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Beyond sex

Exploring the effects of femininity and masculinity on women's use of influence tactics

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Women's use
of influence
tactics

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Abstract

Purpose – Influence tactics are prevalent in the workplace and are linked to crucial outcomes such as career success and helping behaviours. The authors argue that sex role identity affects women's choice of influence tactics in the workplace, but they only receive positive performance ratings when their behaviours are congruent with gender role expectation. Furthermore, the authors hypothesize that these relationships may be moderated by occupational continuance commitment. Results suggest that femininity is negatively related to the use of influence tactics overall, and this relationship is moderated by occupational continuance commitment.

Design/methodology/approach – In all, 657 women working in the construction industry were surveyed for their continuance occupational commitment and sex role identity and 465 supervisors whose responses are linked with the subordinates are surveyed for the women's influence tactics and performance ratings.

Findings – Results suggested that femininity was negatively related to the use of influence tactics overall, and this relationship was moderated by occupational continuance commitment. Results also showed that women's use of influence tactics was only positively received in terms of performance ratings when the influence tactic was congruent with gender role expectations.

Research limitations/implications – The results of this current study suggest that not all women are equally likely to use influence tactics and not all tactics result in positive perceptions of performance. Feminine women in general refrain from using influence tactics unless they are driven to stay in a given occupation, but they only receive positive results when their behaviours are congruent with society's gender role expectations.

Originality/value – Past research has mostly focused on broad differences between males and females, and this study has shown that there are more nuanced differences that can more accurately describe the effects of gender disposition (i.e. sex role identity) on influence tactics. It also emphasizes the importance of occupational commitment as a boundary condition, which influences women to step out of their gender roles even though they may be penalized with lower performance ratings.

Keywords Masculinity, Influence tactics, Continuous occupational commitment, Femininity, Performance ratings, Sex role identity

Paper type Research paper



Introduction

In the workplace, people often try to influence others to gain compliance, to increase liking or to keep or advance in their jobs. Accordingly, a substantial body of research has been devoted to classifying different influence tactics as well as examining their

outcomes. Indeed, previous research has shown that influence tactics can promote helping (Sparrowe *et al.*, 2006), liking (Wayne and Ferris, 1990) and performance ratings (Barrick *et al.*, 2009) in the workplace. Given these outcomes, it is critical to understand the antecedents that give rise to the use of influence tactics.

One important yet controversial predictor of the use of influence tactics is sex. The argument that women tend to engage in communal, nurturing behaviours, and men tend to engage in agentic, assertive behaviours has been used to explain sex differences in influence tactics (Eagly and Wood, 1982). However, the patterns of relationships between sex, influence tactics and performance have been found to be inconsistent. While some research found the expected gender differences in the use of influence tactics (DuBrin, 1991), others found no mean differences between men and women's use of influence tactics (Kipnis *et al.*, 1980). Meanwhile, some researchers have shown that men receive higher rewards than women when using the same influence tactic (Dreher *et al.*, 1989), but others have shown that both genders can achieve similar outcomes (Castro *et al.*, 2003). Smith *et al.*'s (2013) meta-analysis concluded that while men achieve similar results using both agentic and communal tactics, women only receive positive outcomes such as personal advancement and liking when using communal tactics. The small and mixed effects observed in previous literature have led to the call to look at possible boundary conditions that interact with gender to better understand the use and effectiveness of influence tactics (Higgins *et al.*, 2003; Smith *et al.*, 2013). One possible explanation for inconsistent findings is that research to date has not examined the more subtle intra-sex differences in the use of influence tactics. A second explanation is the lack of consideration of contextual factors such as commitment where these behaviours take place. In this study, we take a more nuanced approach to understanding these relationships by considering within-sex differences in influence tactics and the role of continuance occupational commitment as a boundary condition of these effects.

We draw on Smith *et al.* (2013), who showed that there is substantial within-sex variability in sex role identity – the degree to which a person identifies with traditional masculine and feminine qualities – that is likely linked with the types of influence tactics utilized, as well as their effectiveness in enhancing interpersonal perceptions. The objective of the current study is to examine the effects of sex role identity on influence tactics used and performance ratings (Figure 1). We further consider the extent to which women are committed to their occupation due to the high costs of leaving – that is, their continuance occupational commitment – as a potential boundary condition of the proposed effects. We argue that the effects of sex role identity on influence tactics may

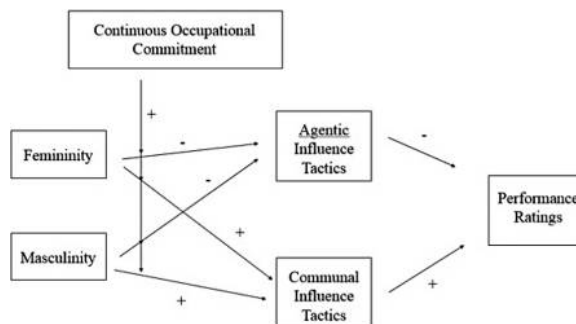


Figure 1.
Conceptual model of
hypotheses

be enhanced when women feel “stuck” in their occupations. Using a unique sample of women working in construction, a male-dominated industry, we aim to capture the interaction between women's use of influence tactics and their continuance commitment in a strongly gendered environment, as no other primary study has ever examined women's use of both agentic and communal tactics in this context (Smith *et al.*, 2013). Altogether, this study will shed light on the complex relationships between sex role identity and influence tactics beyond biological sex, and will further explore how those behaviours ultimately affect the important outcome of performance ratings.

