MOTIVATION AND OPPORTUNITY:
THE ROLE OF REMOTE WORK, DEMOGRAPHIC
DISSIMILARITY, AND SOCIAL NETWORK CENTRALITY IN
 IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

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This study examined relationships among remote work, demographic dissimilarity, social network centrality, and the use and effectiveness of impression management behaviors. In our findings, a higher proportion of time spent working remotely from supervisors increased the frequency of supervisor- and job-focused impression management, but reduced social network centrality decreased job-focused impression management. Social network centrality moderated the relationships between job-focused impression management and both remote work and sex dissimilarity. Sex dissimilarity intensified a negative association between job-focused impression management and performance appraisal. Both sex dissimilarity and network centrality enhanced the positive association between supervisor-focused impression management and performance appraisal.

Work arrangements in organizations are increasingly characterized by remote work, demographic diversity, and mobility. Creating and maintaining a positive workplace identity amidst this welter of new work arrangements may prove problematic. Increased remoteness from and demographic dissimilarity to other organization members, as well as changes in social network position attendant on these new arrangements, may diminish employees’ organizational visibility, enhancing their extant baseline motivation to manage impressions. In addition, these factors may limit social interaction and interpersonal understanding, thereby reducing the perceived opportunity to manage impressions effectively. In this paper, we make explicit the link between remote work, demographic dissimilarity, social network centrality, and employees’ motivation and perceived opportunity to manage impressions. We discuss the often-competing pressures between the motivation and perceived opportunity to manage impressions and empirically examine the relationship between these three situational influences and impression management. We also explore how demographic dissimilarity and social network centrality relate to the effectiveness of impression management by examining subsequent performance appraisal.

Motivation and opportunity have both been widely acknowledged as critical determinants of individuals’ impression management behavior (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Liden & Mitchell, 1988). While the importance of “impression motivation” has been explicated in the existing literature, the notion of “impression opportunity” has not been as clearly articulated, nor has its relationship to motivation been explicitly examined (see Jones & Pittman, 1982; Liden & Mitchell, 1988). Various elements of this notion of impression opportunity have been identified in previous models of impression management, including the perceived risks in engaging in impression management behaviors (Liden & Mitchell, 1988); the perceived probability of those behaviors being successful (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Liden & Mitchell, 1988); the appropriateness of those behaviors (Jones & Pittman, 1982); and the probable costs and benefits of those behaviors (Liden & Mitchell, 1988). All these notions highlight the im-

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portance of an employee assessing a situation’s favorability when determining whether to make an impression management attempt. Thus, an employee’s perceived ability to accurately assess the appropriateness or acceptability of impression management, judgment of the likelihood of success of managing impressions, and willingness to incur the perceived risks of doing so, given his or her social network centrality and remoteness from and demographic dissimilarity to his or her supervisor, will in large part determine perception of opportunity. We argue further that perceived opportunity is an important component in the impression management process and, following Jones and Pittman (1982), suggest that it moderates the influence of impression motivation on impression management behaviors.

Although the impression management literature is replete with studies that demonstrate the effects of isolated factors on impression management, a rich understanding of how important situational factors in combination influence the impression management process is lacking. An examination of the interrelationship between remote work, demographic dissimilarity, and perceived social network centrality and impression management enhances understanding of situational influences on impression management. This exploration not only allows an understanding of the importance of and relationship between impression motivation and perceived opportunity, but also has important implications for the study of organizational behavior and new organizational forms. By examining the relationship between social network centrality and demographic similarity, we can examine whether social network centrality is the latent factor underlying broader situational effects, as has been suggested in the network literature (Fernandez & Weinberg, 1997; Seidel, Polzer, & Stewart, 2000).

THE IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT PROCESS

Impression management has been defined as behavior used to create and maintain desired images of the self (Gardner & Martinko, 1988; Schlenker, 1980). Since impression management is commonly regarded to be a fundamental part of organization life and essential to effective organizational communication, it is viewed as inherently neither good nor bad (Rosenfeld, Giacalone, & Riordan, 1995). People are all motivated to manage impressions and frequently do so in their attempts to achieve important outcomes. To create a positive workplace image, individuals engage in behaviors that focus on enhancing relationships with others and on enhancing others’ perceptions of their skills and abilities. These assertive behaviors have frequently been categorized as supervisor- and job-focused impression management. Supervisor-focused impression management is ingratiatory and other-enhancement behavior directed toward one’s supervisor, such as favor doing or providing compliments, that is intended to make one better liked. Job-focused impression management is behavior focused on self-promotion, such as alerting one’s supervisor to one’s accomplishments, that is intended to highlight job competence and performance (Ferris, Judge, Rowland, & Fitzgibbons, 1994). While numerous studies have examined the differing effects of these two types of impression management behaviors on performance evaluation (e.g., Ferris et al., 1994; Kacmar, Delery, & Ferris, 1992; Wayne & Liden, 1995), comparatively little research has explored the factors affecting impression management, specifically, the link between impression motivation and perceived opportunity and impression management.

Many models of impression management highlight the importance of a subordinate’s understanding of a situation in determining impression management (Leary & Kowlaski, 1990). This understanding is shaped largely by (1) environmental stimuli (e.g., the physical setting); (2) the subordinate’s own characteristics (e.g., age, sex); and (3) the characteristics of the audience (e.g., the supervisor’s age, sex, or familiarity) (Gardner & Martinko, 1988). The existing literature has studied many of these situational variables in isolation, but few studies have examined them in combination (Rosenfeld et al., 1995). The subordinate’s overall understanding of the situation, however, is determined in part by the subordinate’s physical proximity and demographic similarity to other members of the organization, as well as by his or her social network position in the organization. Since remote work, demographic dissimilarity to the supervisor, and social network centrality are critical factors in shaping how individuals define situations, we suggest they influence both impression motivation and perceived opportunity.

Remote Work and Impression Motivation

Impression motivation increases whenever there is a perception or fear that a discrepancy exists between one’s current and desired image (Leary & Kowlaski, 1990). When organizational visibility is constrained and spontaneous opportunities to demonstrate one’s capabilities and accomplishments are limited, individuals may be strongly motivated to manage others’ impressions of them because they may fear that others are unaware of their
efforts and performance. (We recognize, however, that people may also use these behaviors more strategically.)

