

## Conflict Dynamics within the Gender Spectrum of a Large Manufacturing Company

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**ABSTRACT** The primary objective of this study was to investigate the perception and handling of interpersonal conflict within the gender spectrum compilation of biological sex and gender identity. The empirical analysis utilised a cross-sectional survey design, with a combined convenience quota sample of employees (N=133). This consisted of top, middle and lower management personnel. The study made use of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) and the Rahim Organisational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II). The BSRI provided self-determining assessments of masculinity and femininity in terms of the respondents' self-reported control of socially desirable, stereotypically masculine and feminine personality characteristics. The ROCI-II measured the present methods of conflict management, specifically within the organisational environment. The results showed that there was no difference in how pure biological sex (males and females) perceived and handled conflict within the workplace, but there was a difference in how the different gender identity groups (masculine males vs. feminine males and feminine females vs. feminine females) perceived and handled conflict.

### INTRODUCTION

Conflict and interpersonal conflict are present in all organisations of life, and the avoidance of any conflict is not possible at all. Conflict is an inevitable component of social life; it has been highly prevalent in organisational settings where people work together to reach a goal (Moule and Wallace 2017; Pooja and Saxena 2016). Interpersonal conflict in the operational sense conducted in this study can be defined as "a disagreement between two individuals or sub-groups of an organization involving significant resentment and discontent" (Emerson 2015:5). It is essential that members of a group, and especially leaders, should have sufficient knowledge regarding the nature of the impact of different ways of handling conflict, the influence thereof on individual behavioural processes, and effects that may lead to the prevalence of conflict (Crawley 1995; Havenga 2004; Pooja and Saxena 2016). In this process of interpersonal conflict, leadership plays an essential part in any organisation and effective leadership means the effective management of conflict (Khan et al. 2015; Zaccaro and Klimoski 2001).

The 'job' is frequently the subject of studies by several researchers, as well as a number of factors that might increase or decrease the quality of people's life at work (Colichi et al. 2016: 3). Irrespective of the various destructive and constructive powers that conflict can have, and identifying the sources of conflict, cognisance is not always taken of the fact that employees are diverse and as such will perceive and handle conflict differently. Previous research (Havenga 2008) has focused specifically on gender differences when it comes to the various handling styles of conflict within organisations. However, consideration must be given to more than just simple gender differences, which is a deeper consideration for leadership to take into account. Abundant research studies (Chusmir and Mills 1989; Hay et al. 2011; Miller 1991; Ghosh 2012) have been conducted on gender differences (male and female) in the perceiving and preferred style of handling conflict in organisations, but very few have taken into consideration the person's *gender identity*. *Gender identity* means that gender is divided into two main groups, namely masculinity and femininity, and each group has its own actual *identity* (Khan et

al. 2015). It is believed that if management has a better understanding of the prevalence of conflict, not only between different genders, but also within the whole gender spectrum, which includes the actual *gender identity*, it could cultivate an extension of leadership effectiveness.

Gender is among the earliest categories that infants become aware of, and from toddlerhood on, children categorize both themselves and others as female or male (Gryzman and Fivush 2016). Ghosh (2012) defines *gender identity* as a personal idea of oneself as male or female (or rarely, both or neither). *Gender identity* is self-identified as an outcome of a mixture of natural and extrinsic aspects. Khan et al. (2015) and Gainor (2000) describe *gender identity* as one's sense of oneself as male, female or transgender.

Studies such as those by Chusmir and Mills (1989), Hay et al. (2011), Vespo (2011) and Miller (1991 as cited in Beneke 2015) have revealed that there is a gender difference in terms of conflict and that men and women in fact do differ in their ways of perceiving and handling conflict. Chusmir and Mills (1989) stated that because men and women mostly, but not necessarily always, occupy diverse roles at work and at home, they would most possibly also use different conflict handling behaviours. McElwain et al. (2005) found that there actually is a gender difference in the relationship between family demands and family interfering with work. Employees are searching for identity and reason in their work life. More than the company's profits, aims or other goals, the quality or the population or service people desire further than the balanced financial support, they want to make their work a source of personal satisfaction and job fulfilment (Colichi et al. 2016: 2). They also found that an asymmetry continues to exist between men and women in their work and family roles. Duxbury and Higgins (1991) tested whether there is a gender difference in terms of conflict, and they found significant differences in 11 out of 17 gender comparisons; they are mostly ascribed to social expectations and behavioural norms. Davis et al. (2010) found that women are more likely to engage in constructive (positive) behaviour, whereas men are more likely to engage in destructive (negative) behaviour. They added that it is important to keep in mind that there is also a gender difference in terms of personal life. Ishihara (2017) mention that culture and Conflict Management Styles Contribute to Ad-

vanced Burnout. They further added that men have been assumed or supposed to act in a more forceful, dominating manner during conflict, consistent with their gender stereotype of being confident and task orientated, while women have been assumed or supposed to respond in more conciliatory ways, consistent with their gender stereotype of being communal and relationship orientated.

