifice, that is worthy of being emulated by others.
335 Volunteering for tough assignments and going beyond the call of duty are some of the behaviors
336 associated with exemplification. Exemplification also overlaps with the concept of altruism in
337 the literature on organizational citizenship behavior (Bolino, 1999). Altruism and exemplary
338 behavior have a gendered construction given their strong correspondence with the idea of
339 communality. In OCB literature, altruism is found to not reap as great rewards for women as for
340 men due to the expectancy of communality among women (Kidder & Parks, 2001). Similarly,
341 unless positioned strategically as befitting the notion of impression management, exemplary
342 behavior can be misconstrued as either stereotypical of women or invite backlash for being
343 martyr-like behavior (Harris, Kacmar, Zivnuska & Shaw, 2007). Therefore, women need to
344 redefine exemplification to meet their needs of highlighting altruistic behavior while ensuring
345 that it is not attributed to communality.

346 The fact that it was beyond the call of duty or involved sacrifice should be brought into
347 focus such that there is some degree of reciprocity attached to it. Women are said to lack
348 commitment to their careers because they do not stay in office longer and build network ties with
349 their colleagues. While, staying long hours at work and creating social ties with colleagues are
350 seen as necessities for career advancement (Moore, 1990), women can take advantage of their
351 exemplary behavior to build the same networks by not conceding that such behavior is an
352 attribute of their gender. Exemplary behavior should be used to highlight their commitment to
353 their career as opposed to building merely relational networks. Women should also ensure that
354 exemplary behavior is construed as effort expended towards career progress and not just creating
355 impressions of favorability, as they have generally been wont to do (Lewis & Neighbors, 2005).

356 **Ingratiation**

357 Doing favors for others to be liked is the definition of ingratiation. According to
358 impression management research, ingratiation is a precursor to achievement of a self-serving
359 motive (Jones & Pittman, 1982). Therefore, ingratiation in its completeness could be defined as
360 doing favors for others, to be liked, in order that such favors can be reciprocated by others. This
361 fact, when supplemented by the other fact that almost no organizational function can be
362 accomplished by one person in isolation of other members of the organizations, renders
363 ingratiation a necessity. Effectiveness is a notion that gains credibility only when shared by a
364 supervisor and subordinates, if any. Hence, ingratiation is an integral component of effectiveness
365 perceptions (Eagly, Karau & Makhijani, 1995).

366 However, as with any other impression management method, ingratiation bears with it
367 the risk of misinterpretation if not conveyed strategically. Particularly, in the case of women,

368 ingratiation can be easily misconstrued as supplication. In order to avoid such misunderstanding,
369 ingratiation can be conveyed by ways other than doing favors. They can take the form of
370 genuinely extending a helping hand, without sacrificing self-interest, based on a promise of
371 reciprocity. It can take the form of building professional friendship based on mutual professional
372 goals. Providing confirmation of a colleague's output in front of a supervisor when necessary can
373 also be conveyed as ingratiation, when such action is conveyed to the colleague in question.

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

381 **Demonstration**

382 Though not a widely studied means of impression management, it is relevant to the
383 problem of mitigating sex-stereotyping, as it refers to a demonstration of knowledge about the
384 organization. Having established their trustworthiness through exemplification and ingratiation
385 methods discussed above, women can create a new image of themselves as holders of
386 information. Research shows men to be strategic and women to be communal (See Eagly and
387 Wood, 1991 for a review). However, the communality of women can be pursued to their
388 advantage, in creating channels of information from disparate sources. Women who are able to
389 tap their social networks both within and outside their organization for information will be able

390 to gain positions of strength. Demonstration of an ability to not just collect information but use it
391 strategically to inform supervisor's and team's decisions will improve their professional image
392 and credibility in the team. Such an improvement can lead directly to creating impression of
393 ability that has eluded women thus far (Lyness & Thompson, 1997).

