

GENDER ROLE IDENTITY AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES OF MANAGERS IN THE SERVICE SECTOR

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Abstract *Resolving a conflict constructively has often been a challenge for managers and it is found that it varies across gender and personal characteristics. This paper examines conflict management styles adopted by practicing managers and their conflict management approach, in terms of gender and gender role identity. The study was done with 449 managers employed in the service sector in select cities of Kerala, India. The tools used for measurement were Conflict Resolution Inventory (CRI) and Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI). Statistical tools like independent sample t-tests and multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) were used for the analysis of data. It was revealed upon analysis that managers are shedding of the typical gender stereotypes and being more androgynous. Significant difference in conflict management style was found only in confrontation style with respect to gender but found to be significant with all conflict management styles across the various gender role identities. Unlike the feminine category, androgynous and masculine managers used more of approach modes of conflict styles. As both concepts conflict management and gender role identity under study are culturally ascribed to an extent, a study of this kind in an Indian context adds on to the existing research work and throws light on the variations.*

Keywords: *Conflict Management Styles, Gender Role Identity, Masculinity, Femininity, Androgyny, Managers, Service Sector*

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is a natural occurrence in the workplace because of the dynamics and interdependency amongst employees and with customers. With increased diversity regarding gender, culture, and socioeconomic background, the potential for conflicts becomes inevitable in today's workspace. It's evident that the above reasons in itself bring in a lot of disagreements on an interpersonal level during work-related interactions; hence, conflicts and management of conflicts become a topic of keen interest in organizations. Conflict styles that individuals chose to negotiate while they have disagreements is an area which finds a lot of applications in workplaces. The style that a person chooses often may be functional as well as dysfunctional in approach. Modern theorists opine that when conflict is recognized and managed properly, personal and organizational benefits are seen (Silverthorne, 2005; Rahim, 2002). Several studies have reported that conflict, if not managed, leads to destructive forms of behaviour and lack of trust amongst employees (Ayoko, 2007; Liu, Klein, Chen & Jiang, 2009) and reduced productivity (Boddy, 2014). Though it is said that choosing a conflict resolution style is dependent on the situation, by and

large, conflict management styles preferred by individuals are mostly predetermined by individual characteristics (Antonioni, 1998; Gunkel, Schlaegel & Taras, 2016). An understanding of the dynamics of adoption of conflict management styles regarding gender would be of great value in organizations as many researchers have overlooked this.

Conflict represents the largest reducible cost in many businesses; yet, it remains mostly unrecognized (Dana, 1999; Slaikev, 1998). Addressing conflict is a critical component in increasing organizational effectiveness and productivity (Gross & Guerrero, 2000). According to the 2011 Workplace Employment Relations Study (WERS) survey, managers play a central role in creating, avoiding, or resolving conflict; the study has found that unfair treatment or poor relationship with line managers is the single most commonly cited trigger for employee grievances (Wood, Saundry & Latreille, 2014). Lack of requisite skills to nip conflict in the bud (CIPD, 2015) itself is another reason. Chronic patterns of unresolved conflict are costly and lead to a dysfunctional organization. A manager is undoubtedly an integral part of any conflict-resolution process and managing these conflicts often becomes a critical responsibility and activity of them. Therefore, developing constructive or functional conflict

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resolution strategies that lead to positive outcomes should be the emerging thought for a management practitioner.

SEX AND GENDER ROLE IDENTITY

Several studies use the terms male, female, man, woman, masculine, feminine, etc., interchangeably as well as adjectives in their discussions and writings (Claes, 2001; Woodhill & Samuels, 2003). Sex is biological and refers to the chromosomal composition; and this factor determines whether he is biologically male or female (Johnson, Greaves & Repta, 2007; Muss, 1996). As individuals interact with social structures, gender structures also change (Varghese, 2012) and therefore one's gender and subsequent gender role identity is considered to be a psychological component. Individuals develop this to conform themselves to societal and cultural gender norms (Holmbeck & Bale 1988; Johnson et al., 2007; Krause & Roth, 2011; Vinnicombe & Singh, 2002). Therefore, apart from looking at sex-wise or gender-wise differences, an analysis of gender inculcating identity formation shaped by the cultural factors, like gender role identity, also needs to be explored (Portello & Long, 1994). Gender role identity is defined as the relative degree to which one endorses the socially desirable traits (or stereotypes) associated with one's own and one's opposite gender (Bem, 1981).