Influence tactics

Influence tactics are defined as behaviours targeted towards others to gain compliance, liking or any other desired response (Barrick *et al.*, 2009). As proposed by social influence theory, most social interactions involve some degree of interpersonal influence, especially when people are motivated to portray themselves in a more favourable light (Cialdini and Trost, 1998). According to the theory, people use social influence tactics to affect both normative and affective evaluations of the influence target. In the workplace, while influence tactics can be directed upward (i.e. towards supervisors), laterally (i.e. towards peers) and downward (i.e. towards subordinates) (Yukl and Falbe, 1990), we are primarily interested in upward influence because supervisors are the primary decision makers with power over important outcomes such as financial rewards, promotion and job security. Specifically, subordinates hope to gain an advantage in important personnel decisions by affecting supervisors' perception of performance and competence (Wayne and Ferris, 1990). Influence tactics can be classified based on the behaviour (Kipnis *et al.*, 1980), level of intensity and directness (Kipnis *et al.*, 1980), target subject (Wayne and Ferris, 1990) and/or nature of the tactic (Kipnis *et al.*, 1988). In this paper, we will focus on influence tactics that align with traditional gendered behaviours: gender-oriented influence tactics that are differentially linked to gender role, or societally sanctioned roles for men and women (Bem, 1981), due to their similarities with masculine and feminine behaviours, respectively.

Sex, sex role identity, gender role and influence tactics

In the discussion of differences between men and women, researchers commonly distinguish between sex and gender. Sex refers to the biological, genetic distinction that categorizes a person to be man or woman, whereas gender refers to psychological and behavioural aspects associated with these biological distinctions. Individuals are commonly socialized into these behaviours since birth (Deaux, 1985). Eagly's foundational social role theory contends that the historical distribution of men and women into resource provider versus homemaker roles translates into gender-based expectations and behaviours (Eagly, 1987). According to the theory, men and women acquire skills that allow them to succeed in their prescribed gender role; their social behaviours are usually categorized as masculine (agentic) and feminine (communal) in nature. Based on their biological sex, men and women are expected to follow and fulfil their gender roles, the set of rules that are associated with their respective breadwinner and caregiver roles based on social norms. As women tend to take more of a domestic role, they also tend to be more relationship-oriented and cooperative than men. Again, according to the theory, in comparison to women, men tend to be more assertive and independent as a result of their prescribed breadwinner roles (Eagly and Steffen, 1984).

Research has supported this theory by showing that men and women are generally aware of this division of social roles and that sex is a personal characteristic that is seen as the most salient aspect of an individual's identity (Fiske *et al.*, 1991). To reinforce this belief, men and women are socialized from early ages to behave in accordance with their gender roles. Studies have suggested that people internalize these gender stereotypes at least to some extent, so women's construals of themselves tend to be other-oriented and interdependent, while men's construals of themselves tend to be self-oriented and independent (Cross and Madson, 1997).

These gendered behavioural tendencies align well with popular typologies of influence tactics. According to Smith *et al.* (2013), agentic tactics are direct, assertive and self-promotional. Examples of these behaviours are bragging about one's accomplishments and arriving at work early to look good in the eyes of others. Communal tactics, on the other hand, are much more indirect and involve ingratiation. Examples of these communal tactics include offering praise and doing personal favours (Wayne and Ferris, 1990).