In many organizations today, employees frequently work from home (i.e., telecommute), in satellite offices, from neighborhood work centers, and on the road. The U.S. remote work population, already 39 million strong in 2000, is predicted to increase to 55 million in 2004 (Drake, House, Porter, Sandler, & Boggs, 2000). Whatever their differences in form, all these work arrangements involve some amount of time spent working remotely from a supervisor, so that in-person supervision is reduced and face-to-face interaction is replaced by technology-mediated communication (Kurland & Bailey, 1999). As a result, assertive impression management may be particularly important for remote workers exactly because their performance is less easily “seen” (Bailey & Kurland, 2002). No one observes how hard these employees work, how much they get done, or the amount of time they spend on the job. Even though they often work excessively long hours, they may not receive the benefits associated with the visibility of such efforts and may receive insufficient consideration for, or even rejection from, important job assignments (Kurland & Bailey, 1999). Because of diminished organizational visibility associated with their reduced physical proximity to their supervisors, remote workers may be more highly motivated to manage impressions assertively than their nonremote colleagues. Moreover, technology makes it possible for any person to communicate with any other in the modern organization; thus, remote work is not likely to constrain these workers’ perceived opportunity to manage impressions. In fact, researchers have suggested that impression motivation and elements of perceived opportunity will be positively associated with assertive impression management, which includes both supervisor- and job-focused impression management (Gardner & Martinko, 1988; Jones & Pittman, 1982; Liden & Mitchell, 1988). Since remote work is likely to enhance impression motivation and not limit perceived opportunity, we propose:

Hypothesis 1. Remote work is positively associated with supervisor- and job-focused impression management.

Demographic Dissimilarity, Social Network Centrality, and Impression Opportunity

Relational demography is the degree of dissimilarity between an individual and other organization members on various demographic characteristics such as age, sex, and race (Tsui & O’Reilly, 1989). It is considered one of the most important determinants of interpersonal attraction (Byrne, 1971) and behavior (Schneider, 1987). By examining the relationship between demographic dissimilarity and impression management—specifically, a subordinate’s demographic characteristics relative to her or his supervisor’s—we can explore how interpersonal dynamics between subordinate and supervisor influence the motivation and perceived opportunity to manage impressions and thus the use of assertive impression management behaviors, such as supervisor- and job-focused impression management.

Demographic similarity enhances attraction (Byrne, 1971) and increases the frequency (Ibarra, 1992; Schneider, 1987) and quality of interaction (Tsui & O’Reilly, 1989) between individuals. According to social identity and self-categorization theories, individuals classify themselves and others into social categories using characteristics such as age, sex, race, and organizational membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). To maintain a positive social identity, individuals seek to maximize intergroup distinctiveness and see out-group (dissimilar) members as less attractive (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Consequently, individuals of the same age (Zenger & Lawrence, 1989), sex (Ibarra, 1992), and race (Lincoln & Miller, 1979) are more likely to associate with one another and interact more frequently. Similarity also suggests shared experiences and values, which further facilitate interaction (Byrne, 1971). Indeed, demographic similarity may facilitate the development of high-quality exchange relationships between subordinates and their supervisors by increasing interpersonal liking and reducing role ambiguity (Tsui & O’Reilly, 1989). Since recent diversity research has emphasized the importance of taking a multidimensional perspective on relational demography (Pelled, 1996), we focus on age, sex, and race dissimilarity in this study. As highly visible characteristics, age, sex, and race are the most likely to trigger categorization and attraction processes (Pelled, 1996).

Being categorized as an out-group member may enhance one’s motivation to manage impressions so as to compensate for the out-group classification. Out-group members are perceived as less honest, trustworthy, and cooperative than in-group members, who are considered special and regarded more positively (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Fearing the consequence of negative perceptions and attributions by their supervisor, demographically dissimilar subordinates may be highly motivated to manage impressions assertively. Leary and colleagues
(Leary, Nezlek, Down, & Radford-Davenport, 1994), for instance, found that sex dissimilarity was positively associated with the motivation to ingratiating and self-promote (elements of supervisor- and job-focused impression management, respectively) and argued that impression motivation is stronger in mixed-sex dyads because persons of opposite sexes can mediate social rewards for each other, such as the acquisition of romantic partners.

Other researchers have asserted that out-group categorization lowers impression motivation since out-group subordinates’ efforts to construct a favorable impression often meet with little success (Alison & Herlocker, 1994). In fact, recent empirical findings suggest that age dissimilarity may be associated with reduced impression motivation. Age, because of its career relatedness, has been shown to trigger social comparison processes that can engender rivalry between age-similar organization members (Lawrence, 1988; Pelled, Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999), perhaps enhancing age-similar, rather than age-dissimilar, subordinates’ impression motivation.

Despite varied findings for the effects of age and sex dissimilarity that might suggest differing effects on impression motivation, other empirical findings in the demography literature directly suggest that age, sex, and race dissimilarity should have uniformly negative effects on impression opportunity. All three forms of dissimilarity have consistently been shown to be negatively related to the factors that influence perceived impression opportunity most strongly: frequency of communication and interaction (Ibarra, 1992; Lincoln & Miller, 1979; Zenger & Lawrence, 1989); behavioral predictability (Meglino, Ravlin, & Adkins, 1991), which enhances the ability to anticipate one’s supervisor’s response to impression management efforts; familiarity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986); and trust (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Turban & Jones, 1988).

Indeed, according to Bohra and Pandy (1984), interacting with a familiar audience proves liberating for an impression manager in part because it is less risky. In keeping with these arguments, Wayne and Green (1993) found that high-quality exchange relationships were positively associated with supervisor- and job-focused impression management. Whatever the level of impression motivation associated with demographic dissimilarity, such research suggests perceived impression opportunity is a stronger determinant of impression management for demographically dissimilar subordinates. Predictability, coupled with a high-quality exchange relationship, increased trust, and more frequent interaction should enhance subordinates’ perceived opportunity by enhancing their ability to judge the appropriateness and acceptability of impression management behaviors, as well as their general willingness to risk these behaviors. Dissimilar subordinates, who are less likely to enjoy these advantages, may perceive less opportunity to manage impressions regardless of their motivation to do so. Absent opportunity, impression motivation cannot be indulged. We therefore suggest:

Hypothesis 2. Age, sex, and race dissimilarity are negatively associated with supervisor- and job-focused impression management.

Although the study of relational demography emphasizes the micro biases that occur in supervisor-subordinate dyads, network theorists would argue for the importance of capturing the effects of the larger social structure on these same processes. Position in this structure may provide meaningful information to others over and above the information that can be transmitted through a particular interpersonal tie, namely that between subordinate and supervisor, thereby increasing organizational visibility and reducing impression motivation (Burt, 1992). Leary and colleagues (1994) suggested that people with well-established networks of friends and acquaintances are likely to be less concerned with how others perceive them than those with smaller social networks, who are motivated to make new friends and be accepted.