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

400 Having elaborated on a few means of impression management, I feel that it is important
401 to reiterate one of the biggest advantages of impression management: it allows for individualistic
402 application. There is no prototype of the right impression or the right way of managing
403 impressions. It is however possible to engage in circumspection in the manner of self-
404 presentation so that irrelevant information and behaviors do not overshadow relevant
405 contribution. Consequently, women in organizations should see that it is not necessary for them
406 to portray one specific kind of behavior to be perceived as professionals; just as not all successful
407 men in organizations are aggressive or ambitious. One of the significant outcomes of such a
408 realization will be the individual adaptation of impression management methods by women
409 regardless of the level or function they occupy in organizations. It is hoped that by portraying the
410 image of eligibility for success, such women will pave the way for future generations of women
411 to be perceived not from the lens of stereotypes of women in general but that of qualified women
412 capable of success. Therefore, my model is based on the belief that not only can professional

413 women change the stereotypes applied to them individually but through persistence, they can
414 also change the stereotypes about professional women as a collective image in society. Such a
415 transformation of stereotypes should contribute towards supplementing legal measures taken to
416 mitigate the effects of sex-stereotyping in organizations.

417 **A MODEL OF STEREOTYPE TRANSFORMATION THROUGH IMPRESSION** 418 **MANAGEMENT**

419 The premise of my model is that individual women practicing impression management to
420 create individual impressions of successful professional will contribute to the creation of the new
421 stereotype of a successful professional. This step of transforming individual impression into a
422 collective perception regarding the collective of women in organizations will be achieved
423 through the process of reflexivity. The theoretical foundation of my model of stereotype
424 transformation and elaboration of the model is presented in the next section.

425 **Reflexivity**

426 If one considers an organization is a microcosm of society, then the concept of reflexivity
427 as advanced by Giddens (1984) in his theory of structuration provides a means by which
428 individual action, when performed by sufficient numbers of individuals can result in
429 transformation of norms.

430 According to structuration theory there is a recursive relationship between social
431 structures and individuals. This phenomenon is termed reflexivity. Reflexivity is the means
432 through which individuals and groups interact recursively to create norms and structures within the
433 societal framework. In this way “*rationalizations of actions [are] chronically involved in the*
434 *structuration of social practices*” (Giddens, 1984: 26), are perpetuating social systems by the

435 production and reproduction of action in the enactment of everyday social life. It was his belief
436 that it is not only social structures that act on individuals but individual actions influence the
437 creation of social structures. Taking social identity enactment and structuration in conjunction, it
438 can be reasonably ventured that the manner in which social identities are enacted can influence
439 the stereotypes that prevail in society. Hence, enacting social identities strategically with the
440 intent of creating a stereotype that is more resonant with reality can be instrumental in the
441 transformation of stereotypes. Hence I advance the proposition that impression management,
442 practiced by a sub-group of sufficient numbers will result in a transformation of the stereotypes
443 attributed to them, through the process of reflexivity.

444 **Model of change for mitigating the effects of sex-stereotyping**

445 Transformation of stereotypes, even within a smaller structure such as an organization is
446 a function of time and participants. The model of transformation of stereotypes also has certain
447 boundary conditions: consistency, and authenticity. In brief, assuming that individual women
448 approach interactions in the organizations through the framework of impression management,
449 both authentically and consistently; over time, if enough number of women participate, there will
450 be a transformation in the stereotype of women in an organization. The objective towards which
451 this model is geared is a change in organizational norms such that they correspond with systemic
452 efforts like equal opportunity, pay and growth (See Figure 2).

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454 Insert Figure 2 about here
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455 There are four parts to the model: existing sex stereotypes, impression management,
456 effects of impression management on existing stereotypes and expected outcome from

457 impression management. A basic operationalization of the model is that when impression
458 management acts on existing sex stereotypes, it could result in either maintenance or change in
459 stereotype. A change in stereotype should ultimately lead to a change in organizational norms of
460 behavior towards professional women.

461 To begin with, stereotypes may be either strongly or weakly held by individuals.
462 Stereotypes that are more deeply entrenched are naturally correspondingly more resistant to
463 change efforts. On the other hand, stereotypes that are not very strongly believed in are open to
464 transformation upon receiving disconfirming evidence (Stangor & Schaller, 2000). Strong
465 stereotypes however offer a greater challenge in terms of transformation. Greater consistency
466 and persistence will be required to bring about a change in strongly held stereotypes as
467 compared to weaker stereotypes.

