Advertising: Should creative women be expected to 'Fake it?'

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Abstract

The gender imbalance in the advertising industry continues to give cause for concern. A lack of senior women hinders advertising's ability to reflect diversity in society, leading some to question whether the industry is now even fit for purpose.

The paper explores the experiences of women working in advertising using the lens of Impression Management (IM). The study draws upon twenty-five semi-structured interviews with female creative directors working in advertising agencies. We used thematic analysis to identify major themes and the IM strategies women deploy.

Contrary to previous literature which found that women engage in lower levels of IM behaviours, our findings suggest that women within creative departments are actively employing IM strategies and behaviours. However, our research also finds women are engaging in inauthentic IM strategies; 'faking' behaviours in order to both *fit in* and *stand out* within the strongly-gendered environment of advertising. These coping strategies are causing internal conflict and stress, which they also see as driving some women to leave, or become disillusioned with the industry.

We provide managerial implications to suggest how advertising agencies, clients and female creatives, can work together to facilitate the retention and progression of more women within creative departments, and increase their influence over the ads that get made.

Keywords: Impression Management, Advertising industry, Women.

Contribution statement

This study extends our understanding of the persistent problems of gender imbalance within creative advertising departments. Our findings contribute to knowledge by identifying the inauthentic behaviours women employ which are doing little to affect much-needed change, or close the gender-gap. The findings of this study also contribute to our understanding of the internal impact on women when engaging in these behaviours. Additionally, we provide managerial implications for advertising agencies, their clients and female creatives; suggesting actions that could help address gender inequality in light of growing concerns about the reputation of the industry and its current practices.

Introduction

The lack of women in leadership positions remains a pervasive problem for business scholars to address (Gloor, Morf, Paustian-Underdahl & Backes-Gellner, 2018). Despite initiatives to tackle gender inequality, women still only account for 7% of board chairs and presidents, 6% of chief executives in the largest companies in the EU (Boffey, 2017) and less than 10% of executive roles in business in the UK (Fawcett Society, 2018). Many professional fields, including finance (Boateng, 2018), politics (Fawcett Society, 2018) and STEM (Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016) are still dominated by men. However, the gender imbalance at the top of creative professions, such as advertising, presents an additional cause for concern as advertising is considered to have the power to influence society and shape cultural meaning (Alexander, Crompton, & Shrubsole, 2011; Shabbir, Maalouf, Griessmair, Colmekcioglu, & Akhtar, 2018; Windels, 2016). Therefore, beyond moral arguments for equity, the dominance of men is having a profound influence on the culture of creative departments, the progression of women to the top of the creative career ladder, and ultimately the adverts that are made (Mallia & Windels, 2011; Mallia & Windels, 2018; Windels, 2016). This raises important questions about the composition of agencies and the messaging they produce, and even whether the advertising industry is now fit for purpose.

Despite the continued efforts of the advertising sector to legitimise its status and adopt professional practices (Nyilasy, Kreshel, & Reid, 2012), recent research recognises advertising as one of the most ethically challenging aspects of marketing (Shabbir et al., 2018). The issue of harmful gender stereotypes (Advertising Standards Authority, 2018) and the objectification of women in advertising (Stein, 2017) are just two of the areas currently under scrutiny, with women feeling that advertising does not understand them (Coffee, 2014) or even reflect them (JWT Intelligence/ Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, 2017). The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media (2017) highlights that despite some notable

exceptions, such as #likeagirl or This Girl Can, little is changing in the everyday portrayal of women and not enough is being done to show more women in a range of diverse roles. Their research identifies that women are still more likely to be seen in domestic settings, rather than in sporting roles, or at work. The institute calls for marketers to be more progressive and inclusive in their representation of women. As Maclaran (2015) asserts, there is now a pressing need to understand the role both people and organisations in the marketing sector might be playing, in what is identified as a new wave of sexism (Walter, 2011). Women now influence 80-85% of purchase decisions (Grow & Broyles, 2011; Mallia, 2009) and are responsible for 60% of social media sharing (3% Conference, 2019). However, decades after women first argued for their employment in the advertising industry, as effective advocates for female consumers (Tadajewski & Maclaran, 2013), they continue to be underrepresented in the creative departments where the ads are made.

Supporting the progression of more women to creative leadership roles is now an important and urgent step to take in ensuring gender diversity within advertising and addressing criticisms of current practice. Yet, if growing concerns about the output of the advertising industry are to be addressed, their numbers should not be simply increased; women must also play a bigger role in creative messaging (Mensa Torra & Grow, 2015).

Persistent calls for industry action and a range of initiatives have failed to address gender imbalance. Over 20 years ago, the marketing departments of organisations (Catterall, Maclaren & Stevens, (1999), and indeed marketing itself (Desmond, 1997) were starting to become feminised; by embracing more female values. However, years later scholars agree that the advertising workplace continues to be challenging for women (Grow & Broyles, 2011; Mallia, 2009; Mallia & Windels, 2011; Windels & Lee, 2012), with hegemonic masculinity still largely in place (Klein, 2000; Gregory, 2009). In fact, advertising appears to be one of those puzzling sectors outlined by Fischer (2015) as a sector in which, gender

equality might be expected to flourish, yet little discernible progress is being made. Within advertising agencies worldwide, women still only account for 14.6% of all creative directors (Grow & Deng, 2014), with figures for BAME far worse at 7.4% in the UK (see O'Brien, Laurison, Miles, & Friedman, 2016). Previous literature in this area has outlined both the structural and cultural issues which appear to put women at a disadvantage. This article considers the interplay between these macro factors and more micro factors, in particular the behaviours of the relatively few women who have become creative directors. We explore the behaviours of women within these wider institutional forces to provide new insight into the persistent problem of gender imbalance. Scott (2006) highlights the great contributions and indeed the power of what she calls 'corporate feminists' (p.13) such as Charlotte Beers at O&M, who under "imperfect conditions" (p.13) have furthered the cause of feminism from within the marketing workplace. In this study, we consider that despite the minority position of female creatives, or even perhaps because of it, those with resources and a sense of agency could still offer the advertising sector the "critical promise for change" (Grow & Deng, 2015, p. 7), making their behaviours of particular interest.

Previous literature has identified behaviours such as interpersonal communication and presentation skills as crucial for progression to leadership roles in advertising (Windels, Mallia & Broyles, 2013). Self-promotion is particularly recommended within the competitive environment of the creative department (Grow & Broyles, 2011; Windels & Lee, 2012) making Impression Management (IM) a useful lens through which to examine this issue. IM is a process which considers individuals as social actors who are motivated to engage in a range of behaviours including self-promotion, to manage the impressions they convey to others (Bolino, Long & Turnley, 2016; Goffman, 1959; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Rosenfeld, Giacalone & Riordan, 1995; Schütz, 1998; Schlenker & Weigold, 1992; Schneider, 1981; Tedeschi & Riess, 1981). Although the external impact of using IM within organisations has

been widely explored (Bolino et al., 2016; Goffman, 1959; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Rosenfeld et al., 1995; Schütz, 1998; Schlenker & Weigold, 1992; Schneider, 1981; Tedeschi & Riess, 1981), there remains a gap in the literature around our understanding of the internal impact of employing IM strategies and behaviours.

The IM literature has identified that women are reluctant to promote themselves and break expectations of their gender (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010; Smith & Huntoon, 2014); are more passive, using relatively low levels of IM behaviours (Bolino et al., 2016); and resistant to playing the, "organisational game", preferring to let their work speak for itself (Singh, Kumra & Vinnicombe, 2002, p.77). The purpose of this study therefore, is to explore how IM strategies and behaviours, are being employed by women in creative roles, in particular addressing the gap in our understanding of how engaging in these behaviours impacts upon the individual.