On the other hand, access to a large network of interpersonal ties in an organization may be most important to effective impression management because such a network serves as a conduit through which individuals can obtain useful information (Burt, 1992; Kilduff & Krackhardt, 1994). Having fewer direct contacts in the organization may not only mean having less exposure, but also reduced access to information and resources, and these conditions will diminish a subordinate’s interpersonal savvy and situational awareness (Stevenson & Greenberg, 2000). Although more central subordinates may see impression management as less necessary, whether a subordinate will employ impression management behaviors largely depends on his or her assessment of the risk involved and the likelihood of success (Gardner & Martinko, 1988; Liden & Mitchell, 1988). Indeed, people tend to manage impressions assertively more frequently with familiar audiences; they may feel more accepted by those audiences and thus exhibit a greater willingness to engage in impression management (Gardner & Martinko, 1988). More central subordinates may also enjoy greater confidence in managing impressions assertively because they can rely on intelligence gathered through a large network of organizational ties to gauge their supervisors’ general
receptiveness to influence, or when and how that influence might most effectively be exercised. They will therefore perceive greater opportunity to manage impressions assertively. These arguments suggest:

Hypothesis 3. Social network centrality is positively associated with supervisor- and job-focused impression management.

Moderating Effects of Demographic Dissimilarity and Social Network Centrality

While we suggest that remote work is positively associated with impression management because of the positive effects of reduced organizational visibility on impression motivation, demographic dissimilarity and social network centrality may also moderate this relationship. Regardless of impression motivation, if subordinates perceive reduced impression opportunity, they are less likely to manage impressions assertively, thereby reducing their use of supervisor- and job-focused behaviors. Perceived interpersonal dissimilarities and lower-quality exchange relationships resulting from unfavorable categorization and its associated attraction processes are just as likely to diminish the amount of interaction between subordinate and supervisor in the remote context as they are in the face-to-face context. Whether working remotely or not, demographically dissimilar subordinates are likely to be categorized into their supervisor’s out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), interact less frequently with the supervisor (Ibarra, 1992; Lincoln & Miller, 1979; Zenger & Lawrence, 1989), and be less knowledgeable about that supervisor (Meglino et al, 1991); as a result, they are likely to perceive diminished impression opportunity despite their higher impression motivation. This argument leads to:

Hypothesis 4. Age, sex, and race dissimilarity moderate the relationship between remote work and both forms of impression management in such a way that the positive association between remote work and impression management is diminished at high levels of age, sex, and race dissimilarity.

On the other hand, if remote workers perceive greater opportunity to manage impressions and are highly motivated to do so, their impression management efforts are likely to intensify. Remote workers who perceive themselves to be central in their organization are likely to be both highly motivated to manage impressions, and also more confident of their ability to successfully do so. Their motivation to manage impressions will remain high because of their reduced organizational visibility. They may also be more willing to manage impressions assertively because their extensive social networks enable them to develop a better understanding of their supervisors and the organizational context. This argument suggests:

Hypothesis 5. Social network centrality moderates the relationship between remote work and both forms of impression management in such a way that the positive association between remote work and impression management is enhanced at high levels of social network centrality.

It is also possible that demographic effects on perceived impression opportunity may be attenuated when social network centrality is considered (Fernandez & Weinberg, 1997; Seidel et al., 2000). Although relational diversity along demographic dimensions shapes social interaction (Byrne, 1971; Schneider, 1987), the demography of a social system as a whole may preclude or enable particular social contacts (Ibarra, 1993). Interaction increases levels of perceived similarity among organization members regardless of initial categorization processes, allowing individuals to obtain more information about others in their network and increasing mutual acceptance and attraction (Westphal & Milton, 2000). Demographic differences provide one basis for group categorization, but attributes such as membership in the same network can also drive categorization processes (Westphal & Milton, 2000). Once social ties are taken into account, almost all demographic effects may disappear (Seidel et al., 2000). So, although demographic dissimilarity may reduce the perceived opportunity to manage impressions, social network centrality may offset this reduction, thereby enabling demographically dissimilar individuals who are more central to manage impressions assertively. Thus:

Hypothesis 6. Social network centrality moderates the relationship between age, sex, and race dissimilarity and impression management in such a way that the negative association between age, sex, and race dissimilarity and impression management is diminished at high levels of social network centrality.

Impression Management and Subsequent Performance Evaluation

Relational demography and social structure also serve as a context within which other organization members interpret an individual’s impression man-
agement. Demographic dissimilarity and social network centrality are not only likely to constrain or facilitate impression management through their effects on perceived impression opportunity, but are also likely to dictate its influence on others. Past research has repeatedly shown supervisor-focused impression management to be positively, and job-focused impression management negatively, related to performance evaluation (Ferris et al., 1994; Wayne & Ferris, 1990). The use of supervisor-focused behaviors enhances a supervisor's positive affect toward a subordinate, leading the supervisor to form a positive impression of the subordinate and make more favorable attributions about the subordinate's abilities and job performance (Wayne & Liden, 1995), but job-focused behaviors reduce the supervisor's positive affect toward the subordinate and may be interpreted as instances of inappropriate self-promotion (Ferris et al., 1994).

Supervisor-focused impression management, however, may elicit less positive evaluations in specific contexts. Certain supervisor-focused behaviors, such as other-enhancement and rendering favors, are more successful when status differences are relatively small (Liden & Mitchell, 1988). Demographically dissimilar subordinates who use supervisor-focused behaviors may be judged less favorably because, as members of their supervisor's out-group, they experience greater status differences with their supervisor (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Job-focused behaviors may also prove problematic for individuals who are less similar to their supervisor. While they are generally considered inappropriate, job-focused behaviors may be evaluated even more harshly when used by demographically dissimilar subordinates to whom the supervisor is less attracted (Byrne, 1971). Some researchers have suggested liking masks performance deficiencies, leading to biased performance ratings (Wayne & Liden, 1995). Others have noted that a supervisor may assign different sets of characteristics to similar and dissimilar subordinates on the basis of categorization rather than actual observation (Liden, Wayne, & Stilwell, 1993). Thus, supervisors may give more similar subordinates greater latitude when they self-promote because the supervisor likes and already holds a positive view of them.

These arguments lead to:

**Hypothesis 7a.** Age, sex, and race dissimilarity moderate the relationship between impression management and performance evaluation in such a way that, at high levels of age, sex, and race dissimilarity, the positive association between supervisor-focused impression manage-

**Hypothesis 7b.** Age, sex, and race dissimilarity moderate the relationship between impression management and performance evaluation in such a way that, at high levels of age, sex, and race dissimilarity, the negative association between job-focused impression management and performance evaluation is enhanced.