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When we look at the literature on gender and conflict management, some studies support gender differences while some question gender differences. Results from psychological studies, before the 1980s show that men and women tend to endorse conflict management strategies that complement gender role expectations (Chanin & Schmeer, 1984; Watcher, 1999). Many of the earlier studies in gender differences in handling negotiations showed that women were less competitive and more accommodating. For instance, Rubin and Brown (1975); Gilligan (1993) indicated that females are sensitive to relationship cues whilst males are goal oriented. Similarly, in Rosenthal and Hautaluoma (1988), a study done with college students, females preferred accommodating strategies whilst men preferred competing strategies. The primary reason could be due to the way they are conditioned in terms of gender.

On the contrary, most of the contemporary studies show that gender differences are insignificant. Antonioni (1998) in his study found that in general, age, and gender had little relationship with the variance of the conflict handling styles. Sorenson and Hawkins (1995) in a dyadic study also found that there exists no gender difference in conflict

style preferences. In Orbe and Warren (2000) study though sex difference was seen, there was so little variance in the selection of conflict management strategies that the findings were determined to be insignificant. Havenga (2006) in their study amongst owner/managers of small firms in China, found that whether male or female, except for the integrating style of conflict management, use of other conflict-handling styles were same to an extent. Boonsathorn (2007), an Asian study, done with employees in Thailand working in multinational companies found that obliging and avoiding style of conflict management were preferred, but specific gender-wise differences couldn't be identified.

However, some empirical studies still indicate gender-specific preferences with certain conflict styles. Rahim (2001) observed that men adopted accommodating style whilst the women used avoiding style. Colon (2005), in a study done in a prominent call centre at Hawaii to explore the relation between generational differences and conflict management styles, observed that women had a significantly higher mean score for avoiding style than their male counterparts, whilst the other conflict styles did not report any significant differences in terms of gender. The study of Verdun (2004), done in a service sector context with managers of fashion retailer showrooms, observed that gender differences were not present for any of the five conflict styles, but gender, when interacted with management experience, found significant results with the integrating style alone. Male managers with one or more years of experience prefer to use integrative style. Brahnam, Margavio, Hignite, Barrier and Chin, (2005) found gender-wise differences only with collaborative and avoiding styles. It was found that women are more likely to utilize a collaborative conflict resolution style and the men use the avoiding style of conflict. Thomas, Thomas and Schaubhut (2008) compared conflict styles at six different managerial levels across gender and the strongest gender finding was that men scored significantly higher on competing at all six organization levels and at higher organization levels gender differences were not observed. Some other Indian studies found that gender, age, and education have a significant interaction with all the conflict handling styles across Indian Hindus and Muslims (Croucher, Holody, Hicks, Oommen & DeMaris, 2011); it was also observed that gender does predict compromising and dominating conflict handling styles amongst employees (Goel, 2012).

A possible explanation for the inconclusive results in terms of gender could be due to the emergence of gender stereotype and gender role identity during these periods. Certain most cited studies report little or no difference between the way male and female managers handle conflict (Korabik et al., 1993; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Watson & Hoffman, 1996). Eagly and Johnson (1990) in their meta-

analysis found evidence for gender stereotypic behaviour. Whilst Korabik, Baril and Watson (1993) concluded that there were no gender differences on any of the five conflict management styles among experienced managers, but found in non-managerial counterparts and further discussed a phenomenon of “gender-role congruence”.

