

# Gender Differences in Impression Management in Organizations: A Qualitative Review

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**Abstract** In this article we review the literature on impression management to determine if there are substantial gender differences in the employment of impression management tactics in organizational contexts. Based on a social roles theory perspective (Eagly, 1987), we examined use of impression management tactics in organizational settings for gender differences in behavior. We expected that men and women would generally report using impression management tactics consistent with gender role expectations and that this might not be advantageous to women in the corporate world. Our review of the literature supported our expectations. We conclude with implications of these findings for an enriched understanding of organizational behavior.

**Keywords** Impression management · Self-presentation · Social roles · Gender roles · Gender differences · Organizational behavior

Women comprise a substantial portion—approximately 46%—of today’s workforce (Department of Labor Women’s Bureau, 2005; Segal, 1992). However, despite nearly equal representation in the workplace, there is a substantial gender difference in their career progression, as men progress faster and advance higher than comparable women do. Several surveys on this issue illustrate this—although nearly one-

half the workforce is comprised of women, they occupy only one-third of all management positions (Colwill, 1993; Department of Labor Women’s Bureau, 2005), and women are more likely to be junior or middle managers rather than senior executives. Only 3% of women in the workforce occupy senior management roles (Segal, 1992).

In addition, an examination of gender differences in career progression indicated that men experienced faster salary progression than did women, even though the men and women in the study were matched on education and work experience (Stroh, Brett, & Reilly, 1992). Therefore, women are woefully underrepresented in the highest ranks of many organizations (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995), and they earn significantly less than do men in comparable jobs (Thacker, 1995). For example, in the year 2004, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that, across all career fields, women’s salaries were 77% of that of comparable men (Department of Labor Women’s Bureau, 2005). Other research indicates that women earn less than men in commensurate jobs even after other relevant variables are controlled (Dreher, Dougherty, & Whitely, 1989). This gender difference in salary is greatest at the highest ranks in an organization (Thacker, 1995).

In addition to differences in salary and advancement, there is a gender difference in corporate drop out rate. A survey of five Fortune 300 corporations indicated that the attrition rate for women is upwards of three times that of comparable men (Wylie-Propersi, 2000). Other work supports this trend (e.g., Brush & Hisrich, 1986; Martin & Meyerson, 1998; Strober, 1982). Thus, women are also selecting themselves out of the corporate world, possibly because they perceive organizational climates to be hostile toward them (Stokes, Riger, & Sullivan, 1995). Others suggest that women encounter the “glass ceiling” and have difficulty progressing past a certain rung on the corporate

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ladder, so they instead leave corporate America (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995).

What accounts for these gender differences in salary, promotion, and corporate drop out rates? Although some research has focused on sex discrimination and sexist corporate cultures as explanations for differences (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995; Mills, 2002), the purpose of this review was to examine another factor that may impact the differences in which men and women fare in the workplace. Specifically, might conformance to gender role-based expectations for behavior by adopting gender role consistent impression management tactics also contribute to these differences? In this article we examined this question in an attempt to illuminate one piece of the glass ceiling puzzle. We propose that gender differences in impression management in organizational settings might partially account for the differential success (as measured by salary, drop out rate, and advancement) of men and women. To examine this question, we took a social roles theory (Eagly, 1987) perspective, as we reviewed the literature on impression management and examine whether men and women have different impression management goals and employ impression management tactics that are consistent with expectations based on gender roles. Impression management goals and behavior that are consistent with feminine gender role expectations may not be successful in helping women to obtain their career objectives.

There is limited research to indicate a link between use of impression management tactics and performance evaluation (e.g., Zivnuska, Kacmar, Witt, Carlson, & Bratton, 2001) and some evidence to indicate that the relationship between them varies for men and women. For instance, Dreher et al. (1989) reported that the use of impression management tactics was predictive of salary for all participants, but there was also a significant gender difference in terms of the type of impression management tactic used. Specifically, exchanges or favor-doing was a positive predictor of men's salaries and a negative predictor of women's salaries. So, the more men did favors for their supervisors, the higher their salaries tended to be, but the opposite was true for women. Kipnis and Schmidt (1988) reported that women who ingratiated (i.e., tried to be likeable) received better performance evaluations than those who did not, whereas this was not the case for men. Finally, Bolino and Turnley (2003a) reported that use of intimidation was positively related to performance evaluation for men but not for women. Thus, it appears that there are relationships between gender, impression management, and outcomes such as salary and performance evaluation. These relationships are consistent with expectations for behavior based on masculine and feminine gender roles, and they suggest that understanding gender differences in the use of impression management is an important piece of the glass ceiling puzzle.