Social network centrality may play a similar moderating role. Use of supervisor-focused behaviors by less central subordinates may not only be perceived unfavorably but also may be perceived as a transparent attempt at ingratiation. The degree to which flattery and favor doing is warranted is more easily assessed, and mistakes that might render influence attempts more obvious are more readily avoided, when a subordinate has the access to high-quality information about the supervisor that an extensive social network provides. Less central individuals may find themselves hampered when utilizing job-focused behaviors. Individuals often provoke a negative reaction when they lack sufficient information about a target to self-promote effectively (Kacmar et al., 1992). More central subordinates, with access to better information, might not face the same negative reactions to their more carefully placed claims. These statements suggest:

**Hypothesis 8a.** Social network centrality moderates the relationship between impression management and performance evaluation in such a way that, at high levels of social network centrality, the positive association between supervisor-focused impression management and performance evaluation is enhanced.

**Hypothesis 8b.** Social network centrality moderates the relationship between impression management and performance evaluation in such a way that, at high levels of social network centrality, the negative association between job-focused impression management and performance evaluation is diminished.

**METHODS**

**Sample and Procedures**

This study was conducted at an Internet commerce firm headquartered in the southwestern United States. In addition to its headquarters, called “the central office” in this study, the firm also had a regional office. We selected this organi-
zation because a wide variety and number of organization members engaged in remote work some proportion of the time and because their remote work arrangements were varied. All members of the organization (n = 148) received a general workplace survey. Supervisors were also asked to evaluate the performance of their “direct reports.” Demographic data were obtained from organizational records. Participation in the study was voluntary and confidential. Data were collected over a four-week period.

The employee response rate was 66 percent (n = 98), and the supervisor response rate was 83 percent (n = 29). We collected complete data from 91 pairs of subordinates and their immediate supervisors. Table 1 provides demographic information. Of all respondents, 87 percent identified the central office as their primary work location; 9 percent thus identified the regional office; and 4 percent thus identified home. Eighty-six percent of supervisor respondents identified the central office as their primary work location; 9 percent, the regional office; and 7 percent, home. Archival records indicated that these data reflected the actual percentages of workers and supervisors in each location. There were no significant differences between respondents and nonrespondents on any of these variables.

### Measures

**Remote work.** Study respondents worked remotely in several ways. All respondents divided their time at work in one of three ways: between their primary work location and the road; their primary work location and home; or their primary work location, home, and the road. Work time on the road was spent attending trade shows or visiting suppliers, clients, and investors. Because each of these work arrangements reduced subordinates’ physical proximity to their supervisors, we defined remote work as the proportion of time a respondent spent working in a different location than his or her supervisor. This definition allowed us to capture the idea of people being in the same “communication location” (Monge & Kirste, 1980: 112). Respondents reported the proportion of time during a typical workweek spent working in the central office, regional office, at home, and on the road. We then used these reports to estimate the probability that the subordinate and supervisor did not overlap at any time in either office (Monge & Kirste, 1980). The specific formula we used was as follows: 1.00 − Σ(proportion of subordinate’s time, × proportion of supervisor’s time), where i is the office (central or regional) in which time was spent. This measure provided an estimate of the proportion of total time that the subordinate and supervisor spent

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**a** All correlations above .21 are statistically significant at p = .05, two-tailed tests. n = 91.

**b** Measured on a five-point Likert scale.

**c** Measured on a six-point Likert scale.
working in different locations during a typical workweek. In this way, we measured the supervisor’s ability to directly observe the subordinate’s activities and performance.

**Demographic dissimilarity.** We measured dissimilarity between subordinate and supervisor in terms of age, sex, and race. Age was measured in years, and age discrepancy was calculated as the absolute difference between supervisor and subordinate ages. Sex and race were coded as “same” (0) or “different” (1). Following Turban and Jones (1988), we developed standardized individual demographic dissimilarity scores by dividing the individual discrepancy score by its respective standard deviation.

**Social network centrality.** We collected data on familiarity relations using the roster method. We asked respondents to look down an alphabetical list of firm employees, organized by department, and place checkmarks next to the names of people they knew within the organization and with whom they regularly interacted. Self-reporting is commonly used in network research to assess the structure a respondent perceives (Westphal, Seidel, & Stewart, 2001), and it is theoretically consistent with the notion of perceived social network position influencing perceived impression opportunity. Greater familiarity with one another has been shown to increase the quality of information exchange and interpersonal insight for individuals (Carley & Krackhardt, 1996). We thus constructed a matrix of familiarity networks. Following the binary variable approach well established in the network literature (Marsden, 1990), we coded ties as a binary variable set to 1 for those said to exist and 0 otherwise. Centrality in the familiarity network was calculated as direct centrality by aggregating the number of ties to other organization members that a subordinate reported and dividing this score by the total number of possible network ties.

**Impression management.** We adapted a shortened version of Wayne and Ferris’s (1990) 24-item impression management scale (retaining the original items with the highest factor “loadings”) to measure two types of impression management behavior: supervisor- and job-focused impression management. A confirmatory factor analysis established a two-factor solution ($\chi^2 = 71.80\,[53\,df],\ p < .01;\ RMSEA = .06;\ TFI = .91;\ CFI = .93$). Supervisor-focused behaviors included ingratiatory and other-enhancement behaviors respondents directed at supervisors, such as complimenting them ($\alpha = .77$). Job-focused behaviors included self-enhancement activities, such as making their supervisors aware of their accomplishments ($\alpha = .74$). Respondents were asked to report on a five-point scale how frequently they used each of these behaviors. A high score on the scale indicated more frequent use.

**Performance evaluation.** Using Wayne and Liden’s (1995) measure of performance, we asked supervisors to rate their subordinates’ effectiveness in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities, overall performance and effectiveness, and superiority relative to other subordinates. Responses for all four items were made on six-point scales and averaged ($\alpha = .95$), with a high score indicating better performance.

**Control variables.** Simple demographic effects contribute unique variance to performance ratings over and above the effects of relational demography (Tsui & O’Reilly, 1989). To control for these effects on the variables of interest, we included subordinates’ and supervisors’ age, sex (0 = “female,” 1 = “male”), and minority status (0 = “white,” 1 = “other”) in our analysis.

**RESULTS**

Tables 2 and 3 present results of the hierarchical regression analyses testing our predictions for the relationship between remote work, demographic dissimilarity, social network centrality, and supervisor- and job-focused impression management. Table 4 presents the results of the hierarchical regression analyses testing our predictions for the relationships between impression management, demographic dissimilarity, social network centrality, and performance evaluation. Following Aiken and West (1991), we centered each of the independent measures before generating interaction terms and deleted supervisor’s minority status from our models because of its high correlation with the race dissimilarity variable.

