Gender and Impression Management: Playing the Promotion Game

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ABSTRACT. Little attention has been paid to the role which impression management (IM) of genuine and substantial talents and commitment plays in the careers of female and male managers seeking promotion. IM studies have largely investigated the supervisor/subordinate relationship, often with samples of business students in laboratory settings. In the Cranfield Centre for Developing Women Business Leaders, we have focused on the use of IM by practising managers. In this paper, we examine previous literature for indications that gender may be important in explaining differences in IM behaviours. We then report findings from a survey and a qualitative study, showing that gender, especially combined with age and job level, is a differentiating factor in managers' inclinations to use particular IM behaviours. Many women (and some men too) seem uncomfortable with using IM. Women do not always want to play "the organizational game" by the male-constructed unwritten rules, but prefer to trust good management and systems fairness for just rewards. Younger and junior level women managers often recognize that IM may be a useful tool but reject its use for themselves. Women seem to prefer to rely on extra high performance and commitment for visibility to their seniors rather than the networking, ingratiation and self-promotion strategies used more by males. An important consequence is that as ambitious young males use job-focused IM in addition to self and manager-focused strategies, this is likely to leave young women at a considerable disadvantage for promotion, if the strategies are successful.

KEY WORDS: age, ethics, gender, impression management, ingratiation, managers, modesty, promotion, reputation, visibility

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Introduction

There have been few research reports into the use of impression management (IM) strategies by managerial and professional populations, other than Singh and Vinnicombe's (2001) study of IM strategies to signal high commitment. Recently, Ferris et al. (2000) indicated the need for more research into political skills at work, because of the increasing importance of this area in human resource management. Organizations are using political skills as selection criteria without explicitly recognizing and labeling them as such. The political skill portfolio comprises self-monitoring,

tacit knowledge and practical intelligence, social intelligence, emotional intelligence, ego-resiliency and social self-efficacy. Impression management is a manifestation of such political skills at work.

Impression management is the process whereby individuals seek to influence the perception of others about their own image (Rosenfeld et al., 1995). The prime reason for attempting to "manage" the impression we create is that through the construction of "desirable" social identities, our public selves come closer to our ideal selves. We seek to influence how we are perceived, and therefore, the way in which others treat us. The effect of such behaviour may directly impact material outcomes. For example, giving the impression that one is competent and ambitious can lead to benefits such as improved performance ratings and career-enhancing opportunities (Wayne and Liden, 1995). IM behaviours may be focused on the self, the manager(s), and the job. Self-focused strategies include self-promotion, self-presentation and self-identification, whilst manager-focused IM refers to upward influencing strategies such as ingratiation and networking. We use the term job-focused IM to refer to the extra–contractual aspects of high performance and commitment.

This paper reviews previous research on IM and gender, identifying a case for expected differences in the inclination to use IM for career advancement. (Gender is used in this paper to refer to biological sex.) Career planning systems are generally presented as rational, indicating that to improve chances of career success, individuals should acquire appropriate skills, knowledge and experience. Employees accepting this view may however become confused when, having done all that seemed to be required, they do not achieve the anticipated career rewards. They may have overlooked the importance of the subjective part of the promotion process. They may have omitted to use a powerful tool for advancing their career – impression management. Promotion decisions are very influenced by the rating of potential or "promotability" by supervisors, which is a subjective assessment based on managerial perceptions and an estimate of the

promotion decision's anticipated effectiveness (Stumpf and London, 1981).

Some individuals believe that for promotion, they have to deliver extremely high performance, manage the impressions that they give, and build relationships with their superiors. However, there is evidence that women tend to believe that doing a good job is sufficient, and that political behaviours should not be necessary for promotion. Hence women's inclination to use IM may not be as strong as that of males.