## Impression Management

According to Erving Goffman (1959, p. 9), the founder of the dramaturgical approach, life is like a play, and we each perform for others: "When an individual plays a part, he [*sic*] implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them." Impression management, also called self-presentation, is the process by which individuals attempt to control the impressions others form of them (Goffman, 1959; Jones, 1990; Rosenfeld, Edwards, & Thomas, 2005; Schlenker, 1980). Individuals manage their behavior and personal characteristics in the presence of others in an attempt to create a specific impression on their audience. Thus, an individual may seek to create different impressions on different audiences based on his or her specific goal for the interaction. Individuals may have different impression management goals (e.g., to be liked, to appear competent, to appear successful/high in status), and these goals vary by context (e.g., a person on a date may be primarily interested in self-presenting as likeable rather than competent, whereas the opposite may be true in a job interview). Impression management is usually strategic, but it is not usually deceptive (Leary, 1995). That is, people typically present aspects of themselves oriented toward making their desired impression, but they do not typically fabricate such aspects.

Impression management is distinctly different from two related constructs: social desirability and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). Social desirability is an individual difference characteristic where some individuals tend to behave in a manner they believe will be viewed favorably for the situation regardless of its accuracy or veracity (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). Impression management can co-occur with social desirability when individuals emit a socially desirable statement or engage in a socially desirable action that is intentional and genuinely reflects desired characteristics of the individual. OCB is defined as voluntary behavior that is not rewarded by the organization yet facilitates effective functioning of the organization (Organ, 1988). Like impression management tactics, OCBs are individual choices to engage in the specified behavior. However, unlike impression management, OCBs always benefit the organization, whereas impression management tactics are oriented toward benefiting the individual and may at times actually harm the organization.

### Impression management goals

Different impression management tactics serve different impression management goals (Jones & Pittman, 1982). For instance, an individual who wants to be seen as likeable (goal) will employ ingratiation (tactic) over self-promotion (tactic). Thus, in a given situation people's impression

management tactic will reflect both the task at hand and their own psychological goals. The following are psychological goals that motivate behavior in contexts where impression management is called for: to be liked, to appear competent, to convey status and power, and to induce compliance in others (Smith, Cody, Lovette, & Candry, 1990). There may be individual differences in the importance of each of these goals depending on the context. For example, in a job interview, the most important goal may be to appear competent, followed by appearing likable.

According to the literature, there are a number of ways in which individuals convey their impression management goals. For instance, individuals appear likeable by using the following tactics: flattery and ingratiation (e.g., Gordon, 1996; Jones & Wortman, 1973), emphasizing similarity (e.g., Berscheid & Walster, 1978; Cialdini, 2001), physical attractiveness (e.g., Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, & Longo, 1991), and projecting modesty (e.g., Wosinska, Dabul, Dion, & Cialdini, 1996). Individuals appear competent by engaging in activities designed to convey competence: self-promotion (e.g., Arkin & Shepperd, 1989), staging performances to appear competent (e.g., Goffman, 1959), making excuses for failures (e.g., Giacalone & Riordan, 1990), and claiming obstacles to success (e.g., Shepperd & Arkin, 1989). Individuals convey status by displaying artifacts of power through their attire and accessories (e.g., Mast & Hall, 2004), engaging in conspicuous consumption (e.g., Fussell, 1983), associating with people high in power (e.g., Cialdini et al., 1976), and communicating dominance non-verbally (DePaulo, 1992). People are more concerned with strategic impression management when observers can influence the attainment of a desired goal, when the specific goal is important, and when people believe that observers have formed an impression of them that is inconsistent with their self-image (Bohra & Pandey, 1984; Hendricks & Brickman, 1974; Jones, Gergen, & Jones, 1963; Leary & Kowalski, 1990). In addition, the organizational context impacts which impression management goal is most salient and most likely to be successful (Kacmar & Carlson, 1999). Thus, specific aspects of the context can impact the importance of employing particular impression management tactics.