**Results for Impression Management**

In keeping with Hypothesis 1, results showed a positive and significant association between remote work and supervisor-focused (model 1, Table 2) and job-focused (model 1, Table 3) impression management. The greater the proportion of time spent working remotely, the more frequently a subordinate managed impressions. Results, in contrast, did not support our prediction that age, sex, and race dissimilarity would be negatively associated with supervisor- and job-focused impression management (Hypothesis 2). None of these demographic dissimilarity variables was significantly associated with either form of impression management (model 1, Tables 2 and 3), even though the control variable for subordinate’s sex
was negatively and significantly associated with supervisor-focused impression management (models 1–5, Table 2). Female subordinates used these behaviors more frequently, and additional analyses showed that female subordinates in mixed-sex dyads relied on supervisor-focused impression management even more strongly than did female subordinates in same-sex dyads.

Our prediction that social network centrality would be positively associated with both forms of impression management behavior received mixed support (Hypothesis 3). We found that social network centrality was positively and significantly associated with job-focused impression management (model 1, Table 3), but not supervisor-focused impression management (model 1, Table 2). More central subordinates used job-focused behaviors more frequently than their less central peers. Contrary to our expectations that the positive association between remote work and both forms of impression management would diminish at high levels of age, sex, and race dissimilarity (Hypothesis 4), we found no moderating effects for demographic dissimilarity on the relationship between remote work and supervisor-focused impression management (models 2–5, Table 2) or job-focused impression management (models 2–5, Table 3). We found partial support for our expectation that the positive association between remote work and both forms of impression management would be enhanced at high levels of social network centrality (Hypothesis 5). Results showed a positive and significant inter-

### TABLE 2
Results of Regression Analysis of Supervisor-Focused Impression Management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Main: 1</th>
<th>Age: 2</th>
<th>Sex: 3</th>
<th>Race: 4</th>
<th>Full: 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>4.40**</td>
<td>4.41**</td>
<td>4.97**</td>
<td>4.16**</td>
<td>4.83**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>-0.09**</td>
<td>-0.91**</td>
<td>-0.88**</td>
<td>-0.83**</td>
<td>-0.85**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority</td>
<td>-0.60</td>
<td>-0.60</td>
<td>-0.68</td>
<td>-0.34</td>
<td>-0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor age</td>
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<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.07*</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor sex</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote work</td>
<td>1.24**</td>
<td>1.14**</td>
<td>1.45**</td>
<td>1.29**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age dissimilarity</td>
<td>-0.20</td>
<td>-0.20</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
<td>-0.20</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex dissimilarity</td>
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<td>0.20*</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network centrality</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age dissimilarity</td>
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<td>0.50</td>
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<td>0.50</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>× remote work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex dissimilarity</td>
<td>-0.20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>× remote work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race dissimilarity</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>× remote work</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network centrality</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>× age dissimilarity</td>
<td>-0.24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network centrality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>× sex dissimilarity</td>
<td>1.28**</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.40**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network centrality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>× race dissimilarity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ R^2 = .32^{**} \]
\[ \Delta R^2 = .03 \]
\[ \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .23 \]

\( ^* \text{n = 91. Standard errors are in parentheses.} \)
\( ^{**} \text{p = .01} \)
\( ^{**} \text{p = .01} \)

Two-tailed tests.
action between social network centrality and remote work for job-focused impression management (models 2–5, Table 3), but not for supervisor-focused impression management (models 2–5, Table 2). The positive association between remote work and job-focused impression management was enhanced at high levels of network centrality.

Finally, we predicted that the negative association between age, sex, and race dissimilarity and both forms of impression management would diminish at high levels of network centrality (Hypothesis 6). Instead, for the interactive effects of sex dissimilarity and network centrality on supervisor-focused impression management, we observed a crossover interaction (models 3 and 5, Table 2). Although we found a strong, positive association between sex dissimilarity and supervisor-focused impression management at low levels of network centrality, we found a weak, negative association between sex dissimilarity and supervisor-focused impression management at high levels of network centrality. More central subordinates employed supervisor-focused behaviors somewhat less frequently in mixed- than in same-sex dyads, while less central subordinates in mixed-sex dyads used supervisor-focused behaviors much more frequently than their less central peers in same-sex dyads. Indeed, compared to all others, less central subordinates in same-sex dyads used supervisor-focused behaviors the least, and in mixed-sex dyads they used these behaviors the most. Similarly, for job-focused impression management, we observed a weak, negative relationship between sex dissimilarity and job-focused behaviors at high levels of network centrality, but we found a strongly positive association between sex dissimilarity and job-focused behaviors at low levels of network centrality (models 3 and 5, Table 3). Although central subordi-
nates used job-focused behaviors most frequently across the board, they employed these behaviors somewhat less frequently in mixed-sex dyads than they did in same-sex dyads. Less central subordinates, who employed job-focused impression management less often in general, used these behaviors much more frequently in mixed-sex dyads than they did in same-sex dyads.