Study 1 was a survey of a U.K. business school's alumnae and their male peers to investigate the frequency with which they reportedly used IM behaviours to gain visibility for career advancement. Study 2 concerns IM and its impact on promotion, examined through 34 in-depth interviews in a major international management consulting firm. It explores whether IM was perceived by male and female managers to be a significant tool in the promotion of managers to senior positions. Drawing on the findings of these two studies, we discuss the gender differences found, and put these into context with previous work. We conclude with suggestions for further research, and the implications of the findings for practice.

Impression management and women's careers

The starting point for the research projects reported here was identification from interviews in Singh and Vinnicombe (2001) that successful British and Swedish engineering managers seemed to manage actively the impressions of commitment which they gave to their superiors. However, males seemed to use more task-based strategies such as ensuring that they delivered the manager's goals as well as their own, whilst some females built closer relationships with their managers. Interestingly, more females overall said they used IM strategies, but a number of individuals (more females than males) felt that the use of IM was not for them, even though they recognized that there was an organizational contest for promotion being played.

It appears that gender might be a factor in the

willingness to engage in some types of IM. If that is the case, and if IM successfully influences the achievement of the desired career rewards as suggested by Kilduff and Day (1994), then that could constitute another barrier for women (and men) managers who do not wish to use IM in cultures where visibility is key to promotion. Such cultures are becoming increasingly more prevalent, following the move in the 1990s across western economies to flatter organizational structures, project work, virtual organizations, downsizing and increased internal competition. Visibility was found to be a key component of the cycle of success in a study of directors' careers (Vinnicombe et al., 2000). It facilitated attraction of attention from early mentors, and growth through access to highly challenging assignments in wider arenas, from which more senior sponsorship was gained, in an upwardly repeating cycle to board-level positions for both men and women. IM may help to get that success cycle started.

Current research shows little improvement in the numbers of women who gain admission to the uppermost tier of management, where the "glass ceiling" has settled after some improvement at middle level in both the U.K. and the U.S.A. (Singh et al., 2001). Oakley (2000) describes the many barriers blocking women's career paths to leadership positions. These include gender stereotyping of leadership, women's access to line management positions, operational and budgetary experience, hidden promotion and reward systems, power relationships and corporate culture, particularly the old-boy networks at top level.

As a result of years of sex-role stereotyping, there is considerable lack of clarity about women's talents, ambitions and expectations. Maddock and Parkin (1993) found that male managers thought that women lacked ambition, whilst most of the females said that they were waiting for a "green light" from their managers to encourage them to apply for promotion. This is similar to Oakley's findings that gendered communication style was an important barrier, and that women were less likely than men to engage in self-promoting behaviors at work. Tannen (1994) suggests that this results from childhood

socialization, where girls do not want to stand out from their peers and where they balance their own needs with those of others. Girls also learn to use a more polite, egalitarian and considerate linguistic style, which when used by women in management is often perceived to be evidence of weak leadership. Tannen talks of the need for women managers to interact with the right demeanor for the authority that they seek, as it has to be recognized by the other parties as deserving of authority. With recognition follow resources, which may enhance managerial performance still further. IM is likely therefore to be an important tool for successful careers and effective management.

Women often do not buy into the male-constructed rules and values of the game of business and organizational life, but take a different view of what business and organizations should be (Fletcher, 1999). Heim (1993) commented that while negotiating, women focus on what is fair whilst men play to win, and that this is grounded in childhood experiences. Girls play differently; most often in twos, compared to boys who play in groups or teams, pushing for leadership, making themselves attractive to the team "picker" even if they do not like them or are scared of them. Through that childhood and adolescent experience, males therefore come to corporate life with a better understanding than females of what they need to do to be chosen by those with power and influence.

Several studies have shown that women tend to underrate their achievements, and have less confidence in their abilities than their line managers have for them. Rudman (1998) described the female modesty effect, which leads women to be more modest than men in public situations such as the workplace. Women who are assertive and act in a confident manner are likely to be evaluated negatively, and will be less liked by their peers, particularly other women, because they are out of their traditional role. Rudman found that the use of IM substantially increased perceptions of competence, but for women users, it was at the cost of social attraction. This leaves women in a "catch 22" situation with negative consequences whichever option they choose.