This paper therefore makes two key contributions. Firstly, it explores how IM strategies are being used by female creatives to survive, and thrive within this gender-bound environment. Secondly, it addresses the gap in our understanding of the internal, rather than simply the external, impact of IM strategies and behaviours identified by Bolino et al. (2016). Therefore, this paper contributes to our understanding of the effects of IM on not just the audience, but on the individual.

The findings also extend our understanding of how women might play a greater part in closing the gender-gap within creative departments; using IM behaviours to gain leverage from their minority position and increase the number of women progressing to the role of creative director. Managerial implications for advertising agencies, clients and female creatives, are offered to address the persistent issue of gender inequality in light of growing concerns over the current practices within creative departments.

Literature Review

Women in advertising

Many structural and cultural reasons are cited for the lack of women at the top of creative departments (Gregory, 2009; Grow & Broyles, 2011; Mallia, 2009; Mallia & Windels, 2011; Windels & Lee, 2012). These include having children (Grow & Broyles, 2011; Mallia, 2009), long hours and inflexible work arrangements (Mallia, 2009; Mallia & Windels, 2011), a lack of recognition from peers, exclusion from certain accounts and a tendency for senior creative men in post to hire in their own image (Broyles & Grow, 2008). Agencies are characterised by distinct gender dynamics (Tuncay Zayer & Coleman, 2015) with the creative department characterised by male norms (Windels and Lee, 2012), masculine hedonism and homosociability (Gregory, 2009; Nixon & Crewe, 2004). It is recognised as a discrete culture (Nixon & Crewe, 2004), distinguished by its own codes (Stuhlfaut, 2011) and collectively shared ideas (Alvesson, 1994; Mallia, 2009) within which, personality factors such as perseverance, toughness, competitiveness, and a thick skin are seen as important factors for success (Grow & Broyles, 2011). The net result of these factors is a gender-bound working environment in which few women advance or thrive, making female creative directors a rarity in a man's world; a world which may even be hostile to them (Grow & Deng, 2015, p. 21). Women in advertising, like many women in applied creative fields, are under-represented and therefore, form a minority within a male majority. Windels (2011) found these conditions to be detrimental to the creativity of those individuals in the minority, when compared to those who enjoy a majority position. It appears then, that a gendered creative environment, might also be limiting women's contribution to the creative process itself. Many women feel defeated by the challenges they face as they seek advancement and greater influence, with many feeling that it is easier to leave the industry than to change it (Bronwin,

2018). Retaining women in creative departments is now an urgent necessity requiring fresh thinking and significant change in both agency cultures and practices (Magee, 2016).

Impression Management in organisations

The IM which takes place in organisations is usually referred to by researchers as the process by which employees attempt to control the impressions that others (the target) i.e. managers or co-workers, form of them (Bolino et al., 2016; Goffman, 1959; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Rosenfeld et al., 1995; Schütz, 1998; Schlenker & Weigold, 1992; Schneider, 1981; Tedeschi & Riess, 1981). It is attributed to Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical view of social interactions whereby individuals are conceived of as social actors interested in generating positive external impressions (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Previous contributions have noted that individuals are more motivated to engage in IM strategies when their behaviours are public and their image is seen as important in achieving their goals (Bolino et al., 2016). In particular, Capezio, Wang, Restubog, Garcia, & Lu (2017) recognise that employees are not passive within organisations. They point to the extensive research which has developed our understanding of how employees may seek to positively influence their managers and directors throughout their career (Gilmore & Ferris, 1989; McFarland, Yun, Harold, Viera Jr & Moore, 2005).

Although a range of self-presentation behaviours are discussed in the literature, there is a widely accepted distinction between assertive and defensive strategies (Bolino & Turnley, 2003; Schütz, 1989). Assertive strategies might be initiated by the individual seeking to create a particular image or identity in the eyes of others. A recent review of the IM literature conducted by Bolino et al. (2016), notes an emphasis on the use of self-promotion and ingratiation behaviours. In contrast, defensive strategies might include behaviours such as excuses, justifications and apologies, employed if an undesirable image

has been formed (Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984), or to protect an image against perceived threats (Tetlock & Manstead, 1985). These two strategies broadly correlate to both acquisitive/proactive styles of behaviour which are designed to seek social approval, and the protective/reactive/control-protective impression management strategies, which seek to avoid disapproval, and might include modest self-description, uncertain expression and reduced social interaction (Arkin, 1981; Hooghiemstra, 2000; Schlenker & Weigold, 1992; Schütz, 1998; Stanton, Stanton & Pires, 2004). Further distinction is made between direct and indirect techniques. Direct techniques are employed to present information about an individual's traits, abilities and achievements (Cialdini, 1989), whilst indirect techniques might include promoting a favourable association with another individual or social grouping who are already highly regarded (Cialdini, 1989).

Some critics question the authenticity of IM, seeing it as manipulative or deceptive (Bolino et al., 2016); perceiving behaviours shaped to meet external expectations, as simply elevating image over substance (Lair, Sullivan & Cheney, 2005), and risking inauthenticity (Shepherd, 2005). Whilst others argue that engaging in IM behaviours does not necessarily mean that employees are creating false impressions (Leary & Kowalski, 1990, Rosenfeld, 1997), but merely selecting their best attributes to communicate in any given situation.

Authenticity has become an increasingly popular topic in management literature, with researchers interested in its implications for employees and leaders. Scholars appear to broadly agree that authenticity relates to what is 'true' or 'real' but vary widely in their interpretation of the concept (see Lehman, O'Connor, Kovacs and Newman (2019) for further discussion). However, in their review of the authenticity literature, Lehman et al. (2019) identity a strong research theme of *authenticity as consistency*, drawing on the relationship between what Goffman (1959) called the projected image or "front stage", and the "back stage" which is seen to represent the true self. This strand of the literature considers

authenticity as clear alignment between the two (Cable, Gino & Staats et al., 2013; Ladkin & Taylor, 2010) as felt by the individual. Here individuals considered to be acting authentically are acting in accordance with their "own sense of self, emotions and values" (Gino, Kouchaki & Galinsky, 2015, p.984) which is the interpretation of authenticity adopted by this study. Goffman (1959) warns against any discrepancy between front and back stage, fearing it might result in damage to an individual's reputation, with the risk they might be judged inauthentic by an external audience, yet he pays less attention to the impact on the individual.

Other researchers have addressed this gap, linking a feeling of misalignment between front and back stage, to inauthenticity and a range of negative outcomes for the individual. These include, lower task performance (Roberts, 2005); psychological distress, tension and stress (Hewlin, 2009); a decreased sense of well-being including stress and depression and reduced job satisfaction (Ibarra, 1999); and even feelings of impurity or immorality (Gino, Norton & Ariely, 2010). Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) similarly consider the experience for individuals who sense a discrepancy between what they really feel, and the image they feel compelled to convey in a social context, highlighting the potential problem of emotional dissonance. Whilst in contrast, other studies link authenticity, and the freedom to act in line with one's true self, with a range of positive outcomes for individuals. These include a greater sense of well-being (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014); higher self-esteem (Heppner et al., 2008); high-quality relationships (Roberts, 2005) and a better sense of belonging (Newheiser & Barreto, 2014). Authenticity has also been identified as a central concern for female entrepreneurs when engaging in self-promotion (Thompson-Whiteside, Turnbull and Howe-Walsh, 2018), making the question of authenticity in self-presentation of relevance to a study of women who are similarly seeking to succeed in a social context already shaped by male norms. Yet, despite these contributions to date, there is still more to

be understood about the implications of IM and authenticity (Bolino et al., 2016); and little has been explored about the impact of inauthentic IM on the individual.