### TABLE 4
Results of Regression Analysis of Supervisor’s Evaluation of Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Main: 1</th>
<th>Age: 2</th>
<th>Sex: 3</th>
<th>Race: 4</th>
<th>Full: 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>5.03** (0.88)</td>
<td>4.69** (0.91)</td>
<td>5.65** (0.86)</td>
<td>5.09** (0.88)</td>
<td>5.29** (0.94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.01 (0.02)</td>
<td>0.01 (0.02)</td>
<td>0.00 (0.01)</td>
<td>0.01 (0.02)</td>
<td>0.01 (0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>−0.13 (0.27)</td>
<td>−0.06 (0.26)</td>
<td>0.22 (0.29)</td>
<td>−0.14 (0.27)</td>
<td>0.24 (0.30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority</td>
<td>0.42 (0.53)</td>
<td>0.34 (0.52)</td>
<td>0.29 (0.51)</td>
<td>0.45 (0.57)</td>
<td>0.29 (0.56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor age</td>
<td>−0.03 (0.03)</td>
<td>−0.02 (0.03)</td>
<td>−0.03 (0.03)</td>
<td>−0.02 (0.03)</td>
<td>−0.03 (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor sex</td>
<td>0.54 (0.30)</td>
<td>0.39 (0.31)</td>
<td>−0.02 (0.34)</td>
<td>0.37 (0.31)</td>
<td>0.03 (0.36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age dissimilarity</td>
<td>−0.04 (0.12)</td>
<td>−0.09 (0.12)</td>
<td>−0.04 (0.11)</td>
<td>−0.04 (0.12)</td>
<td>−0.07 (0.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex dissimilarity</td>
<td>−0.22* (0.11)</td>
<td>−0.16 (0.11)</td>
<td>−0.09 (0.11)</td>
<td>−0.13 (0.11)</td>
<td>−0.12 (0.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race dissimilarity</td>
<td>−0.07 (0.12)</td>
<td>−0.09 (0.12)</td>
<td>−0.07 (0.11)</td>
<td>−0.08 (0.12)</td>
<td>−0.09 (0.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network centrality</td>
<td>−0.77 (0.54)</td>
<td>−0.66 (0.56)</td>
<td>−0.42 (0.57)</td>
<td>−0.71 (0.57)</td>
<td>−0.42 (0.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor-focused impression management</td>
<td>0.29* (0.12)</td>
<td>0.32** (0.12)</td>
<td>0.40** (0.12)</td>
<td>0.29** (0.12)</td>
<td>0.41** (0.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job-focused impression management</td>
<td>−0.57** (0.18)</td>
<td>−0.58** (0.18)</td>
<td>−0.85** (0.19)</td>
<td>−0.61** (0.18)</td>
<td>−0.80** (0.20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age dissimilarity × supervisor impression management</td>
<td>0.02 (0.13)</td>
<td>0.02 (0.13)</td>
<td>0.02 (0.13)</td>
<td>0.02 (0.13)</td>
<td>0.02 (0.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age dissimilarity × job impression management</td>
<td>−0.27 (0.18)</td>
<td>−0.27 (0.18)</td>
<td>−0.27 (0.18)</td>
<td>−0.27 (0.18)</td>
<td>−0.27 (0.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex dissimilarity × supervisor impression management</td>
<td>0.32* (0.16)</td>
<td>0.28 (0.17)</td>
<td>0.32* (0.16)</td>
<td>0.28 (0.17)</td>
<td>0.32* (0.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex dissimilarity × job impression management</td>
<td>−0.62** (0.23)</td>
<td>−0.62** (0.23)</td>
<td>−0.62** (0.23)</td>
<td>−0.62** (0.23)</td>
<td>−0.62** (0.23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race dissimilarity × supervisor impression management</td>
<td>−0.01 (0.11)</td>
<td>−0.01 (0.11)</td>
<td>−0.01 (0.11)</td>
<td>−0.01 (0.11)</td>
<td>−0.01 (0.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race dissimilarity × job impression management</td>
<td>0.09 (0.18)</td>
<td>0.09 (0.18)</td>
<td>0.09 (0.18)</td>
<td>0.09 (0.18)</td>
<td>0.09 (0.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network × supervisor impression management</td>
<td>1.24* (0.64)</td>
<td>1.54** (0.61)</td>
<td>1.34* (0.64)</td>
<td>1.44* (0.64)</td>
<td>1.44* (0.64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network × job impression management</td>
<td>0.61 (0.94)</td>
<td>−0.26 (0.87)</td>
<td>0.10 (0.90)</td>
<td>0.16 (0.97)</td>
<td>0.16 (0.97)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| \( R^2 \) | .32** | .40** | .43** | .37** | .44** |
| \( \Delta R^2 \) | .08* | .10** | .05 | .12 |
| Adjusted \( R^2 \) | .23 | .28 | .31 | .25 | .29 |

* \( n = 91 \). Standard errors are in parentheses.
* \( p = .05 \)
** \( p = .01 \)
Two-tailed tests.
Results for Performance Evaluation

Supporting the literature, our results revealed that the use of supervisor-focused behaviors was positively associated with performance evaluation, and the use of job-focused behaviors was negatively associated with performance evaluation (model 1, Table 4). We also found that sex dissimilarity moderated the relationship between impression management and performance evaluation, but in the direction opposite to our expectations. We predicted that the positive association between supervisor-focused impression management and performance evaluation would diminish at high levels of age, sex, and race dissimilarity (Hypothesis 7a). Instead, we found that the positive association was strongly enhanced at high levels of sex dissimilarity (model 3, Table 4). As Figure 1 shows, for subordinates in same-sex dyads, increased use of supervisor-focused behaviors was related to higher performance evaluation, but not as strongly as for those in mixed-sex dyads. Additional analyses of mixed-sex dyads revealed that only female subordinates benefited. We found no moderating effects for age and race dissimilarity on the relationship between supervisor-focused impression management and performance evaluation (models 2, 4, and 5, Table 4).

Hypothesis 7b received mixed support. As predicted, we found sex dissimilarity enhanced the negative association between job-focused impression management and performance evaluation (models 2–5, Table 4). As Figure 2 shows, for subordinates in same-sex dyads, increased use of job-focused behaviors was related to lower performance evaluation, but not as strongly as for those in mixed-sex dyads. Contrary to our predictions, we found no moderating effects for age and race dissimilarity on the relationship between job-focused impression management and performance evaluation (models 2, 4, and 5, Table 4).

As expected, results indicated that the positive relationship between supervisor-focused impression management and performance evaluation was enhanced for subordinates with high levels of social network centrality (Hypothesis 8a; models 2–5, Table 4). As Figure 3 shows, increased use of supervisor-focused behaviors was more strongly related to higher performance evaluations at high levels of network centrality. We found no support for our expectation that the negative association between job-focused impression management and performance evaluation would diminish at high levels of social network centrality (Hypothesis 8b; models 2–5, Table 4).

**FIGURE 1**
Interactive Effects of Sex Dissimilarity and Supervisor-Focused Impression Management on Performance Evaluation

![Interactive Effects of Sex Dissimilarity and Supervisor-Focused Impression Management on Performance Evaluation](image)
FIGURE 2
Interactive Effects of Sex Dissimilarity and Job-Focused Impression Management on Performance Evaluation

Job-Focused Impression Management

- Same-sex dyad
- Mixed-sex dyad

FIGURE 3
Interactive Effects of Network Centrality and Supervisor-Focused Impression Management on Performance Evaluation

Supervisor-Focused Impression Management

- Low Centrality
- High Centrality
DISCUSSION

This research contributes to the impression management literature by examining the relationship between multiple situational factors—specifically, remote work, demographic dissimilarity, and network centrality—and impression management. It also highlights the importance for impression management models of incorporating more clearly the two components of motivation and perceived opportunity and of explicating how perceived opportunity may enhance the effects of motivation on impression management. In addition, this research suggests that some situational factors can create a potentially hazardous “catch-22” for subordinates: remote work and sex dissimilarity appeared to enhance the impression motivation, at the same time acting as a context within which impression management behaviors were less positively evaluated. Finally, this research offers support for recent assertions that “the effects of demographic differences are conditioned by the larger social structural context in which group members are embedded” (Westphal & Milton, 2000: 391) and provides additional evidence that social networks serve as opportunity structures (Burt, 1992).