Another reason why women may not self-promote is their preferred transformational leadership style (Rosener, 1990). Transformational managers would see it as part of their managerial role and duty to notice the performance, strengths, development needs and ambition of their subordinates. In transformational managers' teams, individuals would be less likely to feel a need to use IM to gain visibility, because they would receive attention and feedback from their manager in a non-competitive environment (Fletcher, 1999). Women and men who are transformational leaders may also trust their own superiors to notice their achievements and development needs, and hence feel less inclined to deliberately use IM.

Gender, IM and ethics

A further debate relevant to gendered use of IM is the issue of whether men and women differ in their ethical frameworks. If so, they may then differ in their inclination to use IM strategies which some might view as unethical, for example, self-promotion to gain advantage over colleagues with similar performance. Gilligan (1982) demonstrates that men and women differ in their fundamental moral orientation, with women operating from a caring framework and men from one of justice. Others agreeing with this position include Betz et al. (1989), who found that men were more likely to engage in various unethical practices, such as expense account padding and using information for personal gain.

A contradictory position is also presented in the literature, concluding that there are no significant gender-based differences between the ethical frameworks held by men and women. Barnett and Karson (1989) found no consistent gender effects evident in relation to managerial values and executive decision-making, and Derry (1989) showed gender to be unrelated to self-reported experiences of moral conflict or justice orientation.

Social role theory provides a useful theoretical framework to explain how gender-based differences in ethical perceptions are influenced by work experience (Franke et al., 1997). Men and women are said to behave in accordance with the stereotypes associated with the social roles they perform. Women are generally viewed as more "communal" (i.e. friendly, unselfish, concerned for others), whilst men are typically viewed as more "agentic", in other words, independent, assertive and instrumentally driven (Eagly and Wood, 1991). Social role theory is particularly helpful as it recognizes that each individual occupies a number of roles and may change behaviour according to role requirements.

Franke et al. argued that significant gender differences would be evident in views of business practices as ethical or not, but that such differences would decline with increased work experience. Their meta-analysis across 66 studies involving over 20,000 respondents revealed that gender differences in ethical reasoning did decline in samples where respondents had more work experience. Of particular relevance to the studies presented here is the finding that ethical conflicts are likely to be more of an issue for junior female employees than their more senior counterparts.

Impression management and promotion

In one of the few IM studies focusing on promotion and individual differences such as gender, Thacker and Wayne (1995) predicted that females would receive less favourable assessments of promotability than males, because of bias in evaluation of performance. They unexpectedly found that females received higher evaluations than males. However, their study took place in a university shortly after an affirmative action program, which may have biased the findings. They found that influence tactics did impact promotability assessments. They did not examine self-promotion or job-focused IM in their study, but suggested more research into the effectiveness of different combinations of IM tactics.

The subjective nature of appraisal and promotion systems is a barrier for women in male-dominated workplaces where gender stereotyping persists. Alimo-Metcalfe (1994) found that women with equal competence tended to receive

lower performance assessments from male supervisors than men, despite equal performance. For women managers, there is often tension between their identity as women and their professional identity in a male-dominated environment where suitability for promotion is assessed on a set of male managerial characteristics (Schein et al., 1996).

People operate with varying levels of awareness of the impressions which they make on others. Self-monitoring is the ability and willingness to read verbal and non-verbal cues and alter one's behaviour accordingly (Gangestad and Snyder, 2000). Having "read" the situation, self-monitors are motivated to control their expressive behaviour, self-presentation and non-verbal behaviour, in order to be seen as fitting the desired role requirements in the organisation. Visibility to managers is of key importance, but not all behaviours are easily visible, and managers may not individuate when seeing women around them. Kilduff and Day (1994) suggested that low self-monitors, who do not manage their visibility within the organizational promotion arena, would not be as successful in achieving promotions. High self-monitorship and the use of IM may help women and men to send the right kind of signals, and hence construct the desired identity for further promotion. The following two studies examine how impression management is used for increased visibility, reputation management and promotion in managerial and professional samples in the U.K.