#### Overview of the review

In our examination of gender differences in impression management in organizational contexts, we expected to find that men and women generally employ different impression management tactics, which are consistent with masculine and feminine gender roles, respectively. For example, we expected that women would tend to use impression management tactics that are consistent with the feminine gender role (e.g., apologies, opinion conformity, and

modesty). Feminine-typed impression management tactics, which are often successful in a social setting, may not necessarily create the desired impression in an organizational setting, where traditionally masculine-typed behaviors (e.g., assertiveness) are usually rewarded. In addition, even when men and women use the same impression management style, they may be perceived differently due to gender role expectations. For instance, although some women learn to behave in a more assertive, masculine-typed manner (e.g., engaging in self-promotion rather than modesty), these kinds of impression management tactics are a violation of normative expectations based on gender roles and may lead to negative consequences rather than to rewards (e.g., Bolino & Turnley, 2003b; Rudman, 1998).

#### Social role theory

Men and women occupy different roles in society (i.e., provider, caregiver) and through these roles, they learn different skills and beliefs that relate to social behavior. Men and women are also subject to different normative expectations for behavior. According to social role theory (Eagly, 1987), these factors lead to different behavior on the part of men and women. Men are expected to be more *agentic* (e.g., assertive, controlling, independent), and women are expected to be more *communal* (e.g., concerned for the welfare of others, interpersonally sensitive, emotionally expressive).

The implication of this theory for impression management in organizations is that men and women may both behave differently and be expected to behave differently in the workplace (e.g., men may feel normative pressure to be assertive, and women may feel normative pressure to be nurturing). These gender role expectations carry over to the types of jobs considered appropriate for men and women as well as to the perception of the behavior of men and women in organizational settings. For instance, a nurse is seen as a feminine-typed job, and a doctor is seen as a masculine-typed job. In addition, assertiveness in a man is seen as a gender “appropriate” behavior, whereas an assertive woman is seen as violating gender-based expectations for behavior and may be thought of in a derogatory manner.

Social roles impact impression management because they establish normative expectations for behavior. Thus, we would expect that the normative expectations for behavior should vary both by the organizational context as well as the characteristics of the interactants. For instance, although self-promotion is considered appropriate for a job interview, a woman who engages in self-promotion may be perceived as violating feminine gender role norms because self-promotion is not a feminine characteristic. This phenomenon has been termed *the backlash effect* (Rudman, 1998). According to the research

on the backlash effect, in response to violation of gender role expectations, individuals experience social and economic reprisals. Thus, women who violate normative expectations for their gender either by their impression management style or by their occupational role may be less likely to be successful in terms of salary and promotion.

#### Selection of impression management style

According to Rosenfeld, Giacalone, and Riordan (1995), impression management tactics fall into one of four categories. First, they are either acquisitive (i.e., attempts to be seen positively) or they are protective (i.e., attempts to avoid looking bad and/or to minimize deficiencies). Second, they are direct (i.e., the self-presenter uses tactics that are self-relevant), or they are indirect (i.e., the self-presenter uses tactics that attempt to control the people and things with which he or she is seen to be associated) (Cialdini, 1989). Thus, a tactic can be a combination of two of the four categories such as acquisitive and direct (e.g., self-promotion) or protective and indirect (e.g., dissimulation). Acquisitive tactics are oriented toward helping an individual to get ahead, whereas protective tactics are oriented toward helping an individual to get along, in an organization (Arkin & Shepperd, 1989).

Tedeschi (1990) used the terms assertive rather than acquisitive, and defensive rather than protective, but, although he did not distinguish between direct and indirect, he made a further distinction between strategic (long term) and tactical (short term) intention. Finally, there are two tactics that have been previously categorized as acquisitive/direct (i. e., intimidation and supplication), which have been moved to a separate category because the strategic nature of these tactics is one that is negative rather than acquisitive. That is, although intimidation may allow a self-presenter to fulfill short-term goals, the long-term impression created by frequent use of this tactic is one of fear and dislike. So, these two tactics are instead categorized as negative/direct.

#### A qualitative review of the literature

For this review, a comprehensive list of impression management tactics based on previous research (e.g., Cialdini, 1989; Rosenfeld et al., 1995) has been compiled. We reviewed each impression management tactic and whether gender differences in use has been reported on research primarily conducted within organizational contexts. See Tables 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 for a comprehensive listing of impression management tactics that includes whether gender differences in use have been reported. This is in terms of general use, rather than in specific contexts or in response to specific events and/or individuals. Also, the majority of the research described in this section contains self-report data and is subject to biases due to the nature of such data. Finally, an important finding is that men use a wider range of tactics (DuBrin, 1991; Karsten, 1994) and report using them more frequently (Bolino & Turnley, 2003a) than do women. Implications for this gender difference will be discussed later.