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One of the most cited work (Brewer, Mitchell & Weber, 2002) done in a workplace context linking sex, gender role identity and conflict management styles found no significant differences between male and female. But after controlling for sex it was found that people with masculine gender role identity used dominating style, feminine gender role identity the avoiding style and ‘androgynous’ reportedly used integrating style. The impact of gender role identity was substantially stronger than gender itself in their relationship with conflict management styles. Eckstat (2002) found that an individual’s gender role identity and conflict style preference was not associated in cases that did not have management experience. But significant differences were observed between groups with and without management experience wherein the individuals with management experience preferred an interpersonal conflict style in the workplace of “control.”

Brusko (2010) in a study similar to Brewer et al., (2002), done with fulltime professionals found specific sex differences in dominating style in which males scored the highest, whilst the relationship between gender role identity and conflict styles yielded better results. A significant relationship was seen with avoiding and dominating style with respect to masculine and feminine gender role identity. Yousof and Thambi (2012) in their study found that masculine gender role identity appears consistent with the dominating style and the feminine gender role identity with obliging and avoiding style. Debas and Narayana (2016) also found that gender role identity had a significant impact in the use of compromising and integrating conflict management styles whilst no significant impact was seen in the use of avoiding, dominating and obliging styles of conflict handling.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

Despite a large number of studies conducted that capture sex differences in conflict styles, the results of the research work on sex differences in managing conflict have proven to be inconsistent (Brewer et al., 2002; Orbe & Warren, 2000; Schockley-Zalabak & Morley, 1984; Sorenson et al., 1995). Due to such inconsistencies, it is necessary for researchers to look for a different determinant of conflict management

styles, such as gender role identity (Portello & Long, 1994; Brewer et al., 2002). Gender role identity may give researchers a more in-depth understanding than research on sex differences because both sexes can possess high or low levels of masculinity and femininity (Bem, 1974; Brewer et al., 2002). Little research on the topic of gender role identity and conflict management styles has been explored, and additional research on this subject is called for (Brewer et al., 2002; Brusko, 2010). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H1: There exists a significant difference in terms of gender in the adoption of conflict management styles.

H2: There exists a significant difference across gender role identity in the adoption of conflict management styles.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

Data were collected from 449 manager/team leaders employed in the service sector in the state of Kerala which included financial services, IT, ITES, Hospitality, and Healthcare sectors. Managers working in various divisions/projects in any of the above-mentioned service sector organizations involved in leading, guiding, or coordinating the activities of the members of the division/project for the attainment of the division/project goals were included for the study. The sample comprised 268 (59.7%) males and 181 (40.3%) females. The average years of experience of the manager who was surveyed were 10.02 years with a Standard Deviation of 9.08.

Measures

Conflict Resolution Inventory (CRI) and Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) were used to measure the conflict styles and gender role identity, respectively. CRI developed by Pareek and Purohit was used. The scale has reported split-half reliability of 0.516 and validated amongst managers at large. The instrument identifies five styles and explains thereby two modes of conflict management: approach and avoidance.

Resignation (avoidance mode) - This extreme mode is characterized by deliberate avoidance of the conflict through denial of the unpleasant situation and allowing the conflict to resolve in due course as a result of a state of helplessness and fear due to the hostility of the other party.

Withdrawal (avoidance mode) - Individuals in this mode try to get away from the conflict by avoiding or withdrawing from the conflict when it takes place wherein a physical separation or boundary between the conflicting parties exists.

Confrontation (approach mode) - This mode is a distributed approach where both parties have opposing interests, and may be unreasonable in their approach and the outcome may be a win-lose situation.

Compromise (approach mode) - Compromise is the process of sharing gains to bring a win-win situation without much effort to resolve the conflict.

Negotiation (approach mode) - Negotiation is the most satisfactory mode where both parties jointly confront the problem and explore the situation.