Study 1: Strategies to enhance visibility for career advancement

Study 1 builds on the interview findings in Singh and Vinnicombe (2001) which reported IM strategies used by managers to increase the visibility of their commitment. Those strategies seem just as relevant for increasing visibility of performance and personal criteria to achieve career advancement. A questionnaire was therefore developed and pre-piloted with women attending executive development courses. A postal survey was then undertaken of MBA alumnae of a U.K. business school and their current male work peers. All had graduated between 1978 and 2000, and over half were now senior managers or directors. Females returned 210 questionnaires (45% response rate) as did 95 of their male peers. We omitted the self-employed and non-employed from the analysis, resulting in 259 respondents in the final sample. Over 40% worked in management consulting and financial services firms, 12% were in the public sector, 11% were in engineering and manufacturing, 7% in healthcare and pharmaceuticals, 5% in telecommunications, and the rest were spread across a range of industries.

Measures used in Study 1

The 25-question index (alpha reliability 0.71) covered self-focused IM (self-promotion of ambition, self-promotion of successes, maintaining a professional demeanour); manager-focused IM (ingratiation and networking); and job-focused IM (high performance, visible commitment and preparation). Individuals were asked the frequency with which they used the IM strategies on a 5-point scale, to achieve visibility for advancement to senior positions. A full report of the study including preliminary validation of the new Impression Management for Managers Scale (IMMS) is reported elsewhere (Singh and Vinnicombe, 2000a). The demographic variables of interest were gender, age and managerial level. This paper reports significant results of *t*-tests of independent means, and correlations between variables, using SPSS software.

Findings of survey in Study 1

Manager-focused impression management
Results showed that males were reportedly using more manager-focused IM strategies than females, with significantly higher frequency of networking, and a higher mean for ingratiation. The responses from males to the question on how often they sought out key people out to network with showed much higher frequency ($p < 0.000$) than the females, indicating that the men in this sample were using their networks

very instrumentally. Age and job level interacted with gender to reveal more significant results. There were significant differences between males and females in the under-31 age group on networking, males reporting higher frequency of use. When gender was controlled on the ingratiation behaviours, managerial level became significant for females. Junior females reported much less use of ingratiatory strategies than their middle and senior colleagues, whilst males of all levels were similar in reported frequency of ingratiation.

Self-focused impression management

The results for self-focused strategies showed that males reported more self-promotion of successes and self-promotion of ambition than the females, but not significantly so, except for the group aged 30 and under, where the males' frequency was significantly higher than the females.

Another self-focused strategy is to present a totally work-focused image, which we have called professional demeanour. Females reported using this strategy significantly more often than males. Level and age combined with gender also revealed more significant differences on this set of behaviours. Senior women had the highest frequency (70%) of managing their professional demeanour, compared to middle (52%) and junior women (31%), although females in the youngest age group used this strategy significantly ($p = 0.004$) more than their male colleagues. One of the questions in this scale showed a highly significant finding. Women managers in this sample were deliberately not talking about their family at work, to appear totally work-focused ($p < 0.000$). This situation may be found in male dominated organizations where there are few female role models in senior roles, so that women entering the "male club" as they progress upwards have to make decisions about whether to blend into existing cultures regarding informal conversations, or stand out and risk being seen as unprofessional.

It is also interesting that the item "interacting on an equal basis with the manager" showed that this is done significantly more by males. This could be seen to imply that males are expecting to be treated as equals by their managers, and

hence that they expect to reach that level, tacitly demanding respect as equals.