#### Gender differences in general use of impression management tactics

This literature review revealed ten acquisitive/direct impression management tactics. They are grouped by gender difference in use or lack thereof. According to self-report data, men engage in self-promotion or self-enhancement (the practice of boasting or emphasizing one's best characteristics) more than do women (DuBrin, 1994; Lee, Quigley, Nesler, Corbett, & Tedeschi, 1999; Strutton, Pelton, & Lumpkin, 1995; Tannen, 1994). Men also report doing more favors for others (also called exchange) (DuBrin, 1991; Higgins & Snyder, 1989; Strutton et al., 1995), and they engage in more acclaiming or entitlement (taking responsibility for positive occurrences) than do women (Lee et al., 1999). When it comes to using charm to increase the compliance of others, a study by DuBrin

**Table 1** Gender differences in acquisitive/direct impression management tactics.

Tactic	Definition	Gender differences?
Favor-doing	Doing favors for others to invoke the norm of reciprocity	Men engage in more
Self-enhancement/promotion	Emphasizing one's best characteristics	Men engage in more
Entitlement/acclaiming	Taking responsibility for positive occurrences	Men engage in more
Charm	Using charm to increase compliance of others	Mixed results
Modesty	De-emphasizing one's characteristics after a performance	Women engage in more
Opinion conformity	Expressing opinions or behavior similar to others	Women engage in more
Flattery/compliments	Praising other individuals	Women engage in more
Ingratiation	Attempting to induce liking in others	Mixed results
Exemplification	To act self-sacrificing, moral, worthy	None reported
Other-enhancement	Saying nice things about others, especially through third parties	None reported

**Table 2** Gender differences in acquisitive/indirect impression management tactics.

Tactic	Definition	Gender differences?
Association/basking	Enhancing positivity of clearly associated object	Males engage in more
Physical appearance	Altering one's physical appearance	Mixed results
Boosting	Reducing unfavorable features of a positively linked other	No research
Burnishing	Enhancing the favorable features of a positively linked other	No research
Blurring	Disclaiming negative link with a favorable other	No research
Belittling	Reducing favorable traits of negatively linked other	No research

**Table 3** Gender differences in protective/direct impression management tactics.

Tactic	Definition	Gender differences?
Sandbagging	False claims of inability to create low expectations for performance	Men engage in more
Self-handicapping	Setting up obstacles that make it difficult to accomplish a task	Men engage in more
Excuses	Admitting an action was wrong while denying responsibility	Women engage in more
Hedging	Verbal strategies that imply uncertainty and lack of commitment	Women engage in more
Apologies	Admitting blame, responsibility, or regret	Women engage in more
Justifications	Accepting responsibility for an action while denying it was wrong	Mixed results
Accounts	Verbal damage control	Mixed results
Disclaimers	Making an excuse before an incident occurs	None reported
Remedial	Attempts to repair damaged image after a negative event	No research
Self-reported handicap	Making purported obstacles known	No research

**Table 4** Gender differences in protective/indirect impression management tactics.

Tactic	Definition	Gender differences?
Blasting	Derogating a negatively linked other	Males engage in more
Dissociation	Distancing from others after negative event	None reported
Blaring	Proclaiming a negative link to an unfavorable other	No research
Burying	Disclaiming positive link to unfavorable other	No research

**Table 5** Gender differences in negative/direct impression management tactics.

Tactic	Definition	Gender differences?
Intimidation/coercion	Using threat/warnings to gain compliance	Men engage in more
Supplication	Acting as if in need of help/playing dumb	Women engage in more



(1989) indicated that men use the tactic more than do women, but another study on the topic revealed no such gender difference (DuBrin, 1991).

Women engage in more modesty (de-emphasizing one's characteristics after a performance) (Heatherington, Burns, & Gustafson, 1998; Jones & Wortman, 1973), opinion conformity (expressing opinions or behavior similar to that of others), and flattery/compliments (praising others) (DuBrin, 1994; Eagly & Carli, 1981; Tannen, 1994). In terms of ingratiation (attempting to induce liking in others), some studies indicate that women use this tactic more than do men (DuBrin, 1994; Smith et al., 1990; Tannen, 1994). However, two studies indicated no gender difference (Dreher et al., 1989; DuBrin, 1991), and another indicated that men use ingratiation more than women do (Lee et al., 1999).