However, being both authentic and credible is considered challenging (Roberts, 2005). Leary and Kowalski (1990) argue that the process of image construction itself is influenced by five primary factors including desired/undesired identity images, the values held by the target, constraints of the role, and the current self and social image of the individual. In an attempt to fit in to an organisational context (Hewlin, 2003), or appear more credible (Ibarra, 1999), individuals may suppress the desire to be authentic and mask personality characteristics that are otherwise important to them. This creates what Hewlin (2003) terms, facades of conformity, which cause individuals tension and stress, making self-presentation through IM costly, in terms of personal resources (Vohs, Baumeister and Ciarocco, 2005). However, individuals who are able to manage impressions of themselves which are both authentic and credible, will have a greater sense of well-being than those who sacrifice authenticity for the sake of credibility (Roberts, 2005).

While engaging in IM may have a personal cost, it is also not without risk. IM behaviours employed to create a particular desired image, can equally risk creating an undesired image (Goffman, 1959). Attempts to ingratiate oneself with a target audience in order to be liked, might also be seen as sycophantic; whilst promoting oneself in order to be seen as competent, may equally be seen as bragging (Bolino et al., 2016; Smith & Huntoon, 2014) giving rise to the "self-promoter's paradox" (Bolino et al., 2016., p.385). Parhankangas & Ehrlich (2014) similarly found that both excessively low and excessively high levels of self-promotion should be avoided. Capezio et al. (2017) similarly refer to the hard (assertive, usually self-promotion) and soft (ingratiation) tactics and behaviours used to upwardly influence managers and in particular Machiavellian leaders of the type often found in advertising. They find that compared to men, women are less likely to use hard or assertive

tactics and behaviours when managing upwards and conclude that the gendered behaviours elicited by these Machiavellian leaders, are arguably disadvantaging women and limiting their career progress.

Utilising IM strategies effectively and authentically is also noted as particularly challenging for women (Thompson-Whiteside et al., 2018). Women are seen as less self-promoting than men (Grow & Broyles, 2011; Mallia, 2009) and more likely to engage in ingratiation than assertive behaviours (Capezio et al., 2017). Rudman & Phelan (2008) refer to prevailing gender stereotypes which indicate that women are expected to demonstrate a concern for others rather than themselves, presenting; modesty, submissiveness, warmth and selflessness. In contrast, men are expected to present more agentic behaviours communicating; self-confidence, assertiveness and self-reliance. Women presenting the more agentic attributes required for leadership are seen to be subverting prevailing gender stereotypes and consequently are viewed as less likeable or hireable (Rudman & Phelan, 2008). Hence, expectations of gender appear to put women at a disadvantage when it comes to using assertive IM behaviours in the workplace, unless, they are employing these behaviours on behalf of another party (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010).

This study explores the IM strategies and associated behaviours employed by female creative directors working within the advertising industry. Guided by IM theory, the research examines the experiences and internal impact of their gendered work environments on women within advertising agencies.

Therefore, guided by IM theory, we ask:

RQ1 How are IM strategies being employed by females within the creative department?

RQ2 What is the internal impact of using the IM strategies employed by women in creative departments?

Methods

Data Collection

The researchers were interested in exploring the IM strategies deployed by the participants to try and understand why women continue to be underrepresented in creative departments. Accordingly, we adopted a narrative approach to allow our participants to express their views through interviews (Willig, 2013). Interviews lasted up to 90 minutes and were undertaken face-to-face, via Skype and telephone.

Spradley's (2016) guide for interviewing was used to explore an individual's experience of organisational culture from the participants or 'native' perspective. Such a technique has been used effectively in studies which have examined challenges in a range of contextual settings (Thompson-Whiteside et al., 2018; Howe-Walsh et al., 2018). The interviews explored each participant's experiences of IM within the advertising sector, allowing the participants to reflect upon their experience of working within creativity. Following Spradley (2016), we structured the interview around three types of questions to examine descriptive, structural and contrast aspects of the investigation:

- Descriptive questions: These were asked to help build rapport with the participants and to provide an understanding of the context of the women's work environment within the agency. Questions such as, 'How long have you worked as a Creative Director?'

- Structural questions: These allowed the researchers to explore the nature of the working environment for women in creative departments. Questions such as, 'Are there challenges for women working in agencies?'

- Contrast questions: These were asked to allow the researchers to examine how women use different Impression Management strategies within agencies. Questions such as, 'Do you consciously promote yourself within the agency, or not?' and, 'Do you feel confident when making pitch presentations, or not?'

The sample

Insert Table 1 here

The study draws on 25 in-depth interviews with female creative directors (see Table 1). Our sample reflects an 'elite' or 'expert' group of individuals (Harvey, 2011; Howe-Walsh, Turnbull & Budhwar, 2019), which is particularly apposite for exploring IM strategies within the higher levels of creative departments in the advertising sector. Using only creative directors within the study was purposive (Creswell & Poth, 2018); while limiting the generalisability of the study, it allows for key themes and concepts identified to be examined further in future studies with other levels of female creatives.

A snowball sampling technique was used to recruit participants for the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gioia, Corley & Hamilton, 2013). Advertising creatives are seen to be a hard to access population (Stuhlfaut & Windels, 2012) and access to samples from elite populations is acknowledged to be challenging (Mikecz, 2012), hence a snowball sampling method was used to recruit participants for the study. Participants were identified by other women working in advertising and were recruited using an email or telephone introduction to the study, together with an information sheet and consent form to meet ethical obligations of informed consent.

The sample size was determined at the point data saturation was reached (Patton, 2015). The researchers made notes of new information following each interview and after 25 interviews it was determined that no new themes or concepts had arisen, hence further data would be redundant (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were from 11 different countries and predominantly worked for large advertising agencies (See Table 1). The cultural differences and variation in industry structure between countries is recognised as a limitation.

Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim to retain the richness of data (Bryman and Bell, 2015) and generated 168 pages of text. The researchers then adopted an approach suggested by Braun & Clarke (2006, p. 87) involving thematic analysis. Firstly, two of the researchers read and re-read the transcripts to familiarise themselves with the data, noting ideas to generate initial codes, such as: working life balance; motherhood; criticism; reluctance to self-promote etc. From an exploration of the codes we grouped together our common codes. The researchers then embarked on a review process of the codes re-reading all the data extracts to fit into possible themes. We identified two common core themes: *'fitting in'* and *'standing out'* (see Figure 1). These represent the two key themes experienced and identified by the women interviewed as they employed IM strategies within creative departments of advertising agencies. The coding was validated using an inter-coder reliability test (Neuendorf, 2002). The inter-coder agreement was used to check the extent to which the codes developed from the data were agreed by different members of the research team. To undertake the agreement, one member of the research team took 10% of the data and coded it. Next, a second member of the team was asked to code the same data independently. Finally, both researchers met to compare the coding they had undertaken and determine the number of codes they had agreed upon. They also discussed the codes which had not been agreed.

This resulted in 96% agreement between the coders and the remaining disagreements (4%) were resolved by reviewing the transcripts and researchers reaching agreement on the themes.