It is important to note, however, that biological sex is not perfectly aligned with gender-based behaviours. Instead, both men and women can and do use agentic and communal influence tactics at work (Smith *et al.*, 2013). A better predictor of influence tactics may not be biological sex, but rather degree of sex role identity. Sex role identity refers to the degrees of masculinity and femininity people see themselves as reflecting, or to the extent to which people possess qualities that are typically identified with males or females (Bem, 1981). Though masculinity and femininity are often perceived as extremes on a continuum, these two qualities often coexist in varying degrees within individuals, both men and women (Spence and Helmreich, 1978). People do not necessarily accept all of the attributes, or gender roles, assigned to them based on their sex as part of their sex role identity (Spence, 1993). Research has shown that while a large percentage of women do fall under the high femininity category, many also fall under high masculinity categories (Spence *et al.*, 1975). This clearly distinguishes sex role identity from gender role, the former being an individual difference independent of biological sex, while the latter is constructed and imposed by society based on individual's biological sex rather than their individual disposition or sex role identity. As a result, there can be within-sex differences in sex role identity, whereas the same gender roles apply equally to every one of the same sex. Individuals, based on their sex role identity, vary in the degree to which they adhere to societally sanctioned gender roles. Existing research on influence tactics and their effects, as shown in this review of literature, has mostly focused on gender roles associated with biological sex and failed to consider within-sex differences of sex role identity. Though society generally expects women to be more relationship-oriented and cooperative, in reality not all women strictly follow these gender expectations and some may possess more masculine qualities, which influence their behaviours to be more agentic. When individuals identify a certain sex-type dimension as closer to their core concept of self (i.e. sex role identity), they are more likely to align their behaviours to those that are associated with that sex role identity (Bem, 1981). Therefore, we predict that the extent to which individuals have feminine sex role identities will be linked to lower levels of agentic tactics and greater levels of communal tactics, while individual differences in masculine identities will be linked with a higher level of agentic tactics and lower levels of communal tactics:

-
- H1a.* The degree of feminine sex role identity is negatively related to influence tactics and positively related to communal influence tactics.
- H1b.* The degree of masculine sex role identity is positively related to agentic influence tactics and negatively related to communal influence tactics.

Influence tactics and performance ratings

While women can draw from a wide repertoire of influence tactics, they may not necessarily obtain similar outcomes to men, especially when using more agentic tactics. Research has shown that “soft” influence tactics tend to be more effective for women than “hard” tactics overall because soft tactics are less assertive, and thus more consistent with gender role expectations (Higgins *et al.*, 2003). Specifically, Higgins *et al.* found in a meta-analysis of studies linking influence tactics and work outcomes that ingratiation has a positive relationship with performance assessment outcomes and women who use this tactic seem to enjoy more extrinsic success, while assertiveness has a moderately strong negative relationship with performance assessment outcomes for women. These results are confirmed by Smith *et al.* (2013): women who use communal tactics tend to receive more personal advancement and extrinsic success than those who use agentic tactics. This suggests that communal tactics are more effective than agentic tactics when used by women. As implied by social role theory, women, regardless of their sex role identity, are viewed more favourably when they behave in ways that are congruent with their gender role and are caring, friendly and cooperative. Those who self-promote instead often face repercussions because they are being more masculine and assertive, thus stepping out of their prescribed gender role (Rudman, 1998). Therefore, we predict that women using agentic tactics are less likely to receive higher performance ratings as a result compared to women who use communal tactics. On the other hand, women who use communal tactics should be more likely to engender positive outcomes such as increased performance ratings:

- H2a.* The degree to which women use agentic influence tactics is negatively related to higher performance ratings.
- H2b.* The degree to which women use communal influence tactics is positively related to higher performance ratings.

Taking these ideas together, it is logical to infer that the types of influence tactics women use at least partially account for the relationship between sex role identity and performance ratings:

- H3.* Influence tactics partially mediate the relationship between sex role identity and performance ratings at work.

Continuance occupational commitment as a boundary condition

In addition to examining how sex role identity relates to influence tactics, this study also aims to explore a boundary condition. Specifically, we are interested in how those relationships may be impacted by women's attitude towards their occupation, particularly when they feel compelled to stay in an occupation with few feasible alternative career choices. The feeling of being “stuck” in an industry may cause women to act differently than if they feel free to change occupations. Occupational commitment, an important job attitude, is defined as “a person's belief in and acceptance of the values

of his or her chosen occupation or line of work, and a willingness to maintain membership in that occupation” (Vandenberg and Scarpello, 1994, p. 535). Continuance commitment specifically refers to when an individual is committed because he or she recognizes the cost of leaving the occupation and feels there is little choice but to stay (Meyer *et al.*, 1993). Research has shown that there are no gender differences in occupational commitment (Lee *et al.*, 2000), but in the context of a gendered environment such as a male-dominated industry, women’s continuance occupational commitment may motivate them to behave differently because of their minority status. As suggested by Kanter’s tokenism theory, women in predominantly masculine environments may experience negative effects such as social exclusion because of their highly visible differences from the dominant group (i.e. men) (Kanter, 1979; Yoder, 1991). In an industry where these women may not be included, but where they feel compelled to remain, they may feel a stronger need to wield influence so that they can secure their position. To date, there has been no research examining the relationship between occupational gender and continuance occupational commitment, or the effects of continuous occupational commitment on use of influence tactics. However, we predict that when women, regardless of sex role identity, are committed to stay in a profession (especially when due to lack of viable alternatives), they may be more motivated to use influence tactics *in general* because they may be keen to take an active role in managing impressions and wielding influence. To keep their jobs, women may choose the tactic that is best aligned with their disposition because that is probably the tactic that they are most comfortable with utilizing based on past experience. We hypothesize that continuance occupational commitment exacerbates the effects of sex role identity upon influence tactics; the influence of sex role identity is likely enhanced by women’s motivation to stay in their occupation. The opposite effects of femininity on communal tactics and agentic tactics, respectively, will be stronger under the condition of high occupational continuance commitment as women strive to use influence tactics to stay within their current occupation. Similarly, we think that women high in masculinity as well as continuance occupational commitment will prefer using agentic tactics because they are more aligned with those women’s sex role identity. In other words, tendencies for masculine women to use agentic tactics (and feminine women to use communal tactics) will be particularly pronounced when they are highly committed to their occupations.