The two final acquisitive/direct tactics are: (1) exemplification (presenting as self-sacrificing, moral, or worthy), and (2) other-enhancement (saying nice things about others, especially through third parties). Both tactics have been examined by researchers, but no gender differences in the literature have been reported (Lee et al., 1999; Rosenfeld et al., 1995; Strutton et al. 1995).

In terms of acquisitive/indirect impression management tactics, six were revealed in this literature review. The first is association, also called basking in reflected glory, which occurs when an individual enhances the positivity of a clearly associated object (Cialdini, 1989; Cialdini, Finch, & DeNicholas, 1990). Men use this tactic more than do women (Lee et al., 1999). A few researchers have asked men and women in organizations whether they use their physical appearance to get what they want. In one study, male participants said they did so at a higher rate than did female participants (DuBrin, 1989), however two other studies indicated no gender differences (DuBrin, 1991, 1994). We did not find any literature that reported data for gender differences in use of the final four tactics: boosting (reducing unfavorable features of a positively linked other), burnishing (enhancing the favorable features of a positively linked other), blurring (disclaiming a negative link with a favorable other), and belittling (reducing favorable traits of negatively linked other) (Cialdini, 1989).

This review revealed ten protective/direct impression management tactics. The first is sandbagging (making a bogus claim or false exhibition of inability in order to create low expectations for performance). Men report using this tactic more frequently than do women (Gibson & Sachau, 2000). The next tactic is the practice of self-handicapping, which occurs when an individual sets up obstacles that make it difficult to accomplish a task. Three studies have shown that men self-handicap more than women do (Dietrich, 1995; Hirt, McCrea, & Kimble, 2000; Shepperd & Arkin, 1989), and one study indicated no gender differences (Lee et al., 1999).

In terms of excuses (admitting that an action was wrong while denying responsibility), two studies indicated that women employ this tactic more than do men (Konovsky & Jaster, 1989; Schoenbach & Kleibaumhueter, 1990). One study (Lee et al., 1999) indicated no gender difference. Women are more likely than men to hedge (use verbal tactics that imply uncertainty and lack of commitment) (Carli, 1990; DePaulo, 1992; Tannen, 1994) and to apologize (admit blame, responsibility, or regret) (Lee et al., 1999).

The research on justifications (accepting responsibility for an action while denying it was wrong) reveals mixed results. One study indicated that women engage in justifications more than do men (Konovsky & Jaster, 1989), and one indicates no gender differences (Lee et al., 1999). This conflict may be due to the fact that the participants in the Konovsky and Jaster (1989) study were responding to a decision to engage in questionable ethical behavior, whereas the Lee et al. (1999) study examined general response tendencies, rather than a specific context.

Furthermore, the research on accounts (verbal damage control) reveals conflicting gender differences based on the nature of the account. Women engage in more mitigating accounts, such as concessions (Schoenbach, 1986; Tata, 2000), and men engage in more defensive accounts, such as refusal to take responsibility for an event or to acknowledge that the event occurred (Schoenbach, 1986, 1990).

No gender differences in disclaimers (making an excuse before an incident occurs) have been reported (Lee et al., 1999). The literature on the final two protective/direct impression management tactics have not been examined for gender differences in usage: remedial tactics (attempts to repair damaged image after a negative event), and self-reported handicap (making purported obstacles known) (Gardner & Martinko, 1998; Rosenfeld et al., 1995).

Few researchers have examined protective/indirect impression management tactics. Of the four tactics, one gender difference has been reported: men use blasting (derogating a negatively linked other) more than do women (Cialdini, 1989; Cialdini et al., 1990). In terms of dissociation (distancing from others after a negative event), gender differences in general use have not been examined (Rosenfeld et al., 1995). The same is true of blaring (proclaiming a negative link to an unfavorable other and burying or disclaiming a positive link to an unfavorable other) (Cialdini, 1989). The final category of impression management tactics is negative/direct. The first tactic, intimidation/coercion (using threats and warnings to gain compliance) is one that men use more than do women (DuBrin, 1991; Lee et al., 1999; Offermann & Schrier, 1985; Smith et al., 1990). The other tactic in this category is supplication (acting as if in need of help, which is also called "playing dumb"). The literature indicates that women

engage in this tactic more than do men (Arkin & Shepperd, 1990; Offermann & Schrier, 1985; Tannen, 1994).

In summary, men generally report using the following impression management tactics more than do women: self-promotion, favor-rendering, acclaiming, basking in reflected glory, sandbagging, self-handicapping, blasting, and intimidation. Women generally report using modesty, opinion conformity, hedges, apologies, excuses, and supplication more than do men. Thus, it appears that men and women do generally differ in terms of the way they self-present in organizational contexts<sup>1</sup>. And, as expected, men report using tactics that are more consistent with the masculine gender role, and women report using of tactics that are more consistent with the feminine gender role.