The instrument has twenty items measured on a five-point Likert scale with anchors ‘I rarely behave that way’ to ‘I always behave that way’. Four items represented each of the five styles of conflict resolution. The sample items in the instrument were ‘I believe in fighting out the solution’ (Confrontation); ‘I am fearful to break relationships’ (Compromise); ‘I take decisions after discussion with others’ (Negotiation); ‘I keep quiet in contradictory situations’ (Avoidance); ‘I find time to be the best healer’ (Resignation).

The BSRI was developed to assess gender role (i.e., sex-role identity) as indicated by internalized socially desirable characteristics. Bem (1974) defines instrumentality and expressiveness as stable attributes that an individual incorporates into his or her identity. This instrument is used to classify an individual’s gender role orientation as masculine, feminine, androgynous, and undifferentiated. It contains 30 items, of which 10 items are deemed to be socially desirable when demonstrated by male stereotypes (e.g., independent, assertive), 10 items are characteristics of the feminine sex-role stereotype (e.g., affectionate, sympathetic), and 10 neutral items intended to disguise the purpose of the instrument (e.g., conscientious, conceited) rated on a scale from 1 (never or almost never true) to 7 (always or almost always true). This scale is still a widely used (Colley, Mulhern, Maltby & Wood, 2008) instrument to measure gender-linked expressive and instrumental personality attributes.

RESULTS

The reliability coefficient estimate of the scales used for the study was found to be 0.805 for CRI and 0.947 for BSRI.

As a preliminary step, the gender role identity of the managers was assessed. Respondents were classified as high or low in ‘instrumental’ or high or low in ‘expressive’ according to the median item score for each trait. Those who scored high on both ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ were categorized as androgynous, when scored high on instrumentality as ‘masculine’ and high on expressiveness as ‘feminine’ and when scored low on both masculinity and femininity as ‘undifferentiated’. Accordingly, median split values for both traits were obtained and categorized into four.

As seen in Table 1, 36.1% were androgynous, 16.3% masculine, and 16.5% were feminine. In the undifferentiated category, 19.4% were in the ‘near feminine’ and 11.8% in the ‘near masculine’ category.

Table 1: Showing Descriptive Statistics of Gender Role Identity Categorisation

Gender role identity	Frequency	Percent
Androgynous	162	36.1
Masculine	73	16.3
Feminine	74	16.5
Near feminine	87	19.4
Near masculine	53	11.8

Source: Prepared by Author

From Table 2 we can see that of the 268 males in the study, 35.4% were androgynous (high in both masculine and feminine traits), 19% with traditional male gender stereotypic traits, and 11.9% were feminine. The undifferentiated category, with no such specifically strong gender identities, comprised of 31.2%. In the case of females, 36.1% were androgynous, 12.2% masculine, whilst 23.2% followed the traditional stereotypic feminine traits and 27.6% in the undifferentiated category.

Table 2: Cross Tabulation of Gender Role Identity Across Gender

			Gender Role Identity				
			Androgynous	Masculine	Feminine	Near feminine	Near masculine
Gender	Male	Count	95	51	32	53	37
		% within gender	35.4%	19.0%	11.9%	19.8%	13.8%
	Female	Count	67	22	42	34	16
		% within gender	37.0%	12.2%	23.2%	18.8%	8.8%

Source: Prepared by Author

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To test whether gender differences exist in the adoption of conflict management styles, an independent sample *t*-test was conducted and the results are shown in Table 3. Significant differences in terms of sex were found for confrontation style ($F(1,447) = 5.76, p = .017$) only. Males reported a higher mean value of 12.69 with an SD of 2.87 than the female counterparts ($MV = 12.20, SD = 3.34$) in this style. However, significant differences across gender were not observed in compromising ($F(1,447) = .129, p = .719$), negotiation ($F(1,447) = 2.56, p = .110$), withdrawal ($F(1,447) = 0.078, p = 0.780$), and resignation ($F(1,447) = .181, p = .670$) styles of conflict management.