Job-focused impression management

There were strong indications of job-focused IM being used by both men and women. Indeed, the two items in the index with the highest means were managing the delivery of one's own goals and delivering the manager's goals. Other highly used job-focused strategies were for women, preparing extremely well for meetings with senior people, and for men, frequently exceeding supervisory expectations. Females were using high performance, visible commitment and preparation strategies more often than the males. In addition, women in the 40+ age group reported significantly higher frequency of visible commitment (staying late and working long hours) than the other age groups of women.

On six of the eight types of IM investigated, the standard deviations for the females were larger than for the males, indicating a greater spread of response frequencies in the female respondents. In other words, males were more similar to each other in the frequency with which they used the various types of IM.

Discussion of Study 1 findings

Both men and women used job-focused IM very frequently, but men were using significantly more manager-focused strategies than women were. Young and junior men reported higher frequency of use of IM than young and junior women in this highly educated sample, and they had a broader mix of strategies, using self-promotion, networking and ingratiation as well as high performance. If these strategies are successful, and the literature review indicated that they might well be so, then young women are likely to soon fall behind their male peers. Many female managers who did use IM said in open-ended comments that they only started to do so after they noticed men with equivalent experience and qualifications getting more promotions. Commenting at the end of the questionnaire, a female manager in the 31–40 age group noted: "My biggest barriers are my male colleagues who

excel in making themselves heard and claiming seniority often despite lack of experience or knowledge. And my despondency at seeing this and losing the will to fight back, it's an impossible task." It would appear from this survey that she is not the only woman who is not using IM as much as male peers.

Study 2: Impression management and promotion

Research was undertaken in a large international management consulting firm based in the U.K., to elicit views from consultants on the conditions necessary to advance within their firm. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 19 female and 15 male consultants, representing a variety of ages, grades, and business areas. All interviewees were asked to imagine that an ambitious friend sought advice on how to progress within the firm. The second question asked interviewees to consider any action which they would advise their friend definitely not to do, which might negatively impact their advancement. Interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed and analysed using QSR NVivo software.

Study 2 findings

Men and women gave very similar advice on how to progress within the firm in terms of the core components of career advancement. However, there was some interesting divergence on the views of the promotion process, and the need for networking.

The promotion process

There was a clear view that to gain promotion, individuals needed to acquire fairly early in their career a good understanding of the "rules of the game" with regard to expectations of individuals in their approach to work. For men, this involved gaining early understanding of the prevalent success model within their organization and emulating it. There were two approaches: hard work, and fitting the mould.

Some men felt that building a reputation with seniors based on quality of work was necessary, as was the requirement to be flexible and help others even when busy. As one male director said:

> I think basically people need to build their reputation with the partners and directors for the quality of work they could do. They have to demonstrate a degree of flexibility to the requirements of consulting. They should always get involved if only for a fleeting appearance.

It was important to be positive, to have good performance reviews on projects and to show that as an individual, they represented sustainable value to the business. Others felt that promotion was not purely based on merit, and had much to do with fitting a mould to gain recognition. There was a strong feeling that partners promoted people like themselves, thus requiring identification with the prevailing success model.

> It is nothing to do with quality of work. It's a very male culture and the people that do get partnership tend to be like the existing partners (Male Director).

Amongst the women, there was similar diversity of views. For some, the process was one of working hard to ensure that they acquired the right skills and experiences to progress to the next levels. These included generating new business, managing large pieces of work and being technically able. Advice from a female Principal Consultant was to demonstrate clearly such ability.

> Never lose sight of what the firm really values which is the ability to bring money through the door. Therefore demonstrating that you can do business development is absolutely fundamental. You need to be able to demonstrate that you can lead and manage large pieces of complex work because that is the essence of what they do now.

