SELF-PROMOTION AND ACADEMIC BRANDING: CAREER PROGRESSION STRATEGY

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Abstract

Self-promotion (SP) is defined as ultimately a process in which individuals aim to control how others perceive them (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Effective delivery of SP is realised through publicising personal achievements and abilities to a wider setting (Jones & Pittman, 1982). At the individual level, one’s capacity to engage in SP effectively directly impacts others’ perception of their competence (Jones & Pittman, 1982), which subsequently influences recruitment and promotion decisions (Rudman & Glick, 2001). However, while self-promotion is important for obtaining career and education opportunities, women feel uncomfortable doing it, and this hesitation limits their self-promotion success (Smith & Huntoon, 2014; Lindemant, Durik & Dooley, 2018).

Previous researchers have defined such phenomena in the aptly named Backlash Avoidance Model (BAM). BAM suggests that women who fear backlash will display a hesitancy to engage in SP and will subsequently impede their capacity to pursue their goals effectively (Moss-Racusin & Rudman, 2010). Established literature has also determined how the internalisation of gender stereotypes can create a confidence disparity between men and women (Correl, 2014) and supports the notion that women are increasingly risk-averse in the workplace (Croson & Gneezy, 2009). Such an aversion has significant implications for women's success and career advancement. This study aims to investigate the SP adoption practices of female academics by trying to identify the SP strategies adopted by academic females and the barriers that prevent SP adoption.

This exploratory study comprised in-depth interviews with a small exploratory group of female academic staff working for universities within the Australian Technology Network (ATN). Preliminary analysis provides three themes of results. First, the compilation of a specific set of SP strategies adopted by the informants provides an interesting continuation point for further research. Strategies included the use of mentors (both informally and formally), proactively instituting informal conversations or reaching out to peers about an issue or advice seeking, and publicising research outputs through social media or other media to show visibility around outputs (mainly research).

Second, two perceived barriers to engaging with SP were identified. First, individual barriers where informants suggested that females peers were hesitant to showcase their achievements. Second, the perceived gender barriers relating to institutional practices. Informants suggested that it can be tricky to navigate as a woman as they would be viewed as ‘too big for their boots’ and that the negative repercussions of SP outweighed any benefits.

Third, “motivations for engaging in SP”: Engaging in SP helped to connect informants with their communities and networks and provided opportunities to disseminate information, aid learning and development of early career researchers.

The preliminary findings suggest that the study will contribute to the growing body of research about female academics’ adoption of SP strategies and the subsequent organisational capacity. It will allow universities to respond better to the highly gendered context of academic settings. Such actions will create better mechanisms within universities to ensure the development of academic branding of its employees and will increase the visibility and impact of the university itself.

Keywords: Gender Equity, Self Promotion, Academia.