It is important to note that not all influence tactics have the same effects on supervisors’ perception of performance. Thus, even though women, regardless of their sex role identity, are more likely to use both communal and agentic tactics when they are high in continuous occupational commitment, they may only receive more favourable ratings when using communal tactics which conform to the gender role expectations of others (most importantly, their immediate supervisors). In short, we predict that occupational continuance commitment will moderate the relationship between sex role identity and perceived performance, mediated by the use of influence tactics in the workplace. More formally, we propose the following hypotheses:

- H4a.* The degree of feminine sex role identity interacts with continuance occupational commitment such that the negative relationship between femininity and agentic tactics will be more negative when continuance commitment is high.

- H4b.* The degree of feminine sex role identity will interact with continuance occupational commitment such that the positive relationship between femininity and communal tactics will be more positive when continuance commitment is high.
- H4c.* The degree of masculine sex role identity will interact with continuance occupational commitment such that positive relationship between masculinity and agentic tactics will become more positive when continuous commitment is high.
- H4d.* The degree of masculine sex role identity will interact with continuance occupational commitment such that the negative relationship between masculinity and communal tactics will become more negative when continuous commitment is high.
- H5.* The indirect relationship of sex role identity on performance ratings will vary across levels of continuance occupational commitment.

Method

Participants

As part of a larger study, potential participants were recruited from the National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC) in the USA. The association consists of 5,000 women members from a wide range of positions and organizations within the construction industry. A total of 2,650 members were randomly selected from the member directory and sent surveys for the purpose of this study. In addition, 350 women from the 385 women listed in the directory as occupying trade positions were selected to increase the probability that this particular type of work would be represented in the final sample. We collected data from NAWIC members who completed the questionnaire and their supervisors who completed a shorter separate questionnaire rating their subordinates.

A total of 657 questionnaire responses out of the 3,000 that were originally distributed were returned, producing a response rate of 21.9 per cent. Out of the 657 responses, 625 were usable due to 32 surveys being incomplete or incorrectly completed. The final sample was 91.9 per cent Caucasians, with the remaining sample equally divided among African Americans, Hispanics, Asians and Native Americans. The mean age of the participants was 45 years and the average length of time working in the industry was 16 years. In all, 57.7 per cent of the participants were married, while 22.8 per cent were divorced, and 15.3 per cent were single.

We also received a total of 465 supervisors' responses that were linked with the subordinates' data. The response rate among supervisors who received the questionnaires from their subordinates who also returned a completed questionnaire was 73.4 per cent. Out of the 465 responses, 374 were usable, as 3 were completed incorrectly and 88 were returned incomplete because the employees were sole proprietors without supervisors. The total number of responses included in the analysis was 59.1 per cent of those who received the original survey.

We conducted a binary logistic regression analysis to test for potential differences between employees whose supervisors returned a survey and those whose supervisors did not. The results showed that the participants' ethnicity ($\beta = -0.43, ns$), marital status ($\beta = 0.06, ns$) and age ($\beta = 0.01, ns$) did not predict whether their supervisors

completed and returned a survey. Furthermore, neither the supervisor's gender ($\beta = -0.48, ns$) nor the ratio of women to men in participants' organizations ($\beta = 0.28, ns$) was related to supervisor response. As such, the analyses reported in the current study were based on a final sample of 374 employees and their supervisors.

Procedure

We sent out a large envelope that included a cover letter addressed to the randomly selected NAWIC members, a 15-page questionnaire survey, a cover letter addressed to their supervisors, a 2-page survey for their supervisors and 2 postage paid-envelopes addressed to the researchers. The cover letter informed the participants of the purpose of the study, encouraged them to participate by completing the survey, asked them to give their supervisors the second survey and envelopes and assured confidentiality of the results. The cover letter for the supervisor requested their evaluation of the employee and assured confidentiality.

Measures

Sex role identity. Sex role identity was measured by the 15-item subscale adopted from the personal attribute questionnaire (Spence and Helmreich, 1978) on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = *Not at all Descriptive*, 5 = *Extremely Descriptive*) and included the two dimensions of femininity and masculinity. The scale of femininity included eight items such as "I am home-oriented" and "I am helpful to others" ($\alpha = 0.72$). The scale of masculinity included seven items such as "I am independent" and "I am feeling superior" ($\alpha = 0.69$).