468 Impression management will provide a direct avenue for weak existing stereotypes to be
469 transformed into a new and more resonant stereotype of professional women. Women who
470 encounter strong stereotypes that are deeply etched in the mental schema of the perceiver will
471 have to exert greater effort in persisting with consistent impression management.

472 The expected effect of impression management is a change in the perceptions of
473 professional capability of individual women who practice impression management. Practiced
474 consistently, impression management should allay the application of stereotypes to such
475 individual women, thereby modifying existing stereotypes to those that are more representative.
476 This is the effect that is expected in individuals through dyadic interactions. At the group level –
477 work group or organization, this model will hold well only if the majority of women in the group
478 project impressions that are contextually appropriate. It is my belief that the advantages

479 perceived by the individual women will create the traction necessary to change the stereotype
480 itself, without the necessity of any concerted action.

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

488 The model is relevant to the individual woman in the organization by providing an
489 opportunity to every individual woman to alleviate the application of existing wrongful
490 stereotypes to her through the use of impression management. I also believe that given sufficient
491 number of women practicing impression management, the existing stereotypes of women will
492 undergo a transformation to a stereotype that resonates more accurately with the true image of
493 women in organizations.

494 **RELUCTANCE TO USE IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT**

495 Women, it has been found, are averse to the conscious use of impression management
496 tactics. This is despite knowing that their male counterparts benefit disproportionately by
497 engaging in impression management (Singh, Kumar & Vinnicombe, 2002). In another study,
498 Singh & Vinnicombe (2001) showed that women begin to engage in impression management
499 more as they progress in their careers. It is evidence of the importance of impressions in
500 organizations. But, by waiting too long to engage in it, women have to not only counter the

501 impressions of others but also overcome their own previous experiences. It is an indicator of the
502 importance of embracing the advantage of impression management early in their careers.

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

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

524

PITFALLS IN IMPLEMENTATION OF IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

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

531 Keeping the objective of impression management as a tool to improve one's image is the
532 key to being successful in creating the right impressions. The ability to control reactions in
533 situations where its effect may not be apparent sometimes also works towards making the right
534 impression. This is especially true for women as it works towards negating the stereotype of
535 'emotional' women. Using impression management tactics to claim victories when used by
536 women, especially in period of time before the desired identity has been created, usually brings
537 about negative consequences. Both team members and supervisors will view such behavior as
538 typical of the 'tyrannical' woman whose aim is to derogate her male co-workers. It is important
539 to choose one's battles because discretion is the better part of valor.

540 It is paramount to remember that the position at stake is not that of women *as relative to*
541 men but of women as an independent social category. The imperative is creating positive
542 associations with the identity group of working women. Therefore, behavior that seems to be
543 about concern for the collective ego of male co-workers is really about diminishing the
544 interference of the said male ego in their perception of female co-workers. Therefore, self-

545 confidence, self-awareness and self-control need to be exercised in order for women to create an
546 environment in which the interference of sex-stereotypes is minimal.

547 **CONCLUSION**

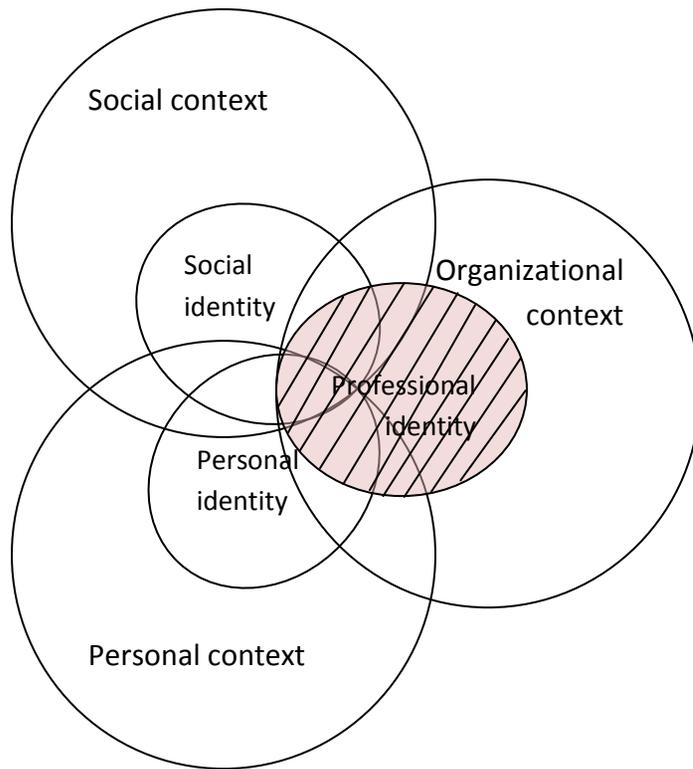
548 Sex-stereotypes affect women because they are more often than not antithetical to their
549 role as working women. It is in the interest of women to control the behavior of others,
550 particularly in response to their own conduct. This control can be achieved by influencing the
551 definition of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