Findings

Insert Table 2 & 3 about here

Distinct from previous literature which identified that women were more passive, using low levels of IM behaviours (Bolino et al., 2016), our data shows female creatives are instead actively employing IM behaviours in response to the strongly gendered-environment of advertising agencies. However, as they seek career progression, these women are experiencing a paradoxical tension: on the one hand, they wish to fit in and be accepted within these environments; on the other, they must stand out to be recognised. This creates tension for female creatives and gives rise to the two themes we identified in the data; *Fitting in and, Standing Out.* While female creatives are employing IM behaviours to meet these requirements, striving to both fit and stand out within advertising agencies drives women to engage in behaviours which are not aligned with their "own sense of self, emotions and values" (Gino et al., 2015, p.984). If authenticity is consistency (Lehman et al., 2019) requiring alignment between the external and internal (Cable et al., 2013; Ladkin & Taylor, 2010); then we find that women are engaging in inauthentic IM behaviours and strategies to both survive and thrive. However, this has an internal impact on female creatives, causing them and other female colleagues to experience stress. They believe that in some cases it drives women to leave the industry, might help explain why many women fail to thrive and progress, and ultimately might be limiting the influence of women on the advertisements that get made.

Theme 1) Fitting in: By employing IM behaviours of Ingratiation, Exemplification and Supplication.

> ***"The paradigm [within advertising departments] is so set, you had to conform to that or you didn't do well" (Isabel, US).***

Previous literature recognises the creative department as a discrete culture (Nixon & Crewe, 2004), with its own codes (Stuhlfaut, 2011) and collectively shared ideas (Alvesson, 1994), characterised by masculine norms (Mallia, 2009; Windels & Lee, 2012). We also found the distinct gender dynamics highlighted by Tuncay Zayer and Coleman (2015) to still be very much in evidence. Gaining acceptance and fitting in within these strongly-gendered environments requires women to display and emulate male behaviours which often feel inappropriate or uncomfortable for them.

> *"You play by their rules, it's all about what interests them, what they think is cool. Even the kinds of ads that they like.... men are cliquey, they have their cliques of men and you know if you want to survive and do well you make sure you're part of that clique, and you're the weird odd girl in the clique. But that means catering to their clique versus like what your clique would be."* (Harri, US)

Similar to the findings of Windels & Lee (2012) and Windels (2016), women are seen as the interlopers in a space that feels predominantly male.

> *"There isn't much diversity within that culture, that sort of small microcosmic culture and therefore, the men are very like-minded, they have the same sort of sense of*

humour so they really revel in that and they become like themselves. But anyone

that's not directly part of that culture can feel really alienated by that." (Gina, UK)

Thriving, or at least surviving in this space, means adopting assertive strategies involving both direct and indirect behaviours; in effect learning to be one of the boys, Eva, from the US, says, *"fitting in means getting your 'code on', playing by their rules and hiding your secret girl side",* recalling the facades of conformity described by Hewlin (2009). The requirement for women to fit in also extends beyond the office into more informal settings such as the pub, private clubs or the golf course. Although respondents from both the US and UK (Annabel, Eva, Isabel, Yvonne) considered male codes of behaviour to be stronger in the UK with "an old boy network" still very much in operation, there was consensus from both sides of the Atlantic, that informal settings are important for bonding and influenced the allocation of briefs. As two respondents put it,

"I think the culture of having bonding experiences in the pub that then follow through

into the office, that's a real barrier to women, that's a real problem." (Annabel, UK)

"I'm the kind of person that ... would go to the pub and have a laugh with male

friends, so I was more accepted, but there's a heck of a lot of women who wouldn't."

(Petra, Global)

Consistent with the findings of Capezio et al. (2017) who found that women were more likely to ingratiate themselves with Machiavellian leaders, our findings indicate that the women are using IM behaviours associated with ingratiation, such as acting in a manner which is consistent with the preferences of a target audience (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). They are displaying opinion conformity (Hewlin, 2009) to fit in, which requires them to hide in part, their true nature and interests, using inauthentic impression management behaviours to play by the rules and secure acceptance.

Furthermore, women also report striving to fit in by demonstrating their commitment. To survive and even thrive, women are engaging in IM behaviours associated with exemplification which emphasises doing more than necessary, staying late and appearing to go beyond the call of duty often at personal cost. The hours expected were highlighted as overly long and not conducive to work/life balance, for those with or without children. Respondents report a lack of flexibility and trust in agencies. There is still a tendency to work through the night before deadlines and to value people being in the office, at their desks, which encourages 'presenteism', another form of exemplification.

> *"Essentially the hours tend to be 10 until seven, and then very, very, very often it's much later than seven. I was working nine until 10 every day for a very long time, in fact I did six months without a full weekend off and then collapsed with exhaustion at the end of it."* (Donna, US)

Another respondent from the UK similarly comments,

> *"Yes 100%, it's a really difficult culture and you have to be incredibly resilient, but also you have to be a grafter, you have to work so hard, and it's not conducive to work / life balance… Men don't do the lion's share of the childcare or the household duties, so I think that's a massive enablement for the men to be able to progress really, because everyone in the department is expected to do so many hours."* (Mariella, UK)

For women returning from maternity leave, the problem of fitting in to the prevailing culture is amplified, summed up here by one participant,

> *"The Ad industry and motherhood - I just don't think it's conducive, the ones [women] that do have kids, some of them manage to claw their way back in, but they really have to claw."* (Betty, Belgium)

On return to the workplace, our data shows that women are not just engaging in ingratiation, but also in defensive IM behaviours. They are engaging in supplication to establish themselves; with one participant describing how a colleague appeared to apologise for their time away from the workplace in response to the expectations of the culture. This seems to weaken their position and cause them psychological distress. Nina from New Zealand, outlines the issue:

> *"One of the biggest problems is how we project ourselves when we come back, like I think we're very apologetic; I know a woman who started a new job right after she'd had a baby, and she didn't tell anybody at work, because it was a very creative agency and she didn't want them to judge her and think she wasn't going to deliver. That's like to hide a baby because you're worried about what the perception is, she should be saying yeah I had a baby, I had this amazing life experience, I now have this experience that you don't have which is super valuable. I mean this is what we do, we try to understand what's happening in human's lives and try and figure out how to talk to them, and I can imagine that having a baby would probably be one of the biggest life experiences. It's funny [because] I've known men that have gone off and gone surfing around the world for two years, and they come back to like fanfare and it's like nothing happened and they pick up right where they left off cos they had this amazing experience. Whereas women come back when they've taken two years off for having a kid, and it's like they just fell in a hole somewhere."* (Nina, New Zealand)

Women reported an environment currently experiencing a number of tensions. Advertising and creative direction are coming under increasing pressure with clients taking work in-house, greater numbers of specialist shops are being set up and a significant number of women are leaving the industry or going freelance. As one respondent says *"the industry is*

on its knees, it's going to hit rock bottom, and it will fall apart and they'll have to change the way they do everything, I really think so," (Laura, Singapore) while another reports *"we're not constructing something new, and that's the danger right now."* (Donna, US).

Theme 2) Standing out: By employing IM behaviours of Self-promotion, Justifications and Supplication.

> **"Fake it [confidence] 'til you make it…You're not going to be confident about this stuff, but pretend to be confident and it will come." (Eva,US)**

In order to secure progression within the current environment, women must not only fit in but also stand out. Historically, the process of creative direction has been as more than one respondent termed it, a *"break culture"* (Annabel, UK), in which ideas are put forward and are tested until the point at which they are broken, or not. This requires women to engage in self-promotion on behalf of themselves and their ideas, a theme the participants returned to again and again. Yet, *"few women do it themselves at all…feeling self-conscious, so embarrassed and mortified"* (Laura, Singapore), with the strongly-gendered nature of the environment seen as an additional challenge. As Talia, now working in Spain, explains

> *"If you go into a meeting, and of course almost everyone else in the room is a man, there is kind of like a sit-back-arms-crossed-prove-yourself thing, where you go into a room and everyone is very cocksure, and kind of almost a little bit threatening. You go in to present some work to them and you're already feeling quite nervous because [of] the body language and atmosphere and all that sort of stuff, and then you can get quite quickly attacked, or you feel like it, because you're probably quite sensitive*

because of the atmosphere already, they're very exclusive and it doesn't feel like a very safe space." (Talia, Spain)

Although the female creatives recognised that up to 90%-95% of their output might be rejected, one of the respondents from the US, described how this affected her.