Influence tactics. Influence tactics, as reported by the supervisors, were measured by the 19-item scale adopted from Wayne and Ferris (1990) on a scale from 1 to 7 (1 = *Never*; 7 = *Always*) and included the two dimensions of job-focused (i.e. agentic) and supervisor-focused (i.e. communal) influence tactics. The scale of job-focused tactics included 12 items such as "makes you aware of their accomplishment" and "arrives at work early in order to look good in front of you" ($\alpha = 0.74$). The scale of supervisor-focused tactics included seven items such as "agrees with your major ideas" and "offers to do something for you that they were not required to do" ($\alpha = 0.72$).

Performance ratings. Performance ratings by the supervisor were measured by the five-item scale adopted from Wayne and Ferris (1990) with anchors ranging from 1 to 7 (1 = *Strongly Disagree*; 7 = *Strongly Agree*). These items measured the employee's base of knowledge about the job, dependability, quality of work, cooperation and initiative and judgement. Sample items included "has good initiative and judgement" and "is an excellent worker overall" ($\alpha = 0.77$).

Continuance occupational commitment. Continuance occupational commitment was measured by the five-item scale adapted from Meyer *et al.* (1993) on a scale from 1 to 7 (1 = *Strongly Disagree*; 7 = *Strongly Agree*) and sample items included "I have put too much into my construction profession to consider changing now" and "too much of my life would be disrupted if I were to change my profession" ($\alpha = 0.64$).

Results

We conducted multiple regression analyses to test *H1* and *H2* and used SPSS PROCESS macros developed by Hayes (2013) to test *H3* through *H5*. The macros were designed to test complex moderated mediation models using regression analysis. More specifically, we conducted non-parametric bootstrapping analyses with these macros, which are accomplished by drawing from a sampling distribution of indirect effects with

replacement for anywhere from 1,000 to 10,000 times to estimate the true standard error of estimate closest to that of the population and create a confidence interval for the indirect effects (Hayes, 2013). If the confidence interval for these repeatedly sampled indirect effects excludes zero, then one can conclude a significant mediation effect. This approach is superior to the causal steps approach (Baron and Kenny, 1986) in that it does not require a significant X to Y relationship for mediation to occur (Hayes, 2013). Additionally, it quantifies the indirect effect as the product of the two paths involved in the proposed mediation. It is also superior to the Sobel (1982) test in that it does not assume a normal sampling distribution of the indirect effect, which is often an untenable assumption that can lead to Type II errors (Edwards and Lambert, 2007). In short, bootstrapping does not impose untenable assumptions and was recommended, based on simulation studies (Mackinnon *et al.*, 2002), over the causal steps and Sobel approach, as it leads to lower rate of Type II errors while preserving reasonable control of Type I error when testing for mediation (Preacher and Hayes, 2008).

Importantly, these macros also allow one to test conditional indirect effects at varying levels of the moderator variable. These macros can now calculate the index of moderated mediation, which is essentially equivalent to bootstrapping the difference between two conditional indirect effects. Stated simply, this technique calculates the indirect effect at high and low levels of a moderator variable while using bootstrapping to form a confidence interval around the difference between these indirect effects. If the confidence interval for this index excludes zero, one can conclude evidence of moderated mediation (Hayes, 2014). We examined the moderated mediation model of how continuance occupational commitment moderates the relationships between sex role identity, influence tactics and performance ratings. Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of the focal variables can be found in Table I, while results from regression analyses can be found in Table II.

In *H1a*, we predicted that femininity would be positively related to communal influence tactics and negatively related to agentic tactics. Results showed significant negative associations between femininity and both agentic ($b = -0.83, p < 0.05$) and communal tactics ($b = -1.10, p < 0.05$), providing mixed support for this hypothesis. As femininity increased, use of both agentic and communal tactics decreased. In *H1b*, we predicted that masculinity would be negatively related to communal influence tactics

	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Influence tactics					Performance ratings
		Femininity	Masculinity	Job-focused	Supervisor-focused	Con. occup. commitment	
Femininity	2.03 (0.44)		0.10*	-0.2	0.03	0.004	0.07
Masculinity	2.34 (0.44)			-0.05	-0.02	-0.01	0.07
Job-focused tactics	2.98 (0.80)				0.12*	0.03	-0.26**
Supervisor-focused tactics	4.42 (0.94)					0.01	0.29**
Con. occup. commitment	3.88 (1.51)						0.40
Performance ratings	6.35 (0.72)						

Table I.
Correlations among
and descriptive
statistics for key
study variables

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; con. occup. commitment = continuous occupational commitment

but positively related to agentic tactics. Results showed no significant association between masculinity and both agentic ($b = -0.08, n.s.$) and communal influence tactics ($b = -0.11, n.s.$). Thus, results partially supported *H1a* but did not provide any support for *H1b*.