To test whether significant differences exist in the adoption of Conflict Management Styles across gender role identity, a one-way multivariate test of analysis of variance (MANOVA), with the five gender role identity categories as the independent variables and the five conflict-handling styles as the dependent variables, was done. MANOVA gives much more accurate results than ANOVA for detecting group differences when there are too many dependent variables (Sekharan & Bougie, 2013). Before proceeding to the analysis, the basic assumptions for conducting a MANOVA, tests like the independence of observations, normality, multicollinearity, and homogeneity of variance were checked. The inter-correlation matrix of the dependent variables was also verified and found acceptable (Table 4).

Table 3: Independent Sample T Test Showing Differences in Conflict Management Styles (CMS) Across Gender

Conflict Management Styles (CMS)	Gender	N	Mean score of CMS	Std Deviation	F	Sig
Confrontation	Male	268	12.69	2.87	5.76	.017*
	Female	181	12.20	3.34		
Compromise	Male	268	13.13	2.87	.129	.719
	Female	181	13.06	2.84		
Negotiation	Male	268	14.64	2.98	2.56	.110
	Female	181	14.03	3.36		
Withdrawal	Male	268	12.33	3.15	.078	.780
	Female	181	12.76	3.02		
Resignation	Male	268	13.17	2.79	.181	.670
	Female	181	13.06	2.83		

Note: * $p < .0001$

Source: Author's findings

Table 4: Inter Correlation Matrix of Conflict Styles

Pearson Correlation	Confrontation	Compromise	Negotiation	Withdrawal	Resignation
Confrontation	1				
Compromise	.469**	1			
Negotiation	.530**	.596**	1		
Withdrawal	.210*	.326**	.207**	1	
Resignation	.349**	.490**	.480**	.353**	1

Note: ** Correlation significant at 0.01level

*Correlation significant at 0.05 level

As seen in Table 5, i.e., the mean values of the conflict management styles across the different gender role identities, the androgynous group reported the highest mean value in confrontation ($MV = 13.72, SD = 2.97$), compromise ($MV = 14.31, SD = 2.78$), and negotiation ($MV = 15.72, SD = 2.85$) style of conflict management style followed by the masculine gender role identity. In the case of withdrawal style, the highest mean value was reported with feminine

gender role ($MV = 13.32, SD = 2.92$), the next with androgynous group ($MV = 12.70, SD = 3.23$). In resignation style, the highest again was for androgynous ($MV = 13.62, SD = 3.05$), masculine ($MV = 13.26, SD = 2.65$), feminine ($MV = 13.24, SD = 2.43$) gender role identities. However, in this style, the mean values were much closer to each other, unlike the other styles.

The results, as seen in Table 5.1, indicated multivariate effects of gender role identity on conflict handling styles, Wilk's lambda $F = 7.672, p = .000 < .001$, partial eta squared 0.080, as significant. Proceeding further, the univariate test result, as seen in Table 5.2, showed significant results for all

the five conflict management styles. Significant difference across gender role identity for all the conflict management styles, i.e., confrontation ($F = 19.072, p = .000$), compromise ($F = 15.81, p = .000$), negotiation ($F = 24.690, p = .000$), withdrawal ($F = 3.21, p = .013$), and resignation ($F = 3.95, p = .004$), were observed.

Table 5: Showing the Mean values and Standard Deviation of Conflict Management Styles Across the Gender Role Identity Categories

	N	Confrontation		Compromise		Negotiation		Withdrawal		Resignation	
		Mean	*SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Androgynous	162	13.72	2.97	14.31	2.78	15.72	2.85	12.70	3.23	13.62	3.05
Masculine	73	13.33	3.07	13.03	2.60	15.12	2.67	11.60	3.20	13.26	2.65
Feminine	74	11.57	2.59	12.80	2.63	14.30	2.89	13.32	2.92	13.24	2.43
Near feminine	87	10.99	2.86	11.71	2.46	12.45	3.03	12.25	2.72	12.64	2.51
Near masculine	53	11.38	2.50	12.21	2.93	12.70	2.79	12.42	3.15	12.08	2.87