"I went through Ad school and I was pretty confident [there], I was kind of like one of the better people in my Ad school and I left feeling pretty cocky and then I started my first job and I was like a deer in the headlights, I just changed, and I think it was because, like so much of our job is being told this isn't good enough, this is wrong, and I think men are better at telling themselves that they're good and they don't suck, and I think women are already acutely aware of all our shortcomings and then amplifying them." (Yvonne, US)

Roberts (2005) found that individuals who are able to establish credibility whilst remaining authentic will enjoy a greater sense of well-being. However, in order to cope with this competitive and often hostile environment; younger colleagues are advised by senior female Creative Directors, to "*fake it [confidence] 'til you make it*" (Yvonne and Eva).

"You're not going to be confident about this stuff, but pretend to be confident and it will come…quit beating yourself up about when people say no to you…like that's the job. I mean even now at my level I get told 'no' a lot, and until you build up that kind of core level of confidence, it's pretty brutal." (Eva)

In part, this is attributed to multiple teams all pitching internally for the same brief, resulting in *"uncomfortable"* (Queeny, UK) levels of competition in which assertive and defensive IM strategies and behaviours are employed by both men and women. Assertive strategies however, are not without risk for women. As one woman from Colombia asks,

"*why can't we make the agency a nurturing place for women to hone their skills?*

instead of feeling like you are going to be eaten alive." (Wendy, Colombia)

Women use self-promotion to put forward their ideas, pointing to previous accomplishments and a track record. Yet, the data shows that women report either having their ideas and opinions dismissed, or being considered too opinionated. In these cases, women describe how they employ defensive IM strategies to justify or defend their ideas. In doing so however, they are not perceived to be strong and confident. Instead they are described as disruptive, difficult and aggressive. One British respondent said,

"*So actually one of my old bosses literally came up to me in the office and said, 'I*

hear that you're a bitch'." (Petra, UK/Global)

In this charged atmosphere and consistent with prior research (Rudman & Phelan, 2008), the reactions and emotions of both men and women are perceived differently. Women report themselves and other women sometimes becoming frustrated in the creative process and as a result becoming emotional or teary. This, albeit authentic, reaction is considered a form of supplication behaviour and perceived as weak or as more than one respondent recalled, attributed to "*having their period*" (Nina, New Zealand). Pointing to an emotional reaction is also seen as a weapon and an "*instant way to kill a woman's career*" (Farica, Germany). Yet an emotional reaction from men which might come out as anger or aggression is tolerated. The respondents questioned why one set of emotions is seen as more valid than the other. Even authentic anger from women is not well received, a type of backlash well documented by Rudman & Phelan, (2008), while from men, it is not only permissible, but seen as a hallmark of their creativity. This leaves women working within creative departments with a distinct impression management dilemma, leaving them to question whether they should engage in authentic IM behaviours at all. These apparent double standards are summed up by one US respondent who says:

"*Creative male directors in advertising are allowed to be so difficult and violent, I've been in meetings where people have thrown chairs, thrown phones, screamed, sworn at people, got people fired, all of that stuff. Now, if a woman was to do it, instantly you're a bitch, and it's like wow did you just see this guy, wasn't he amazing he just threw the chair across the room, his difficultness makes his genius possible, it's all part of it. But if I literally raise my voice to somebody who isn't doing their job, I'm the biggest bitch in town, and it's got nothing to do with my creativity or all of that, or cos I want perfection, just that I'm a bitch. So you're living in a strange world.*"
(Donna, US)

Frustration with the status quo was widely reported, with women reporting the urgent need for change before more women are able to exert greater influence. As one female creative director working out of the US explains:

"*If you are going to build empathetic communication plans it would make absolute business sense to have some people that really understand how to build empathy with your target audience.*" (Isabel, US)

Our data indicates the desire for change from creative women and their acute awareness of the work that is still to be done.

"*I think the factors are still against women so that's why we have to keep banging the drum, we have to keep talking about diversity, we have to keep making people think even if it's a bit boring to keep saying it, it's boring for me to keep saying it, but we have to because only by repeating it again and again until we're bored, will anything change.*" (Jo, UK)

Discussion and Conclusions

The impact of using IM within organisations has been widely explored from an external perspective (Bolino et al., 2016; Goffman, 1959; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Rosenfeld et al., 1995; Schütz, 1998; Schlenker & Weigold, 1992; Schneider, 1981; Tedeschi & Riess, 1981). However, this paper is one of the first to address the gap, identified by Bolino et al. (2016), in our understanding of the internal impact on the individual and the implications for authenticity. The IM literature has previously considered women to be more passive in the workplace; using relatively low levels of IM behaviours (Bolino et al., 2016), as reluctant to promote themselves and break expectations of their gender (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010; Smith & Huntoon, 2014) preferring instead, to let their work speak for itself (Singh et al., 2002). In contrast, through in-depth interviews with 25 female creative directors, we have found that women are indeed active in employing IM strategies and behaviours. However, they are using these behaviours to respond to the strongly gendered-environment of advertising agencies which appear to be making contradictory demands of the women. We find that female creatives are actively employing assertive and defensive IM strategies, engaging in behaviours needed for both *fitting in* and *standing out* within these cultures.

The data also shows that meeting these apparently contradictory demands is often an uncomfortable experience for women. Previous research has highlighted the importance of consistency between the projected self as conveyed through IM, and the private self, for individuals wanting to feel authentic (Cable et al., 2013). Authenticity has also been shown to be important for women (Thompson-Whiteside et al., 2018). This study finds that female creatives are experiencing a misalignment between their perception of their true selves and the public face they feel the creative department is expecting them to convey. Our data shows that this is causing stress and tensions for women. Participants also report that these tensions

drive some women to leave the industry, or even go freelance, and may help explain the persistently low numbers of women in senior creative roles.

Women are combining assertive and defensive strategies and behaviours to resolve the seemingly paradoxical tension between *fitting in* and *standing out.* In an attempt to secure belonging, women are employing ingratiation and exemplification behaviours as part of an assertive strategy. They are engaging in IM behaviours both in and out of the office which do not feel authentic. Hiding their true selves is causing tension and frustration. This is consistent with previous literature, (Gino et al., 2010; Hewlin, 2009; Ibarra, 1999; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Roberts, 2005) which links any misalignment between what feels true to the individual, and an impression they are required to convey, with a range of negative outcomes.

Although costly in terms of personal resources as highlighted by Vohs et al. (2005), it is not an effective strategy; not sufficient to guarantee success or progression, and does little to change current practice. Instead, it appears to be a hygiene factor. Whilst these assertive IM behaviours may secure initial belonging, *fitting in* and hiding one's true self to abide by the current rules and codes through ingratiation and exemplification, ultimately only serves to perpetuate the status quo of these gender-bound environments and limits the contribution of women.

If *fitting in* does little to bring change, then women must also ensure that they and their ideas are *standing out.* Our data shows that women, unlike men, are not granted automatic respect or gravitas, and must instead earn it. Current practice requires them to engage in assertive IM strategies, employing the behaviours of self-promotion to advocate for themselves and their creative ideas. Self-promotion can feel uncomfortable and inauthentic for the women and is often perceived as inconsistent with their gender. This presents both tensions and risks for female creatives and often results in an all-too-familiar backlash.