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

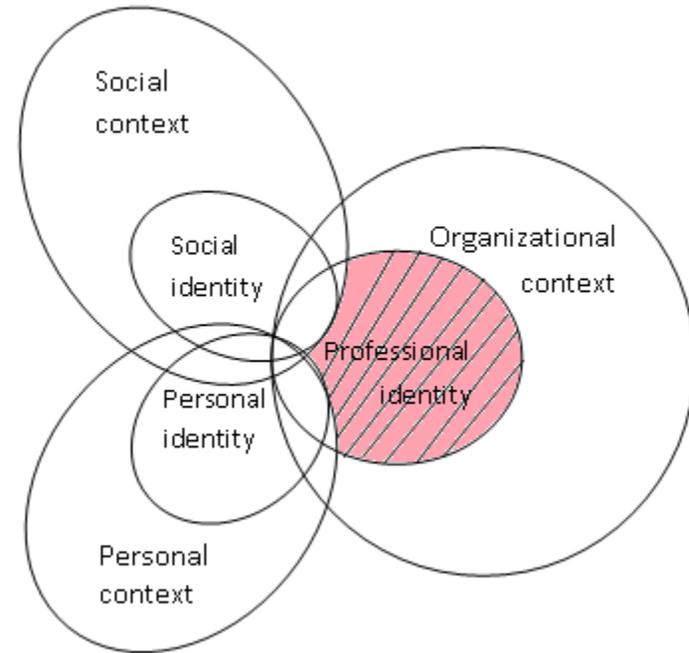
565 Stereotypes, though often used indiscriminately, are also important tools of social
566 interaction. It is impossible to conceive of a complex society operating without the use of

567 stereotypes. Therefore, transformation of a stereotype is essentially modifying an existing
568 stereotype to resonate better with existing realities. An existing reality is that women invest a
569 great deal of resources in acquiring and demonstrating professional capabilities and as such
570 deserve commensurate rewards.

Figure 1: Modes of self-presentation

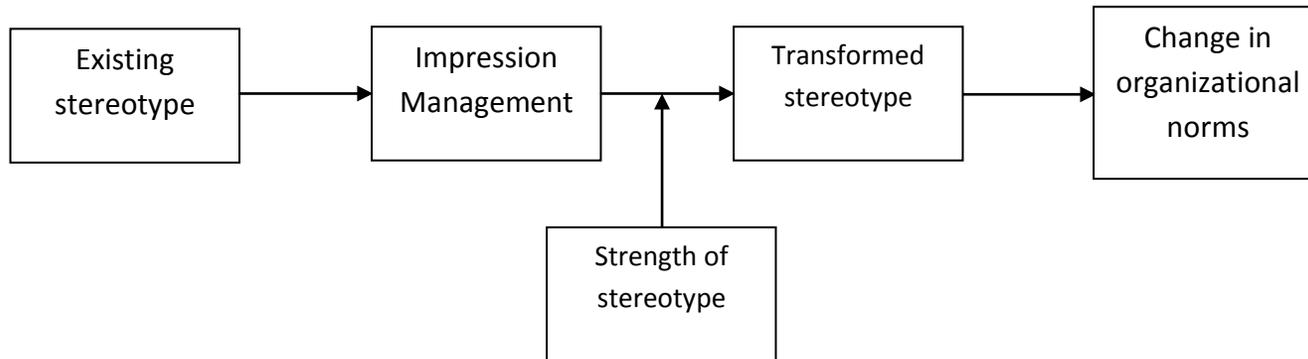


Non-Strategic self-presentation



Strategic self-presentation

Figure 2: Model of change in organizational norms through impression management



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