Like the men, some women felt it was important to appear flexible and positive, to be visible in one's own group and to show that as individuals, they added value. For other women, the view was that promotional outcomes were affected by institutionalised factors, and that

masculine-typed management characteristics were more highly valued (Schein et al., 1996). Whilst this would negatively impact women's advancement, most women were aware of this but nonetheless chose to stay within that environment.

There was also a view that to progress, it was important to signal to senior organizational members both one's ambitions and achievements. A senior female commented that it was not sufficient to work long hours in order to get promotion.

> Some of the people I've worked with have worked 12 and 13 hours in the day and expect themselves to get noticed and promoted on the basis of that and I have to take some of those people to one side and say it's not the way it works here.

The women interviewees were clear that hard work alone was insufficient, and that for promotion, the contribution had actually to be recognized. Their advice for the achievement of recognition was to emulate the behaviour modelled by current partners, even if this did not feel comfortable or truly reflective of their own style (Ibarra, 2000). However, concern was raised as to whether such contributions would be valued since they felt that partners would only acknowledge valuable contributions coming from people like themselves. As the vast majority of partners were male, they were not used to seeing valuable contributions from women.

In this discussion of the promotion process, both men and women were clear that reading the organization in terms of identifying key organizational practices and behaviours was necessary to progress. Though focusing on very similar themes of understanding the rules of the game, working hard and fitting the mould, men saw this in a mechanistic way, identifying a success model and emulating it. Women, on the other hand, expressed discomfort at having to behave in a self-promoting way, though recognizing that this was what was required for promotion. They also said that it was difficult to ask for help without being considered "high maintenance", which would lead to a negative reputation.

Networking

Both men and women viewed networking as important for career advancement. For men, networking was seen as a key and necessary activity to which time and attention should be given, and they discussed it in a rather utilitarian way. It was seen as a method through which individuals could maintain a profile within the organization and enhance their personal reputation. Equally importantly, a network was seen as a way of ensuring recognition by the firm of an individual's value, as two male principal consultants commented.

> Now part of merit is about does the business recognise you as being very valuable and that relies on networking.
>
> Networking or linkage to partners to make your career has become far more important in my view, and if you don't have that network, you're lost today.

Females also discussed the critical importance of networking as a key activity, particularly with senior members of the firm. Networking was seen to be particularly important in loosely structured organizations like consulting, as otherwise recognition of individual contributions might be lost.

> Perhaps because we're out with clients much of the time, we do have to network to even function in the role, let alone to progress (Female, Principal Consultant).

It was recognized that, as there were few formal networks, it was important to network in a number of areas, and not to rely on working on a single project to build a reputation. For women, a network was seen as central to developing a profile within the firm. Such a profile was necessary for advancement, building up a reputation as someone who was competent and capable of delivering. Their network would include sponsors or advocates, a group of people who would vouch for the quality of their work, an important asset in a system based on word-of-mouth recommendations.

Some concern was expressed that networking was not a natural activity for women. As one female Principal Consultant put it:

The people that get promoted quickly are exceptionally effective networkers. Interestingly that doesn't suit women.

The view was that, given the importance of networking for acquiring career-enhancing information and opportunities, and for making known one's strengths and achievements, women's reluctance to participate in such activities was likely to be detrimental to their careers.

Discussion of Study 2 findings

The evidence above shows that both men and women had a good understanding of the importance of informal organizational processes for career advancement. This was consistent across grade and business unit. They considered it essential to provide senior organizational members with an image of the self that was consistent with the success criteria evident within the organization. The indication was, however, that women were less comfortable in engaging in these behaviours, although it was clear that such behaviour did not come naturally to all the men. Whilst men and women agreed on the elements necessary for advancement, women provided a much deeper analysis of why each component was important. Men appeared to see the issues in black and white terms, with little discussion around the fact that this was what needed to be done. In general, their view was that "this is the way it works, so get on and do it". Women on the other hand, though clearly recognizing what needed to be done, took much greater pains to describe and explain exactly what they meant, and why particular courses of action were necessary.