Current practice also dictates that this often takes place in a competitive, even combative environment in which rejection and criticism are both commonplace. It is currently recommended that female creatives who struggle with this should engage in inauthentic behaviours and "*fake it,' til they make it*". However, possible alternative and more authentic IM behaviours are deemed inappropriate. Defensive behaviours such as supplication is deemed weak, while the assertive behaviours of intimidation commonly used by men, are seen as inappropriate for women. Similarly, when women engage in authentic defensive IM strategies to justify or defend their ideas, they are often perceived as emotional, aggressive or difficult. Therefore, many female creatives employ inauthentic IM strategies to survive in creative departments that are already coded as male. These inauthentic IM strategies and behaviours cause tension and fatigue for women, leaving many to become disillusioned with the industry and current practices, while driving other female creatives to leave.

Whilst the risks of some IM behaviours have been previously acknowledged, the contribution here is the risk to self when employing inauthentic IM behaviours in response to an organisational setting. Our findings suggest that engaging in inauthentic IM behaviours as a means to ensure that they are both simultaneously *fitting in,* and *standing out* within these strongly-gendered cultures, causes women psychological stress, limits their contribution to creative messaging and causes many women to ultimately leave the industry or go freelance. Although some of the tension they describe can be seen as common to the female experience in many strongly male-gendered environments (Gloor et al., 2018), it is also clearly linked to the culture and practice of advertising agencies.

The authors have developed a model which summarises these conclusions (See Fig.2). It illustrates key influences on the organisational context. Within this working environment female creative directors are actively employing a range of IM behaviours and tactics in a bid to meet the paradoxical demands of both *fitting in* and *standing out*. Doing so leads them to

engage in inauthentic behaviours in order to gain acceptance. Abiding by male codes of behaviour however, can make women sense a misalignment between a projected self and what they feel is their true self. This feels uncomfortable for women, maintains the status quo and can lead to disillusionment or even their exit from the industry. Engaging in authentic behaviours however, brings women into contact with double standards, and can generate backlash and criticism. The real opportunity for change lies in developing working environments in which female creatives can fully participate and communicate, not just their ideas, but their true selves. In this way, authenticity for female creatives is not a risk or a choice that few dare make, but an accepted way to stand out within an industry that must seize the opportunity for change.

Fig.2 here.

Managerial implications

The findings of our study have important implications for management practice. Advertising, like so many creative industries, is operating under a "cloud of masculinity" (Grow & Deng, 2015, p.10). Women feel that advertising doesn't understand them or reflect them and despite increased efforts towards professionalism and legitimisation (Nyilasy et al., 2012), questions continue to be asked about how responsibly the industry uses its power to influence society and shape cultural meaning. Increasing the numbers of women in creative roles; allowing them to have a greater influence over creative messaging will go some way to address current concerns, as women may well now offer the critical promise of change (Grow & Deng, 2015) that the advertising industry needs. Surely female creatives are better placed than their male colleagues to understand and reflect the increasingly powerful female consumers, who

currently influence 80-85% of consumer purchases (Grow & Broyles, 2011; Mallia, 2009) and dominate social media sharing (3% Conference).

However, simply increasing the numbers of women is not sufficient without further structural and cultural change. Female creatives must be allowed to play a bigger role in shaping creative messaging (Mensa Torra & Grow, 2015); yet, our data indicates that the creative department can be a hostile environment for women. Therefore, facilitating a 'safer' environment in which female creatives can engage in authentic promotion of their ideas and, indeed themselves, is now a pressing need and will help support women to make a bigger contribution to the creative process. This will also go some way towards legitimising the advertising industry and improve its ability to reflect gender diversity in society. We believe it is not just female creatives who offer the promise of change (Grow & Deng, 2015). By working together agencies, clients and female creatives can all play a part in addressing the implications of our findings, and unlocking the persistent and pervasive gender gap.

Firstly, advertising agency practices must be urgently reviewed. The set paradigm of creative departments presents many barriers and challenges to women. Factors such as working hours and the choice and timings of social activities (where networking takes place and access to pitches is often secured), all need to be addressed. Agency management should certainly heed the findings of a recent study conducted by Campaign magazine (Tylee, 2019) which explores the views of agency staff about what makes an agency a great place to work. It appears that employees are now seeking the opportunities to feel authentic at work; looking for more than simply material rewards and wanting to work for companies with values, which align with their own. Rather than simply accepting or conforming to a 'work hard, play hard' culture, they are looking to embrace the arguably softer values of flexibility, trust and autonomy at work. If arguments for equity are not compelling enough, agencies interested in winning the war for talent, should be looking to develop their own employer brand.

Particular attention should also be paid, to the pitching process itself, which we found to be often prejudicial and bruising for female creatives. We suggest that in order to increase the influence women may have over the messaging and creative development of ads, the process might be re-framed as the co-creation of ideas. Teams working together; helping each other to reach a better client solution rather than directly competing, could start to change the combative and often ego-led culture that has prevailed. The development of ideas and client solutions is a core process and is key to the advertising industry's ability to reflect the powerful female consumer. Therefore, agencies should take a more gender-intelligent approach, giving female creatives every opportunity to practice presenting their ideas and receiving feedback in a 'safe' environment. The feminisation of advertising is not simply about head-line grabbing campaigns but requires lasting change in the day-to-day portrayal of women. Female creatives are crucial in making this change. The marketing landscape is changing with disruptive technologies fundamentally changing the industry. If agencies wish to retain the very female talent that can help make advertising more relevant and representative of consumers, then they must be willing to disrupt their own set paradigm.

Secondly, if the industry cannot heal itself, then clients can have a stronger influence on current agency practices. Paying for the advertising places clients in a particularly strong position to drive change in the industry. P&G are already leading the way, seeing it not just as a move for the social good, but also as a driver for growth. Unilever have formed the Unstereotype Alliance and are working with Facebook, Google, Alibaba, Mars and WPP, as well as key advertising industry bodies including the IPA in the UK and the US-based ANA to challenge persistent stereotypical gender portrayals. Other clients will now surely follow. Clients can also seek to ensure equal representation of women and men in their own creative supply chain.

Finally, to the female creatives themselves. Scott (2006) highlights the contributions of women working in marketing, who over the years have sought and affected change through the first, second and third wave of feminism. She argues that "it is sometimes necessary to act under imperfect conditions" (p.13). Now in the much discussed fourth wave of feminism, women still find themselves working in far from perfect conditions, within a paradigm which although shaken is often not stirred to meaningful action. Our data reveals that women are still struggling to fit in and stand out within the current environment. However, they may now choose to leverage their minority position to provide alternative viewpoints and join other women who are already *standing up.* Like the women of the 1950's recalled by Tadajewski and Maclaran (2013), who first argued for their ability to advocate for the female consumer, it is female creatives who can best represent the female consumer and address concerns about gender portrayal.

Female creatives are in a unique position to challenge stereotypes, disrupt business-as-usual, and provide much-needed alternative narratives. To do this however, they must not only be willing but more importantly supported, to drive their ideas forward. If not by agency management, then by each other. However, despite female creatives recognising the need to engage in self-promotion for themselves and their ideas, the term itself remains challenging for many women. Ibarra, Ely and Kolb (2013) propose that focussing on a higher purpose, outside of themselves, helps women to overcome their reluctance in putting themselves forward. They argue a sense of purpose allows women to look beyond the current situation and argue for different possibilities in the future. Considering this activity as *advocacy* rather than self-promotion, might provide a refreshing and more authentic alternative. Female creatives already advocate for their clients, with Smith and Huntoon (2014) finding women to be willing advocates for other women. Now, female creatives can be powerful advocates for

an alternative set of ideas, values and practices. They are already powerful storytellers for their clients; now it is vital they tell their own story.