*SD- Standard. Deviation
Source: Prepared by Author

Table 5.1: Showing the Multivariate Test Results

	Value	F	df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Wilks's Lambda	.718	7.672	20.00	1460.26	.000	.080*

Note: * $p < .001$

Table 5.2 Showing the Univariate Test Results for Conflict Management Styles

Conflict Management Styles	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Confrontation	622.032	4	155.508	19.072	.000	.147*
Compromise	455.905	4	113.976	15.807	.000	.125*
Negotiation	807.102	4	201.776	24.690	.000	.182*
Withdrawal	121.066	4	30.266	3.206	.013	.028*
Resignation	121.148	4	30.287	3.947	.004	.034*

Note: * $p < .0001$
Source: Authors' findings

Post-hoc test was done to find out where the difference lies with androgynous gender role identity as the reference criterion. In confrontation style, there was a significant difference between androgynous gender role identity and feminine and the 'undifferentiated' category (near feminine & near masculine categories). The mean value was found to be the highest for the androgynous category in this style followed by the masculine category. In compromise style, androgynous gender role identity was significantly different to masculine, feminine and the 'undifferentiated' category. In the case of negotiation style, significant differences were observed between androgynous and feminine and the 'undifferentiated' category. The highest mean value was reported with androgynous and masculine gender role identities with (MV = 15.72, SD = 2.85) and (MV = 15.12, SD = 2.67), respectively.

In withdrawal style, significant differences were observed from androgynous (MV = 12.70, SD = 3.23) to the masculine (11.60, SD = 3.20) and near feminine (12.25, SD = 2.72) gender role identities. The feminine category had the highest mean value reported in this style. Significant differences were observed between the androgynous and the 'undifferentiated' category in the resignation style. The highest mean values was found to be reported with androgynous (13.62, SD = 3.05), masculine (13.26, SD = 2.65), feminine (13.24, SD = 2.43) followed by the undifferentiated category where the 'near feminine' had an MV of 12.64 and SD of 2.51 and 'near masculine' had MV of 12.08 and SD of 2.87.

DISCUSSION

From the analysis results, we found that our first hypothesis that differences regarding sex in the adoption of conflict

management styles were found to be significant only with confrontation style, with males having a higher mean value. Studies of Thomas et al., (2008); Goel (2012); Croucher et al., (2011) are consistent with this finding where males reported higher scores in this style. Males do have a preference to adopt a dominating style like confrontation which is more persuasive and sometimes unreasonable in approach but may be effective at times. It is said that favourable outcomes are strongly related to sequences of strongly asserting one's needs by using a competing style (Van de Vliert, 1997; Thomas et al., 2008). The traditional ideology prominent within a patriarchal society is focused on the belief that to be in power, one must be dominant and assert the power that one gains upon another (Chemaly, 2013). In a patriarchal society, it is normally the men that pertain to such roles and men are deemed to be in higher positions than women (Strebel et al., 2006). India which primarily follows the 'Karta' system is characterized by such a mind-set. Since the prevailing culture influences the managers, they may believe that it is necessary to be dominant and assert power on others to remain in the higher position and perhaps this could be explaining the adoption of a confronting conflict management style. The compromise, negotiation, withdrawal, and resignation styles did not report any significant gender differences, and our finding is consistent to that of Antonioni (1998); Havenga (2006); Boonsathorn (2007); Manyak and Katona (2010). As per Debas and Narayana, (2016) men can have feminine or masculine attributes; likewise, females can have feminine or masculine characteristics. The absence of significant difference between gender and the other conflict handling styles is expected, as grouping individuals exclusively based upon their sex may not yield outcomes. Although it has been asserted in several studies that rather than looking at gender differences, it would be better if we could look 'within sex' differences to understand conflict management styles adopted (Portello & Long, 1994; Brewer et al., 2002; Brusko, 2010). Our study also points out the need of examining gender role identity rather than gender in understanding the styles of conflict management.