In *H2a* and *H2b*, we predicted that communal tactics would be positively related to performance ratings, while agentic tactics would be negatively related to performance ratings. Results showed a significant negative association between agentic tactics and performance ratings ($b = -0.26, p < 0.01$) and a significant positive association between communal tactics and performance ratings ($b = 0.23, p < 0.01$). As usage of communal tactics increased, performance ratings also increased, but as usage of agentic tactics increased, performance ratings decreased. These results supported *H2a* and *H2b*.

In *H3*, we predicted that influence tactics would partially mediate the relationship between sex role identity and performance ratings. Results showed no significant mediation effects of agentic $[-0.06, 0.06]$ or communal influence tactics $[-0.03, 0.09]$ on the relationship of sex role identity and performance ratings. Types of influence tactics did not appear to mediate the relationship between sex role identity and performance ratings. Results did not support *H3*.

In *H4a* and *H4b*, we predicted that femininity would interact with continuance occupational commitment such that the negative relationship between femininity and use of agentic tactics and the positive relationship between femininity and use of communal tactics would both be stronger when continuance commitment was high. In *H4c* and *H4d*, we predicted that masculinity would interact with continuance occupational commitment such that the positive relationship between masculinity and agentic tactics and negative relationship between masculinity and communal tactics would both be stronger when continuance commitment was high. In *H5*, we predicted that the indirect relationship between sex role identity and performance ratings would vary across different levels of continuance occupational commitment. To test these hypotheses, we examined conditional indirect effects of femininity and masculinity on performance ratings through influence tactics at varying levels of the moderator (continuance occupational commitment). Results showed that the mediation effects of influence tactics did exist at different levels of continuous occupational commitment for the relationship between femininity and performance ratings. When continuance occupational commitment was low, there was a positive indirect effect of femininity on performance mediated by agentic influence tactics $[0.02, 0.16]$, but when continuous

Variable	Influence tactics				Performance ratings	
	Job-focused <i>b</i>	<i>SE b</i>	Supervisor-focused <i>b</i>	<i>SE b</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE b</i>
Femininity	-0.83**	0.29	-1.10*	0.34	0.07	0.08
Masculinity	-0.08	0.09	-0.11	0.11	0.07	0.08
Job-focused tactics					-0.26**	0.05
Supervisor-focused tactics					0.23**	0.04
Con. occup. commitment	-0.38*	0.15	-0.63**	0.17		

Table II.
Summary of multiple
regression analysis
for key variables

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; con. occup. commitment = continuous occupational commitment

occupational commitment was high, the same indirect effect was negative $[-0.18, -0.003]$ (Figure 2). The index of moderated mediation was significant for this model $[-0.11, -0.02]$. On the other hand, when continuous occupational commitment was low, there was a negative indirect effect of femininity on performance mediated by communal influence tactics $[-0.18, -0.02]$, but when continuance occupational commitment was high, the same indirect effect was positive $[0.05, 0.22]$ (Figure 3). The index of moderated mediation was significant for this model $[0.04, 0.13]$. However, there was no significant indirect effect of masculinity on performance ratings through both types of influence tactics at high or low levels of continuance occupational commitment. Results supported *H4a* and partially supported *H4b* and *H5*, but not *H4c* and *H4d*.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to shed light on the within-sex differences in the use of influence tactics and their effects upon performance ratings under the boundary condition of continuance occupational commitment. Based on previous research, we proposed and tested a model in which sex role identity, or level of femininity and masculinity, predicted performance ratings through its effects on influence tactics. Additionally, we examined occupational continuance commitment as a boundary condition of these mediated effects. Results generally support this overarching model for femininity (but not masculinity) and suggest that within-sex variability in sex role identity influences performance ratings via influence tactics among women who feel that they should stay in their occupation.

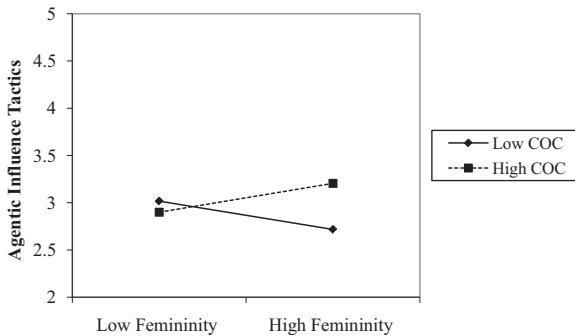


Figure 2.
Interaction effect between continuance occupational commitment (COC) and femininity predicting agentic influence tactics