Theoretical Implications

Our results indicate that remote work enhances impression motivation but does not limit perceived opportunity. As the proportion of time spent working remotely from their supervisors increased, subordinates increased their levels of impression management. This finding suggests an intense desire to create a positive workplace image. We have argued that remote workers may believe it imperative to inform their supervisors about their effort and performance, fearing that otherwise their performance will not be seen or acknowledged. Several quotes from our interviews with remote workers illustrate the importance of these visibility concerns. One remote worker asked, “How can [my boss] evaluate me? . . . [my boss] is missing out. She can’t see me in action.” Another indicated that she had to “try to find other ways to be visible...to make sure my supervisor sees me in her mind’s eye.” She therefore kept her supervisor and other managers constantly updated by phone and electronic mail. Remote workers at this firm were clearly aware of their risks of reduced visibility and actively managed these risks through the use of supervisor- and job-focused impression management.

The lack of significant “main effects” for age, sex, and race dissimilarity and of interactive effects between these forms of demographic dissimilarity and remote work on impression management indicate further that demographic dissimilarity does not necessarily constrain perceived opportunity. Demographically similar and dissimilar subordinates engaged in similar levels of supervisor- and job-focused impression management even when working remotely. These results suggest that categorization and attraction processes, which normally constrain face-to-face interaction between demographically dissimilar subordinates and supervisors, may be attenuated in some communication contexts. While the remote workers in this study relied more heavily on phone and e-mail than their nonremote peers, all firm employees communicated almost half of the time over e-mail. Age, sex, and race dissimilarity are easily observable forms of dissimilarity (Pelled, 1996), but the social presence of others is reduced by “lean” media (such as phone and e-mail), lowering the salience of social status differences that are associated with highly visible demographic category memberships and encouraging interaction (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976). With the inhibiting awareness of social status differences reduced, it is possible that demographically dissimilar workers in this study felt free to manage impressions just as actively as their demographically similar peers. Future research should examine how the use of lean media might reduce the negative effects of categorization and attraction processes in the workplace. Our results for the effects of remote work also indicated that employees readily use some forms of impression management in a variety of communication media. Exploring the influence of communication media on the relationship between demographic dissimilarity and impression management could prove to be another fruitful avenue for future research.

In addition, the lack of significant main effects for age, sex, and race dissimilarity might also be explained by the organizational context in which these relational differences were embedded. The workforce at this Internet firm had a relatively high proportion of women (69%). Subordinates and supervisors were also close in age and predominantly white (see Table 1). Research has shown that the salience of demographic attributes as social categories is lower in homogeneous than in heterogeneous organizations (Chatman, Polzer, Barsade, & Neale, 1998; Martins, Milliken, Wiesenfeld, & Salgado, 2003). Thus, age and race dissimilarity may not have been particularly salient to respondents in this study. Despite the homogeneity of workforce composition in terms of sex, however, the high proportion of women at this firm was distinctive in comparison to other high-tech firms. Chatman and
colleagues (1998) found that sex remained salient even when the proportion of women in a group was extremely high if such sex homogeneity was atypical of the larger organizational context. Our finding that female subordinates, especially those in mixed-sex dyads, engaged more frequently in supervisor-focused impression management indicates that simple demographic attributes in combination with demographic difference can trigger nonsymmetrical effects. Some researchers have suggested that the effect of sex dissimilarity should be more severe for men working in women-dominat ed groups because this group composition violates their expectations of being in the majority and heightens the salience of their sex category membership (Chattopadhyay, 1999; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Our finding was suggestive of such an effect. While they are beyond the scope of this study, more detailed future explorations of such contextual considerations and the effects of status incongruence would certainly enhance scholars’ understanding of impression management. This finding also suggests that demographic category salience may shift from context to context depending on which dimensions of an individual’s overall demographic profile are triggered. Future research should examine the effects of the organizational context on demographic category salience and the implications of this salience for the effects of demographic dissimilarity on impression management.

In terms of social network centrality, the pattern of results suggests that social networks provide the level of comfort or trust necessary to create a perceived opportunity to manage impressions. Findings indicate that more central workers are more likely to engage in job-focused impression management than less central workers. People who perceive their situation to be favorable will manage impressions more assertively than those who perceive their situation to be unfavorable (Gardner & Martinko, 1988). This relationship is an element of what we have termed “opportunity.” A subordinate may know when to manage impressions and when to refrain from doing so on the basis of knowledge of her or his supervisor’s receptiveness that is gained through the subordinate’s social network. Since less central individuals may be less adept at judging such situations accurately, they may either limit their impression management efforts as a result of perceived lack of opportunity or engage in ill-considered impression management attempts. Our finding that same-sex subordinates managed impressions most actively when their social network centrality was high and least actively when it was low, while opposite-sex subordinates did the opposite, supports the assessment-of-favorability interpretation. More central subordinates in same-sex dyads may perceive a more favorable environment for their impression management efforts, possibly because of the categorization and attraction processes associated with demographic similarity. Their social network centrality may better position them to assess the risks associated with making their claims. Similarly, more central subordinates in mixed-sex dyads may exercise restraint because they are more aware of the negative impact of job-focused behaviors in the context of demographic dissimilarity. Less central dissimilar subordinates may also simply feel less inclined to intervene because they feel disengaged relative to more central organizational members. Theorists have contended that those who perceive their influence as too low are less likely to attempt to exercise it (Farrell & Petersen, 1982). In either case, our findings highlight the importance of social networks in modifying opportunity structures for demographically dissimilar subordinates, and thus these findings advance recent work on latent network effects.

By examining the roles of remote work, demographic dissimilarity, and network centrality in the effectiveness of impression management behaviors, our research also highlights the potential problems that these situational influences may create. Remote workers, who rely on job-focused impression management, face a dilemma in that these behaviors may backfire. In keeping with the literature, our results revealed that the use of job-focused behaviors was negatively associated with performance evaluation. Remote workers’ heavier reliance on these behaviors may be especially problematic for those who are in mixed-sex dyads, considering that supervisors evaluate opposite-sex subordinates’ use of job-focused behaviors even more harshly than they evaluate same-sex subordinates’ use of these behaviors. The very strategies subordinates adopt to manage their challenging situation may therefore cause more harm than good. Similarly, our findings that social network centrality moderated the relationship between supervisor-focused impression management and performance evaluation raise concerns. Despite their best efforts, less central subordinates who engage frequently in supervisor-focused behaviors do not reap the same benefits as their more central peers. In contrast, highly central subordinates who engage less frequently in such behaviors are evaluated more harshly than less central peers, suggesting supervisors may expect the nature of their relationship with more central subordinates to be different (e.g., Liden et al., 1993).