There are two overarching differences between these two lists: The list of tactics favored by men is more assertive and more dominant than the tactics favored by women. This finding cannot be explained away in terms of confounds such as the women surveyed being (owing to the nature of the workplace) less experienced or senior on average than the men, given that many of the studies cited in this section sampled men and women from a variety of levels in their organizational hierarchy and most of the participants were equivalent in terms of years of work experience. Thus, one implication is that men and women at the same level in an organization act differently, and the men project images of greater power. This may impair the visibility of women and perceptions of their suitability for promotion. Moreover, as reported elsewhere (DuBrin, 1991; Karsten, 1994), it does appear that men utilize a wider range of impression management tactics. Our review did not uncover anything about the relative status of the individuals involved in the interactions, as many of these studies looked at interactions among peers.

## General Discussion

Our review addressed the question of the gender difference in career progression by examining whether men and women employ different impression management styles. We hypothesized that women do not advance as quickly in the workplace nor earn salaries as high as men in comparable positions do in part because women tend to self-present in a manner consistent with feminine gender role expectations, as derived from social role theory (Eagly, 1987). Based on these

social roles, women are expected to be more *communal* and men are expected to be more *agentic*. Thus, men and women are subject to different normative expectations for behavior. These factors lead to different behavior on the part of men and women and can be particularly problematic for women. Feminine-typed impression management tactics, which are often successful in a social setting, may not be effective in organizational settings, where men who exhibit traditionally masculine-typed behaviors are usually rewarded. Although some women learn to behave in a more assertive, masculine manner, such impression management tactics are a violation of gender role expectations and may lead to negative consequences rather than to rewards. Thus, women are caught in a double bind where they are either violating norms based on their gender role or norms based on their occupational role.

When we examined gender differences in general impression management, we found considerable evidence that men and women differ in their use of tactics in ways that are consistent with gender role expectations. Specifically, men use more assertive, dominant tactics in general and women use tactics that are more passive and cooperative (e.g., intimidation and self-promotion vs. opinion conformity and supplication, respectively).

Should women change their impression management style?

One conclusion to draw from our review is that it is the women suffer negative repercussions owing to gender or occupational role violation. Commensurate role violation on the part of men does not seem to lead to such negative consequences (Floge & Merrill, 1986; Hultin, 2003). Indeed, there is evidence, both empirical and anecdotal, that men who select occupations that violate masculine gender roles get mistaken for members of higher status occupational groups, whereas the opposite occurs for women (e.g., male nurses get mistaken for doctors, whereas female doctors get mistaken for nurses). This gender difference in repercussions for gender role violation begs the question of whether women should attempt to change the impression management tactics they use to manage their image in the workplace, and, if the answer is yes, in what way should this be accomplished?

It seems that the majority of the tactics used by women are not only feminine-typed, but are also submissive/passive, whereas the opposite is true for men. Consistent with this, Bolino and Turley (2003a) reported that women report engaging in more passive impression management tactic usage, whereas men report engaging a aggressive impression management tactic usage. This should be of no surprise because dominance is part of the masculine gender role (Tepper, Brown, & Hunt, 1993). We have presented evidence to indicate that women who use feminine

<sup>1</sup> To clarify, the vast majority of the research reported in this review was specifically conducted with corporate workers. However, a small minority of the research was conducted with college students. The results are consistent across context, and, because the focus of the review is on what happens in the workplace, we do not qualify some of our general statements about the work generalizing beyond the organization.

impression management tactics fail to impress their supervisors as having the characteristics necessary for the job, as do women who use masculine tactics, and this has implications for their career trajectories.

Of course there are notable exceptions of women who are very successful in the corporate world (see Forbes list of the 100 most powerful women for examples of these women; MacDonald & Schoenberger, 2006). What is it that makes them successful? Is it possible that they are able to appear both warm and competent? Is it that these successful exemplars are able to use masculine impression tactics without violating feminine gender role expectations? One possible explanation is that successful women use essentially a “hybrid” tactic, wherein women use an equal number of masculine- and feminine-typed impression management tactics to balance out the conflicting demands made by their gender and occupational roles. Our review failed to uncover any research on this approach, but we think it is a compelling hypothesis, and we strongly recommend that future researchers pursue this question along with the question of whether individuals can be taught to change their impression management style (Rosenfeld et al., 1995).