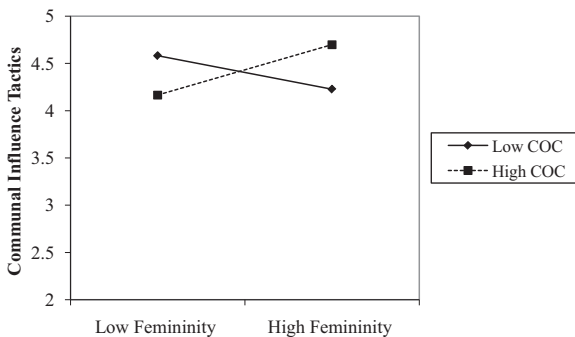


Figure 3.
Interaction effect between continuance occupational commitment (COC) and femininity predicting communal influence tactics

The results provide partial support for our first set of hypotheses by showing that women high in femininity are less likely to use both agentic and communal tactics than those low in femininity. Further, the use of agentic tactics is negatively related to performance ratings, whereas use of communal tactics is positively related to performance ratings. Together, these findings suggest that women high in femininity generally shy away from influence tactics, whether agentic or communal. The few who display such behaviour receive differing results, depending on what tactic they use. This is an important departure from previous research that assumes that women and men are both equally likely to use influence tactics, albeit using different types of tactics. As shown, not all women are equally likely to use influence tactics; rather, feminine women in general are less likely to use influence tactics. This confirms that examining within-sex variability in sex role identity may indeed provide important insights into gendered workplace behaviours. The relationship between influence tactics and performance ratings, however, is consistent with the extant literature (Higgins *et al.*, 1993); “softer” communal tactics are viewed more favourably than the “harder”, more assertive agentic tactics, which aligns nicely with the social expectation of women being more communal and relationship-oriented.

Influence tactics do not appear to mediate the relationship between femininity and performance ratings when considered independently of employees’ attitudes towards their occupation. However, the indirect effect between femininity and performance ratings is moderated by occupational continuance commitment. When continuance occupational commitment is low, femininity is negatively related to both communal and agentic tactics, though communal tactics are positively related to performance ratings, while agentic tactics are negatively related to performance ratings. When continuance occupational commitment is high, femininity is positively related to both communal and agentic influence tactics, though they are still related to performance in opposing ways. This emphasizes the importance of continuance occupational commitment as a crucial boundary condition on the explanatory mechanism of influence tactics. When continuance occupational commitment is low, feminine women in general are less likely to use influence tactics, and those who use agentic tactics receive less favourable performance ratings, while those who use communal tactics receive more favourable performance ratings. The relationship changes, however, when continuance occupational commitment is high. Under this circumstance, feminine women become more likely to use influence tactics overall, though the results of these influence tactics are not the same. When women use communal tactics, which are more congruent with their gender role, they receive more favourable performance ratings than when they use agentic tactics.

This pattern of findings lends support to our suggestion that feminine women may be more motivated to use influence tactics at work when they feel they have little choice but to stay in the current industry. When women are low in continuance occupational commitment, they are more likely to focus only on their task performance and do not attempt to engage in this form of extra-role behaviour, possibly because there is less need to perform extra-role behaviours to stay in the job. It is also possible that they fear social repercussions and being perceived negatively when utilizing influence tactics, as they are walking the very precarious line of being female in a masculine environment. After all, even the more communal tactics, such as ingratiation, involve some degree of assertion. On the other hand, when feminine women are high in continuance

occupational commitment, they feel compelled to perform these extra-role behaviours to ensure job security.

None of our hypotheses regarding the relationships among masculinity, influence tactics, performance ratings and continuous occupational commitment was supported. Contrary to our predictions, women high in masculinity do not appear to be more likely to use agentic tactics more often than communal tactics, and as a result, influence tactics do not appear to mediate the relationship between masculinity and performance ratings. Whether these women are high or low in continuous occupational commitment, they do not appear to be more likely to use influence tactics and there is no indirect effect between masculinity on performance ratings as moderated by commitment. It is possible that the relationship between masculinity and use of influence tactics is a non-linear relationship. While highly masculine women feel strongly about their disposition and are more likely to act accordingly, moderately masculine women are more likely to feel constrained by gender role expectations and refrain from use of influence tactics, especially in an environment that is perhaps not most friendly to women. Because their disposition strength is not as strong, they are more likely to be impacted by the strength of the environment, resulting in an overall lack of relationship between masculinity and use of influence tactics.