It was also evident that, whilst capable of giving advice to a friend on how to advance, many of the women were not comfortable about actually taking their own advice. They very rarely spoke in the first person, and frequently referred to things they had seen others do to advance, taking pains to disassociate themselves from such behaviour. It is thus clear that, far from being unaware of the way in which promotion operated within their environment, the women in this study generally knew the rules of the game, but many chose not to play. Social role theory (Eagly and Wood, 1991) was particularly useful in interpreting these findings. The way in which advice was presented by males and females clearly reflected the masculine "agentic" and feminine "communal" styles. Men viewed the process of advancement in straightforward terms, whilst women felt the necessity to justify and contextualise their comments. The findings also supported those of Franke et al. (1997), with older, more experienced women in the sample seeming to accept more readily that the system operated as it did. The view was that the use of IM may well be necessary for advancement, and that success within the firm required emulation of other successful organizational members. Younger female consultants, with fewer years' experience were less aware of the subtleties of the "informal" aspects of promotion than their more experienced counterparts. Discomfort with use of IM was more frequently expressed by younger women, as was the belief that one's personal style and work-based contribution would be adequately rewarded.

Discussion

These two studies indicate the importance of informal influence processes in promotion systems, and the different inclinations that individuals have to use impression management strategies to play (or ignore) the unwritten rules of the game. For some, particularly males, the use of IM seemed almost natural, whilst for others, there was a sometimes uncomfortable learning process. Some individuals, particularly females, did not wish to use IM at all, despite recognizing its potential. This evidence supports the findings of Dobbins et al. (1990) that females were more likely to be low self-monitors, important as they also found that high self-monitors emerged more frequently as leaders. Oakley (2000) also commented that women would be less likely to self-promote than men, and that women are often not attracted to senior positions because of discomfort with the culture and dynamics in senior management. These findings echo those of Singh

and Vinnicombe (2001), who showed that it was considered normal by some ambitious males to show – sometimes very deliberately – that they were very highly committed. Senior women in that study emulated those behaviours, whilst some males said they had to learn how to be more visible, as it did not come naturally. Study 1 indicates that women managers only started to use IM equally as often as the men when they reached their thirties, sometimes after noticing male peers going ahead, as open-ended comments showed. Younger and junior males used a broader range of strategies (manager-focused, self-focused and job-focused), whilst more young women (and we might speculate that they are perhaps aware only of the formal promotion systems at this early career stage), used more rational persuasion strategies of high performance and visible commitment. Study 2 found that men were actively reading the promotion systems in their organization and working to fit the career success model, whilst women read what was required, but felt uncomfortable in moulding themselves to the required style.

Study 2 identifies the importance of gaining reputation, particularly through recognizing the need to add value, which was also one of the manifestations of commitment identified in Singh and Vinnicombe's (2000b) study of engineering managers used as evidence for promotion. It was also important that acknowledgment of the contribution was achieved, confirming the reciprocal influence process loop described by Thompson and Luthans (1983). Women in Study 2 felt that their contributions would not be equally valued, and hence they would gain less reputation, due to stereotyping and rewards being given to in-group (i.e. male) members. Study 1 confirmed that more males interacted frequently on an equal basis to their managers.

Study 1 confirmed that women were deliberately avoiding talking about their family at work, providing further support for Singh and Vinnicombe's (2001) identification of residual gender stereotyping by some senior males regarding women talking informally about their children. In some organizations, it is not acceptable and is risky for future career progression to promote a "whole" identity (Sheppard, 1989).

Only a work-focused individual will gain the entry ticket to the next round. This restriction raises an issue for women with children, that energy has to be spent in positioning themselves to fit a model which still sees them as "other", despite their human and management capital investments.