Other factors to consider: does the organizational context matter?

One issue that has not yet been examined, but is relevant to gender differences in impression management in the workplace, has to do with social context. Different situations are often associated with specific and varied norms for behavior. For instance, people somehow know that it is not appropriate to talk loudly while watching a movie in a crowded theater, nor is it appropriate to drive through a red light. Similarly, in organizations, it is likely that there are different norms for behavior that vary by the type of organization and the specific situation at hand (see Cialdini, Bator, & Guadagno, 1999, for a review). It follows that impression management may vary in success depending on the political climate of the organization (Zivnuska et al., 2001). Thus factors (such as norms and political climate) peculiar to a specific organization or occupation may impact the likelihood that gender bias will occur. We think that several such factors are relevant to the current review. They are: the gender ratio of the organization, the gender-type associated with the occupation, and the social constraint of the situation.

The gender ratio and corresponding norms for behavior impact gender differences in normative expectations for behavior. Research on this topic indicates that women in masculine gender-typed organizations receive severe punishment for violating behavioral expectations based on their gender. Martin and Meyerson (1998) conducted a case

study on women and power in a masculine-typed organization. In this organization, norms for behavior included self-promotion, overt internal competition, and extremely aggressive behavior, such as yelling at peers during meetings. In this environment, female executives reported being severely punished for adopting these masculine norms for behavior, but that they could not be effective in their jobs if they acted stereotypically feminine. Many tried to combine masculine and feminine behaviors to limited success. Furthermore, in this environment female managers and executives had formal power, but were excluded from informal power networks. This took its toll, and several of the women who participated in the case study left the corporation soon after.

In terms of the gender ratio of the organization, token status in a group alters the type of impression management likely to be used. For instance, Ruble and Higgins (1976) reported that being the lone man or woman in a group primes others for gender-based responding and increases the likelihood that the token will describe him- or herself as more similar to the other sex (e.g., men report being more feminine, and women more masculine). This also suggests that the gender composition of immediate group determines the extent to which individuals present themselves as masculine/feminine. Thus, women in who are in gender-skewed occupations (especially if women are in the minority or the women hold masculine-typed jobs) receive more negative sanctions (because they are perceived as less feminine) than do women in gender-integrated occupations, especially if they also behave in a more masculine manner. This demonstrates the interaction between impression management style and characteristics of the organizational context, and it is especially problematic for women in upper management because they are automatically categorized as violating gender role expectations due to their masculine-typed job.

How does the gender role associated with an occupation impact the perception of an individual in that job? Researchers have examined occupations in terms of gender type associated with the job to examine this question by comparing traditionally men’s, traditionally women’s, and integrated jobs (i.e., occupations where men and women each occupy the occupation at an equal rate). Unfortunately the research in this area is limited but it indicates that as compared to women in integrated occupations, women in male-dominated or female-dominated occupations experience stronger normative pressure to conform to gender role expectations (Gutek & Morasch, 1982). Unfortunately, the sole such study was conducted only with women, so no comparable data on men are available. However, Rudman and Glick (1999) reported that agentic female job applicants were only discriminated against when the job was a feminine one. That is, when the job was masculine, the sex



of an agentic job applicant did not matter, but when the job was feminine in description, an agentic woman was less likely to be hired than was an agentic man. Thus, an agentic woman applying for a stereotypically feminine job received a greater punishment than an agentic man did for violating gender role expectations. In addition, there is also some evidence that, as compared to women in traditionally feminine jobs, women who occupy non-traditional jobs are rated more negatively on characteristics related to femininity and liking (Rudman, 1998; Yoder & Schleicher, 1996). Overall, the results of these studies suggest that having a gender type associated with job increases normative pressure to conform to gender roles.

Another relevant aspect of organizational context concerns the social constraint of the situation. A highly constrained situation is one in which the range of normative behaviors is narrow and the sanctions for deviating from such behaviors are severe (Schutte, Kenrick, & Sadalla, 1985). An unconstrained environment is the opposite: Many behaviors are considered appropriate, and little negative feedback is received if a norm is violated. Although previous research has demonstrated that contexts do differ in constraint (e.g., Price & Bouffard, 1974; Schutte et al., 1985), no one has specifically examined multiple organizational contexts for differences in constraint. We recommend that future researchers address this issue.