When we examined the gender role identity of managers, we found that majority of them were androgynous. The increasing proportion of women in managerial positions in recent decades (Davidson & Burke, 2011; Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell & Ristikari 2011; Powell, 2011) may have contributed to such a finding where more people in the androgynous category are found in which a balanced endorsement of masculine and feminine traits are seen. In a meta-analysis done by Donnelly and Twenge (2016), it was seen that women's entry into workforce corresponds to with a sharp increase in the 'masculinity' and 'androgyny' scores. According to them in the past two decades, women's 'femininity' score has decreased, and 'masculinity' increased; whereas for the men, the masculinity score remained more or

less stable. Our findings are partly similar to the above study, as males retain their 'masculinity' or become androgynous; and contrary to their hypothesis, we find that only a small percentage of female managers are 'masculine' and do have a tendency to stick to their gender stereotype. An increasing number of females fall into the androgynous category too. Another interesting finding is that a substantial percentage of the managers fell in the undifferentiated category (31.2%) and such a possibility cannot be overlooked as Powell and Butterfield, (2015) in their latest research work mention the possibility of an 'undifferentiated' or lesser masculine or feminine category emerging over a period, which has received much lesser attention as of now.

As per our contention, we found that gender role identity explains the conflict styles in a better manner than sex alone as the results were significant for all the styles of conflict management. It was found that the androgynous managers had the highest mean scores in all the approach modes of conflict management styles – negotiation, compromise, and confrontation styles in the order of preference. The masculine group had the highest mean value for negotiation, followed by confrontation and compromise. This was consistent with the findings of Brewer et al., (2002), where androgynous used integrating style and masculine preferred competing style. The feminine group, however, followed a mixed mode, wherein the highest mean value was reported for the negotiation (approach mode) and withdrawal (avoidance mode) followed by resignation, confrontation, and compromise style. The undifferentiated category too scored highest in negotiation style followed by the avoidance styles. It was observed that androgynous and masculine groups use more of negotiation strategy which is synonymous to the integrating style (Rahim, 2001) found in other conflict literature, and this is considered to be the best for resolving conflicts as it not only solves the problem, but also enriches the interpersonal relationships (Mc Farland, 1992). In our study, almost 18.2% of the variance is explained by this style. Individuals who possess masculine traits tend to be more assertive and achievement-oriented; hence, the relationship between the masculine gender role and the confrontation style was expected. This style accounts for more than 14.7% of the variance. The feminine group also had their first preference for negotiation style followed by withdrawal and resignation style. The relationship of feminine gender role identity to withdrawal style was consistent with that of Brusko (2010). Withdrawal style is associated with a situation where avoidance or being away from the site is resorted most often due to a lack of concern.

From the study, we have seen that androgynous and masculine category of managers was significantly different in the adoption of conflict styles from the feminine and

undifferentiated category. The dominant gender role identities using the approach modes of conflict management styles were the 'androgynous' and 'masculine' categories. According to Pareekh and Purohit (2010), approach modes of conflict styles are based on hope and attempt to resolve conflicts by considering both the parties. This creates open communication and fosters healthy relations among co-workers. Rather than trying to eliminate conflict, or suppress its symptoms, such styles try to resolve a conflict by influencing and engaging with others in a functional manner. To conclude, we find that androgynous and masculine gender role identities use more of approach modes of conflict styles than the avoidance modes of conflict styles, whilst the feminine group adopts both approach (negotiation) and the avoidance style.

LIMITATIONS

One the major limitation of the study is that it has looked into only one individual determinant, i.e., in terms of gender. Several other variables like experience, managerial level, personality traits, etc., could have been explored. Also, the study was conducted only in one state; hence, generalizability of the results may not be possible.

CONCLUSION

The findings so obtained add on to the existing literature on conflict management styles and gender role identity, especially in an Indian context. More than sex-wise differences, we understand that how individuals identify themselves with their gender role identity is relevant to the adoption of conflict styles and hence has its implications at workplaces. An awareness about individual characteristics like gender role identity, which has a relationship to conflict styles adopted, would be practically useful.

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