As previous research suggests, female modesty may be an important factor in women's reluctance to self-promote (Rudman, 1998), and it would seem that women in these studies, particularly younger women, are resisting or may even be unaware of the need to make themselves more visible. Yet self-promotion, ingratiation and networking skills form part of the criteria for the rules of the game of acknowledgement, recognition and promotion, which most of these managerial and professional males seem to understand and comply with, in a more straightforward and less emotional way. Women as more transformational managers tend not to see the need for IM, as they work with and develop subordinates on an individual basis (Singh and Vinnicombe, 2001). In their kind of system, women can maintain their authenticity as individuals (Fletcher, 1999) yet still achieve the desired rewards if they are good enough. Commenting on junior women's need to retain authenticity, Ibarra (2000) called such strategies "true-to-self", but it was the chameleon-like abilities that were more successful in her study. Chameleons (mostly males) cherry-picked strategies from a number of role models, trying different approaches, with a greater chance of understanding what worked for them. The women had few same-gender role models, and had greater difficulty in identifying appropriate seniors to emulate. Ibarra recommended three strategies for junior professionals in consulting firms to consider: Is the role model effective, would the behaviour work for me, and do I want to be like the role model. The advice given by Study 2's respondents to their friend who wanted to get ahead echoes those questions.

We acknowledge the limitations of the work. Study 1 depended upon self-reported usage of IM, and those who reported high use of IM might also be likely to enhance reports of their actual behaviours in interviews or questionnaires.

Many respondents had studied power and influence during MBA studies, and hence would have been sensitized to these issues, possibly biasing results towards more gender-balanced findings. Further research is needed into the impact of IM usage, to identify which strategies would be successful in various contexts, and with less elite samples, to gain an overview of IM usage in the more general work environment. More in-depth work is suggested with women to understand better how some of them eventually come to terms with the use of IM, to increase awareness of IM as a self-development tool which need not compromise women's authenticity.

Implications for practice

Managers should not assume that females who do not self-promote are not as ambitious or able as their male peers. Managers could guide those who trust the formal HRM systems to provide career opportunities, and who do not recognize or accept the importance of "branding" their values and core strengths to their senior managers. To take advantage of a wider resource pool of talent, organizations could ensure that their promotion system is open to all who are excellent at their present job and have potential for advancement, not just open to those who enhance the presentation of themselves by using manager-focused and self-focused IM. Senior managers have an important role to play in this process, in the socialization of newcomers and networking downwards to tap the talent of both male and female managers, and in the recognition of talent in all its forms.

Conclusion

This paper has presented evidence from two U.K. studies which investigated the perceived importance of IM to promotion, and the frequency of use of a range of self-focused, manager-focused and job-focused IM strategies. From the advice given to a friend regarding the gaining of promotion to partner, Study 2 showed that many of the IM strategies identified in Study 1, and also in Singh and Vinnicombe's (2001) study of engineering managers, were also relevant to managers and professionals in international management consultancy. The Study 1 survey confirmed the different frequency and the different combinations of IM strategies used by male and female managers. In particular, it emerged that gender combined with both age and job level were significant predictors of the frequency of use of IM.

A contribution has been made to the impression management field by providing evidence undertaken with managers in real organizational settings, whereas most previous studies have used experimental designs with current students. We have provided evidence from the U.K., whereas most studies reported in the management literature have been undertaken in the U.S. We have enhanced the quality of our findings by triangulation, using two different methodologies and samples.

Gowler and Legge (1989, p. 447) comment that "the 'successful' manager is the one who manages the good opinions of others". Managers may have the right ideas and skills, but unless their reputation, or others' perceptions of their abilities, is valued, purchased and used by those in power, their management capital is worthless for their career advancement. We have identified that many women are aware of the potential of IM but choose not to use it. If female managers are less inclined to use impression management, other than by job-focused rational strategies of high quality work and commitment, whilst their male peers use these strategies as well as ingratiation and self-promotion as indicated in these studies, then this is likely to have a continuing impact on their careers.

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