Limitations and Future Research

The limitations of this study provide direction for future research. The focus of the current qualitative study was limited to examining women working as creative directors within advertising agencies, precluding wider generalisation of the findings. To develop our understanding of the challenges and experiences of creative women, future studies might interview women across the creative employee life-cycle, including those who are newly employed as creatives, those in mid-career who have not yet achieved the position of creative director, and those who have chosen to leave the industry.

Future studies could also consider the perspective of male creatives on why there are so few women in these roles. Are men actively trying to keep women out, or simply unaware of the impact of the current male-dominated culture and its practices on women? Studies which consider how men feel about female creatives, including an exploration of what they see as the challenges and barriers for women, could be very interesting and may uncover previous unacknowledged unconscious biases.

Through our research we also encountered the work of Creative Equals and the 3% Movement Conference, working in the UK and USA respectively, providing accreditation for those agencies working towards greater equality in creativity. Research is needed to track the experience of these agencies in increasing gender diversity. It would also be interesting to see explorations of agencies developing more 'feminine' or gender-neutral cultures.

Furthermore, exploring the IM strategies and tactics used by women within strongly-gendered environments found in other industries, particularly those such as the media, which

play a powerful role in reflecting and influencing society would be valuable. Gender diversity and representation on and off-camera continue to be an issue in both television and cinema. Exploring how women could have a greater share of voice and influence makes film and TV production departments of considerable interest for further research.

Additionally, the research has some methodological limitations. The sample was pre-dominantly drawn from Western Europe and the US while representation from South America, Middle East and Asia was limited. This highlights the gap for future research from developing countries, where differences in attitudes, beliefs and values provide a novel setting for the exploration of women's IM strategies. Research to focus on the cultural differences in IM behaviours for example, would also be of great interest.

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Table 1: Demographic of participants.

Respondents	Country	Role	Years in role	Age
Annabel	UK	Creative Director	6	45-49
Betty	Belgium	Creative Director	2	35-39
Claudia	Netherlands	Creative Director	4	35-39
Donna	US	Creative Director	11	45-49
Eva	US	Executive Creative Director	12	45-49
Farica	Germany	Creative Content Director	2	35-39
Gina	UK	Creative Director	5	40-44
Harri	US	Creative Director	9	50-54
Isabel	US	Creative Director	13	45-49
Jo	UK	Creative Director	13	40-44
Kathy	UK	Creative Director	7	45-49
Laura	Singapore	Creative Director	4	35-39
Mariella	UK	Creative Director	5	45-49
Nina	New Zealand	Creative Director/CEO	11	35-39
Odette	UK	CEO	12	45-49
Petra	UK/Global	Creative Director	13	50-54
Queeny	UK	Executive Creative Director	10	45-49
Rahela	Romania	Creative Director	3	40-445
Sophia	Romania	Creative Director	2	35-39
Talia	Spain	Creative Director	4	40-44
Uma	Spain	Creative Director	3	35-39
Vida	Dominican Republic	Creative Director	2	35-39
Wendy	Colombia	Creative Director (Digital)	3	35-39
Yvonne	US	Creative Director	8	45-49
Zena	UK	Creative Director	9	40-44

A priori themes IM strategies	A priori themes IM behaviours/tactics	Description of IM behaviours used	Illustrative quotes	Emergent theme
	Ingratiation	Seeking to fit in, be likeable, showing oneself to be of benefit to others	"The paradigm is so set, you had to conform to that or you didn't do well." (Isabel)	Fitting In
			"I'm the kind of person that ... would go to the pub and have a laugh with male friends, so I was more accepted, but there's a heck of a lot of people who wouldn't." (Petra)	Fitting In
			"Fitting in means getting your 'code on', playing by their rules and hiding your secret girl side."(Eva).	Fitting In
Assertive	Exemplification	Doing more than necessary, staying late, appear going beyond call of duty	"Essentially the hours tend to be 10 until seven, and then very, very, very often it's much later than seven. I was working nine until 10 every day for a very long time, in fact I did six months without a full weekend off and then collapsed with exhaustion at the end of it." (Donna)	Fitting In
			"It's a really difficult culture and you have to be incredibly resilient, but also you have to be a grafter, you have to work so hard, and it's not conducive to work / life balance… Men don't do the lion's share of the childcare or the household duties, so I think that's a massive enablement for the men to be able to progress really, because everyone does so many hours." (Mariella)	Fitting In
Defensive	Justifications	Justifying/Explaining self and actions	"The Ad industry and motherhood - I just don't think it's conducive, the ones [women] that do have kids, some of them manage to claw their way back in, but they really have to claw." (Betty)	Fitting In
	Apologies	Apologising for self and actions	"One of the biggest problems is how we project ourselves when we come back, like I think we're very apologetic; I know a women who started a new job right after she'd had a baby, and she didn't tell anybody at work, because it was a very creative agency and she didn't want them to judge her and think she wasn't going to deliver."(Nina)	Fitting In