#### Practical implications: what managers and organizations can do

There are a number of policy changes that organizations and managers can implement to help balance out the career progression of men and women. For instance, managerial jobs can be reframed to emphasize the feminine-typed qualities needed to excel in the position (e.g., good communication skills). Reframing a position in this way increases perceptions of fit between individual and occupational roles. Increasing the emphasis on job relevant information may also help with this (Tosi & Einbender, 1985).

Deaux (1985) asserted that gender differences in attribution patterns only occur in contexts where there is a gender difference in performance expectations. An implication of Deaux's literature review is that, if jobs and organizational norms where there are no gender differences in expectancies are created, the gender-based attribution gap will decrease. Thus, one practical implication is that managers should consider developing gender neutral evaluation criteria for their subordinates.

In terms of recruitment, we recommend that organizations have an equal number of female and male interviewers because women are less likely than men to evaluate a female job candidate more poorly than an equal male candidate (e.g., Foschi, Lai, & Sigerson, 1994). Regardless of gender,

all interviewers should be motivated to form accurate impressions of the applicant pool (Neuberg & Fiske, 1987). Furthermore, we also recommend that employers make an attempt to correct the imbalance between the salaries men and women receive for the same occupation in order to increase their feelings of worth and equality (Heilman, 1983). We would also like to point out that these recommendations should be implemented throughout all ranks in organization as these gender differences in impression management have implications for women at all stages of their careers. Not only may gender differences in the use of impression management tactics impact the selection process, women may be evaluated negatively for raises and promotion in part due to their use of feminine impression management tactics, which may be one reason why the corporate drop out rate is so much higher for women and why there are a small minority of women in the highest ranks of corporate America.

In terms of leadership, we recommend that policies, practices, and training de-emphasize gender issues in the work place. For instance, Van Nostrand (1993) recommended that employers be aware of ways to combat sexism. According to Van Nostrand, leaders should model behavior that de-emphasizes sexism, and they must face their collusion with sex discrimination before their organizations can change. As an example of why this is important Van Nostrand discussed how managers may make hiring decisions based in part on their perceptions of the opinions of the executives in power. If the executives in power make it clear that gender equality is the appropriate corporate norm, then managers may make hiring decisions that support that norm (Larwood, 1991).

We also recommend that organizations offer training to women leaders on the topic of social role theory and impression management, as the literature on leadership indicates that men and women adopt different leadership styles (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003) and it is also possible that men and women who adopt the same leadership style may be perceived differently owing to gender role expectations (see Bass, 1985, Burns, 1978, and Greenleaf, 2002, for detailed descriptions of the three leadership styles considered to be effective: transformational, transactional, and servant). Indeed the work of Eagly et al. (2003, p. 573) suggests that this is the case: "The classic argument that leadership roles constrain behavior so that sex differences are absent among occupants of the same role fails to take important considerations into account. Not only may the norms associated with gender roles spill over to influence organizational behavior, but leaders' gender identities may also influence their behaviors in a direction consistent with their own gender role."

Finally, organizations should also endeavor to produce a supportive corporate environment (Van Nostrand, 1993). If

employees perceive that the corporate culture is supportive, they will work hard to promote gender-equity issues (Ashford, Rothbard, Piderit, & Dutton, 1998). In addition, Heilman and Martell (1986) reported that: “Exposure to successful women in heretofore male-dominated occupations can reduce sex bias in personnel selection” (p. 376). They recommend that a newsletter that highlights successful women in the organization can help to minimize sexism in the workplace.

#### Limitations of this review

There are a few two notable limitations of this review. First, we only examined literature in English-speaking Western Culture. Because of this, we can draw no conclusions about the generalizability of these results to non-English-speaking or non-Western cultures. Second, we only examined published literature and, as with any review, there is always a question of the “file drawer” problem. Specifically, the data on gender differences in use of impression management tactics may look very different if we were able to consider all unpublished studies on this topic as well.

#### Conclusion

In conclusion, the literature we reviewed indicates that men and women tend to vary in the frequency with which they employ different impression management tactics, and, in some cases, masculine-typed impression management tactics tend to lead to better performance evaluations and salary, whereas feminine-typed impressions management tactics tend not to lead to those benefits. Furthermore, the literature shows that, when women adopt masculine impression management tactics, they are often punished for transgressing norms rather than rewarded for adopting what for men are successful tactics. Each link in this chain needs to be more carefully examined by future researchers. For now, it remains an intriguing empirical question whether or not these gender differences are part of the puzzle of why men and women experience different organizational outcomes.

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