Theoretical and practical implications

The most significant implication of this study is that variability of sex role identity, specifically femininity, among women is related to influence tactics and their effects on performance ratings. We found that not all women act the same when trying to wield influence at work and their job attitudes do matter. This finding is particularly important given that past research has mostly focused on differences between males and females and this study has shown that there are more nuanced differences that can more accurately describe the effects of gender disposition on influence tactics. As suggested by [Smith *et al.* \(2013\)](#), predicting the use of influence tactics requires more than just sex, and this study shows that women display a wide variety of gender identities and their behaviours are dependent on their degree of femininity. The fact that feminine women in general seem to refrain from influence tactics unless they are strongly motivated to stay in the job goes against social influence theory, which states that people in general, regardless of sex, tend to use influence tactics in most interpersonal relationships. It is possible, as we suggested, that when highly committed to stay in the profession, feminine women are more willing and motivated to do whatever it takes to wield more influence, even if it means overcoming their natural inclination to be relationship-oriented and seize whatever opportunities they can. It is also possible that influence tactics, regardless of their agentic or communal form, are considered assertive in general and as a result, feminine women, unless they are highly committed to the occupation, refrain from using them to avoid social repercussions. Research on workplace communication has shown that in the face workplace dilemmas such as dealing with an unwarranted interruption or advocating for themselves for a promotion, women are more likely to refrain from any action, avoiding even the more indirect approaches such as subtly hinting at their accomplishments ([Barrett, 2004, 2009, 2011](#)). Therefore, it is possible that the higher women are in femininity, the more likely they are to choose a more feminine course of action (i.e. staying quiet and refraining from action) over a more assertive, albeit mild, approach of subtly promoting

themselves. *Smith et al. (2013)* also found that women are no more likely to use communal influence tactics over agentic ones, suggesting that women may not view communal and agentic tactics as separate categories of action even though they are perceived very differently by supervisors. Even though continuous occupational commitment interacts with sex role identity such that women's behaviours do not exactly align with their degree of femininity under high commitment, it is still important to note that depending on how feminine women are, they show a clear difference in their influencing behaviours when they are not particularly committed to the occupation. This also emphasizes the key role that continuance occupational commitment plays in influencing women's behaviours in the workplace.

Moreover, this study also confirms previous research that suggests women do not receive the same results using different influence tactics and those who step out their gender role do face backlash, particularly in a male-dominated industry. Although there is no evidence suggesting that feminine women have a clear preference for communal tactics over agentic tactics, consistent with social role theory, women do experience negative consequences when they attempt to be more agentic by self-promoting. Perhaps because of the gender role expectation, women do not achieve the same success when they use more traditionally masculine tactics, such as self-promoting and assertiveness. Even in such a traditionally masculine industry, where masculine traits are highly valued, women are still expected to adhere to social norms and be relationship-oriented, and are rewarded for doing so.

This study also has an important implication in suggesting that performance appraisal continues to be subject to gender bias. Even though influence tactics can be considered a form of contextual behaviour and have little to do with an employee's job-related performance, they still have an effect upon the performance rating, and thus can affect an employee's financial interests and career advancement. Altogether, this study bridges the existing gap in literature regarding within-sex differences in influence tactics usage, its outcomes and the boundary condition of occupational commitment.

Limitations and future directions of research

One limitation of this study is that it is cross-sectional and therefore no causal relationships can be inferred, and so the direction of the relationship is unclear. However, given that one of the variables examined is dispositional (sex role identity), it is logical for this to be viewed as a predictor rather than an outcome. This lends strength to the argument that femininity leads to certain types of influence tactics, not the other way around.

Additionally, we have only examined influence tactics based on their gendered nature in this study and focused only on performance rating as an outcome variable. It would be interesting to study the within-sex differences in other typologies of influence tactics, as well as with other outcome variables such as promotion, salary increase and career advancement. There has been research suggesting that the link between influence tactics and career success is weaker than that between influence tactics and performance assessment (*Higgins et al., 2003*), while other studies suggest that women who use agentic influence tactics do advance in their careers but face social repercussions for doing so (*Rudman, 1998*). The gender of the target of influence tactics, namely, the supervisor, may also be an important factor in determining how the

influence tactics are perceived, as research has suggested gender differences in influence ability (Eagly and Wood, 1982).

Furthermore, this study only focuses upon within-sex differences among women and the two dimensions of masculinity and femininity. It would be useful to examine whether similar effects are observed in men (particularly in female-dominated contexts), given that there is previous research suggesting that the males do not seem to suffer as many of the negative effects of tokenism when working in a highly feminine working environment (Sackett *et al.*, 1991), and males generally achieve similar success using both agentic and communal influence tactics (Smith *et al.*, 2013). Future studies can compare whether men and women are affected similarly by occupational commitment and the gendered nature of the work environment. In sum, research should also continue to examine gender and sex role identity in more nuanced ways to explore how these subtle differences may affect work behaviours uniquely and whether societal expectations depend solely upon biological gender.

Conclusion

The results of this current study suggest that: not all women are equally likely to use influence tactics, and not all tactics result in positive perceptions of performance. Feminine women in general refrain from using influence tactics unless they are driven to stay in a given occupation, but they only receive positive results when their behaviours are congruent with society's gender role expectations. Despite progress in gender equality, gender roles remain rigid and women are still penalized for stepping out of the expected norm even in an unconventional profession.

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