Table 2 Findings –Theme 1 with illustrative quotes

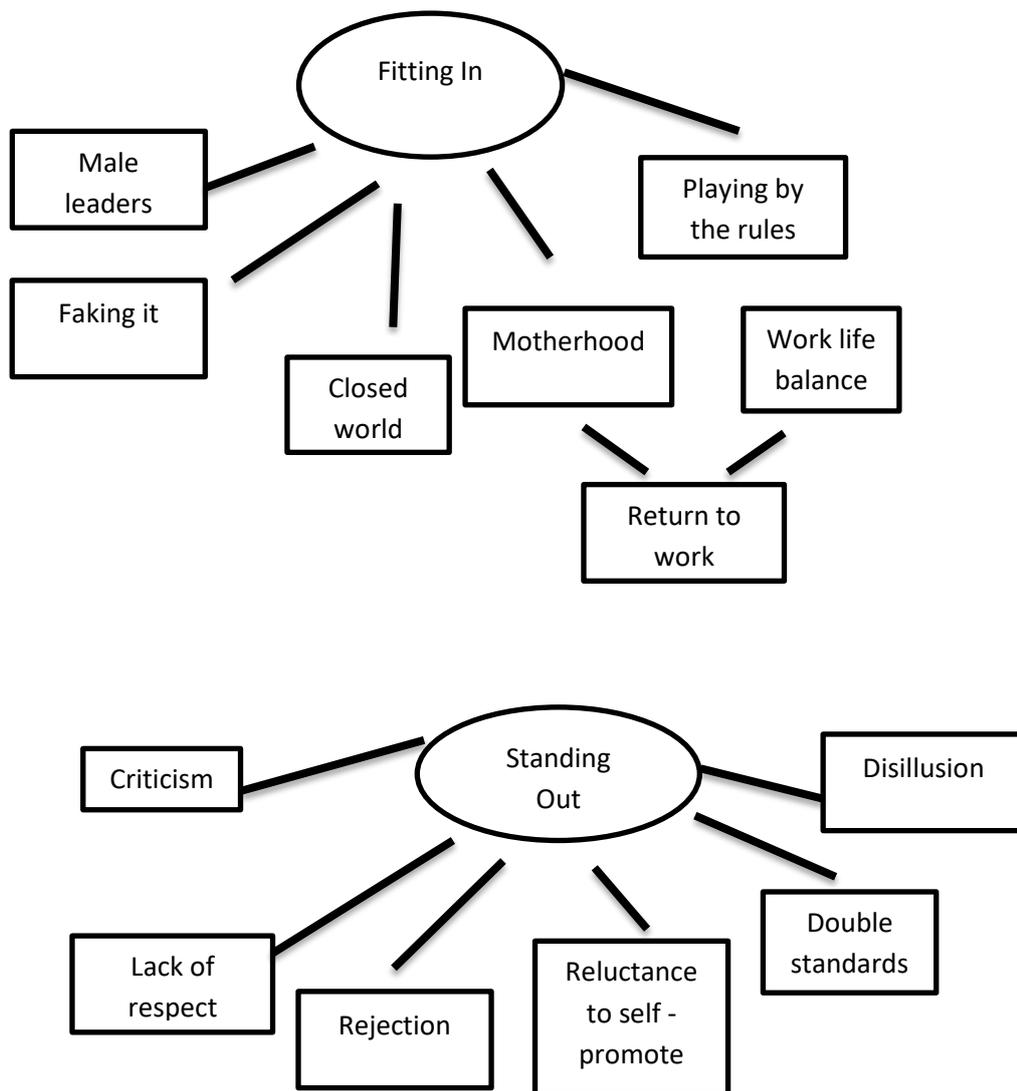| A priori themes IM strategies	A priori themes IM behaviours/tactics	Description of IM behaviours used	Illustrative quotes	Emergent theme
Assertive	Self-promotion	Mention of abilities/ accomplishments	*"[Pitching] is a 'break culture.'"(Annabel)*	Standing out
			"You go in to present some work to them and you're already feeling quite nervous because [of] the body language and atmosphere and all that sort of stuff, and then you can get quite quickly attacked, or you feel like it, because you're probably quite sensitive because of the atmosphere already, they're very exclusive and it doesn't feel like a very safe space." (Gina)	Standing out
			"Few women do [self-promotion] themselves at all...feeling self-conscious, so embarrassed and mortified."(Laura)	Standing out
			"So much of our job is being told this isn't good enough, this is wrong, and I think men are better at telling themselves that they're good and they don't suck, and I think women are already acutely aware of all our shortcomings and then amplifying them." (Donna)	Standing out
			"The best leaders are those that have a diverse and really wide network. So it's not just people within the industry, but it's people outside the industry also knowing your personal brand that's really important." (Odette).	Standing out
	Intimidation	Use of aggression and power	*"Creative male directors in advertising are allowed to be so difficult and violent, I've been in meetings where people have thrown chairs, thrown phones, screamed, sworn at people, got people fired, all of that stuff. Now if a woman was to do it, if I literally raise my voice to somebody who isn't doing their job, I'm the biggest bitch in town, and it's got nothing to do with my creativity .. or 'cos I want perfection, just that I'm a bitch. So you're living in a strange world." (Donna)*	Standing out
Defensive	Justifications	Justifying/Explaining self and actions	*"I don't want to do it like this" (Eva).*	Standing out
			"I think the factors are still against women so that's why we have to keep banging the drum, we have to keep talking about diversity..we have to keep making people think even if it's a bit boring to keep saying it, it's boring for me to keep saying it, but we have to, because only by repeating it again and again until we're bored, will anything change." (Jo)	Standing out

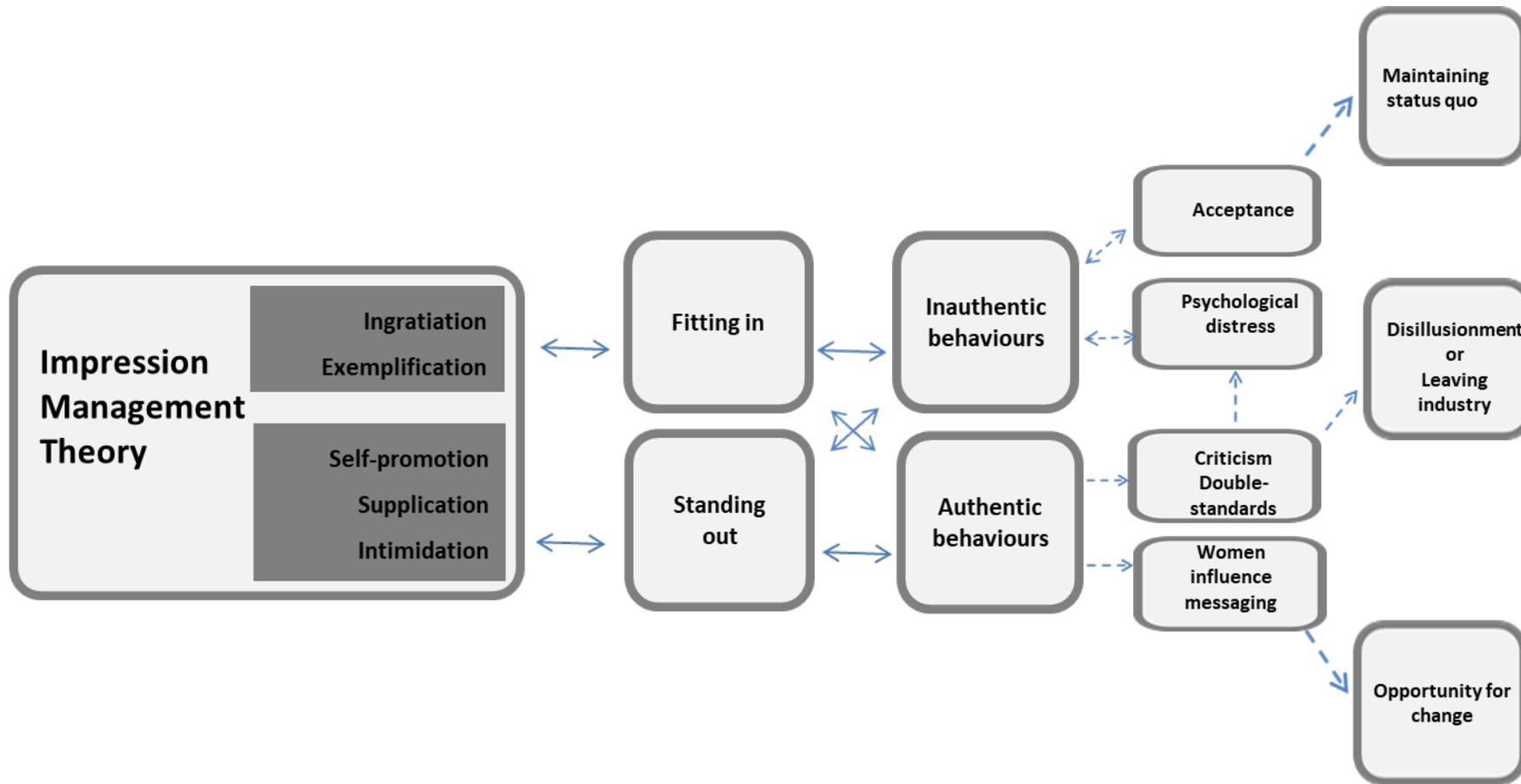*Table 3* Findings –Theme 2 with illustrative quotes

Fig. 1: Developed thematic map (highlighting two main themes).
Source: Interview data

Impression Management Theory

Ingratiation
Exemplification

Self-promotion
Supplication
Intimidation

Fitting in

Standing out

Inauthentic behaviours

Authentic behaviours

Acceptance

Psychological distress

Criticism Double-standards

Women influence messaging

Maintaining status quo

Disillusionment or Leaving industry

Opportunity for change

Fig. 2 Illustrates the range of outcomes which result from the IM behaviours employed by women to both fit in and stand out within advertising's gendered creative departments (Authors' Own)