The constraints imposed by remote work, demographic dissimilarity, and reduced network central-
ity may present challenges for many workers trying to manage impressions, yet they may also provide some benefits. Even when “face time” with a supervisor was limited, remote workers increased use of assertive impression management behaviors. Considering the positive effects of supervisor-focused impression management on performance appraisal, remote workers’ intensified use of these behaviors was beneficial. Similarly, sex dissimilarity could play to a subordinate’s advantage when supervisor-focused impression management was employed. Findings suggested that for subordinates in mixed-sex dyads, increasing use of supervisor-focused behaviors elicited significantly higher performance evaluations, while for subordinates in same-sex dyads, increasing use of these same behaviors elicited only marginally higher performance evaluations. Our finding that this effect was driven by mixed-sex dyads wherein the subordinate was female suggests that behaviors that conform to role expectations and stereotypes (namely, that women ingratiate) are evaluated more positively than counterstereotypic behavior (Rudman, 1998). Additional research is needed to explore how best to minimize the negative effects associated with counterstereotypic behavior.

In sum, our findings for the effects of remote work, demographic dissimilarity, and social network centrality on impression management highlight the importance of understanding the organizational context in which impression management occurs. Our results suggest that situational factors work together to create multiple organizational contexts that might influence impression motivation and perceived impression opportunity in complex ways. We encourage researchers to continue to explore how the interplay of multiple situational factors shapes organizational contexts and thereby influences impression motivation and opportunity.

Limitations

Although we have argued that remote work, demographic dissimilarity, and social network centrality affect impression motivation and perceived opportunity, and thereby impression management, we did not measure these underlying psychological processes directly. Moreover, given that this study was cross-sectional, conclusions about causality are limited. Future research involving longitudinal measurement and/or controlled experiments is needed to determine the causal link and to understand the underlying psychological processes more fully.

In addition, our measure of remote work, which estimated the probability that a subordinate and supervisor did not overlap at any time in any office, may be limited. If, for instance, Subordinate A worked regularly in the central office on Mondays and Tuesdays, and her supervisor worked regularly in the same office on Wednesdays and Thursdays, she would receive the same score as Subordinate B, who worked in the same office on the same two days that his supervisor worked there. Thus, our remote work measure may overestimate the proportion of time a subordinate and supervisor overlapped in the same work location. This measure provides a conservative test of our hypotheses, however, because the possibility of such an overestimate means we would have been less likely to find effects for remoteness. Nonetheless, future research would be enriched by using a more precise measure of remoteness that captures actual as opposed to estimated overlap in a work location.

The generalizability of these findings may also be subject to some limitations. The demands faced by employees working in a fast-paced “e-commerce” firm may place their own unique stresses on the impression management process. In more mature organizations, or those with less stressful environments, the pattern of results might be quite different. Still, as the growth of e-commerce and the adoption of new organizational forms continue, individuals are more likely to resemble the employees at this firm in terms of their mastery of alternative communication modes, the work pace they maintain, and the stresses they experience on the job.

Finally, although we have argued that people generally try to convey accurate impressions (Schlenker, 1980), we recognize that people may try to create false impressions to achieve undeserved outcomes. Ingratiation, favor doing, and self-promotion can also be politically motivated behaviors (Farrell & Petersen, 1982). For instance, an employee may try to frame his or her performance advantageously when perceiving an opportunity to secure valued organizational resources or achieve selfish aims. Since we relied on supervisors’ perceptions of performance, we do not know the degree to which performance perceptions were distorted by such politically motivated impression management behavior. To determine the extent to which false impressions are being created, future research should include objective measures of performance to compare with these more subjective measures. Future research is also needed to examine whether these and other situational factors influence politically motivated impression management differently than more benignly motivated forms of such behavior.
Practical Implications

These findings suggested a possible source for discriminatory labor market outcomes. Sex-dissimilar subordinates were penalized more heavily for using job-focused impression management and rewarded more strongly for using supervisor-focused behaviors. More central subordinates also benefited more substantially when they employed supervisor-focused behaviors. These results combine with previous research, which has shown that minorities and less central workers receive lower performance ratings (Kilduff & Krackhardt, 1994; Kraiger & Ford, 1985), to highlight the need for organizations to avoid discriminatory performance evaluation systems. It is imperative that managers regularly test for biases in performance ratings and adjust for them as necessary. Managers require direct feedback and extensive training to prevent and alleviate the biases to which they are susceptible (Fishhoff, 1982). Additionally, programs focused on building social connections across demographic differences and work arrangements, as called for by Seidel and colleagues (2000), would start to remedy such discriminatory outcomes. Structural remedies include formal activities designed to increase interaction across differences, such as small, focused off-site trainings and retreats, joint task dependencies, and formal mentoring programs. Socialization activities and task structures that increase interaction can enhance a sense of shared values among organization members that minimizes the salience of demographic attributes (Chatman et al., 1998).

The goal of a performance evaluation system is to accurately identify and reward good performance. Managing employees who work remotely, are demographically dissimilar, and are less centrally networked presents many specific training challenges. For example, women and men may require training to use specific impression management behaviors that counteract existing negative stereotypes and expectations (Eden, 1991; Rosenfeld et al., 1995) to create accurate performance evaluations. Likewise, managers must establish positive expectancies for their subordinates to encourage constructive self-fulfilling prophecies (Eden, 1991).

Our discussions with remote workers suggested that they used impression management to keep their supervisors updated on what they were doing (i.e., informing) as much as they did to impress on their supervisors how well they were doing it (i.e., self-promoting). Yet supervisors in this sample appeared to label all such behaviors as self-promotion. Management clearly must adopt more effective, formal systems for communicating the nature and extent of remote workers’ efforts. Establishing organizational routines that include frequent progress reports (whether made in person, by phone, or via electronic mail) should help minimize remote workers’ fears about reduced organizational visibility and thereby decrease impression motivation. Adopting such formal communication strategies might not only reduce remote workers’ use of less productive job-focused behaviors, but also minimize the possibility that supervisors will mistake simple informing activities for self-promotion. Managers should also require subordinates to overlap regularly with them in a common work location. Regularly scheduled opportunities for a manager to observe, counsel, and mentor subordinates are likely to alleviate subordinates’ visibility concerns even further and facilitate the supervisors’ ability to accurately and fairly evaluate the subordinates’ performance.

REFERENCES


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