According to Sutchek (2001) as cited by Havenga (2008), males have a preference for the dominating conflict-handling style before utilising the avoiding strategy. Females, on the other hand, prefer the avoiding instead of the domination conflict-handling style (Swanson 2016). Miller (1991) found that during conflict men focused more on the offended party's initiation of conflict, whereas women focused more on whether the offending party apologised. Hay et al. (2011; Colichi et al. 2016: 3) found that women are initially more prospective than men to use reactive aggression, but then desist, whereas men increase their use of force to defend their territory and possessions. McGeowne et al. (2012), Echabe (2010) and Newman (2012) revealed that it is predictable or estimated of the masculine side to be stronger, more independent and more experienced than the feminine side. Echabe (2010) also claims that there is a difference between masculinity and femininity in terms of handling conflict. He describes masculine identities as equivalent to instrumental identities, and feminine identities as the same as communal identities. He also found that women have a more equal and liberal approach towards gender identities than their male counterparts – for instance, women have been gaining access to duties that up to now have been reserved for men, but men are not assuming roles traditionally reserved for women (Echabe 2010).

### Problem Statement

According to Heppner and Heppner (2008), there is a huge lack of research on conflict experiences within the various *gender identities*. However, many studies have been conducted on *gender identity conflict*, which can be defined as specific patterns of negative consequences that surface or begin for people during their experience with *gender identity* strain (O'Neill 2008). O'Neill (2008) breaks down *gender identity* conflict into different types, which

include *gender identity* conflict within oneself, *gender identity* conflict expressed or articulated towards others, *gender identity* conflict experienced from others, and *gender identity* conflict experienced from role transitions.

Overall, research has revealed that *gender identity* conflict is habitually associated with larger problems, including depression, anxiety, relationship problems, low self-esteem, violence and a variety of other undesirable things (O'Neil 2008). It should therefore be noted that this study will fill the gap in research by looking at the *gender identity* differences and workplace conflict differences, as opposed to the well-researched field called *gender identity conflict*, thereby supporting the motivation towards this study.

Apart from the above mentioned, the main problem statement is that leadership might expect differences between genders when analysing conflict perceptions and handling styles, but might not consider that *gender identity* within those genders might play a role in and influence the validity of the results in scientific research, in contrast to research in which only the main two constructs, namely male and female, are taken into account.

From what has been discussed above, the research questions that need to be answered are: Are there significant differences between the biological sexes of male and female on the one hand, and between gender identity attributes of masculinity and femininity on the other hand, in their perception of conflict dynamics in the workplace? What differences exist in conflict-handling styles when measured between different genders, and gender identities within each of those genders?

### Objectives

The aim of this study was to investigate the experience and handling of interpersonal conflict within the gender spectrum compilation of biological sexes and *gender identity*. The following sub-objectives were therefore pursued: To conduct a comparative analysis, by means of an empirical exploration, between biological sex, that is between male and female, and gender identity attributes, that is, the *masculine style* and the *feminine style*, in their perceptions of conflict dynamics in the workplace; secondly, to determine, through statistical analysis, whether

differences exist in conflict-handling styles when measured between different genders, and the different gender identities within each of those genders.

### METHODOLOGY

The empirical study utilises the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) and the Rahim Organisational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II). The Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) provides self-determining assessments of **masculinity** and **femininity** in terms of the respondents' self-reported control of socially desirable, stereotypically masculine and feminine personality characteristics. The Rahim Organisational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II) measures the present methods of conflict management within an organisation. Perception will be measured in terms of causes and consequences of conflict between biological sexes (**male** vs. **female**) and the embedded *gender identity* (**masculine male** vs. **feminine male** and **feminine female** vs. **masculine female**) as indicated by the responses of the research group. Conflict-handling styles will be measured by utilising the ROCI-II's indication of the five handling styles used by biological sex (**male** vs. **female**) and *gender identity* (**masculine male** vs. **feminine male** and **feminine female** vs. **masculine female**), respectively, to the preference of one.

Condensed demographic characteristics of correspondents showed that 48.12 percent were males and 51.88 percent females. 51.3 percent had undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. The majority's (72.31%) home language was Afrikaans and 68.7 percent had fewer than 15 years' service in the company and came from more than 14 different departments.

### Measuring Instrument

A combined questionnaire was developed. The first section measures the respondents' biographical characteristics. The following section utilises the standardised Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI). This instrument provides independent assessments of masculinity and femininity in terms of the respondents' self-reported ownership and control of socially required, stereotypically **masculine** and **feminine** personality characteristics. Participants respond in terms of how well each attribute or trait describes them

on a seven-point Likert scale. In the next section, the standardised Rahim Organisational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II) is utilised. This section is a 28-item questionnaire that measures the present-day methods of conflict management in an organisation based on the five conflict management styles, namely *avoidance*, *accommodation*, *compromise*, *competition* and *cooperation*. An organisational member responds to each statement on a five-point Likert scale.

### Reliability and Validity

A correlation analysis was done to ensure the relevance of the questionnaire. Factor analysis was also conducted in order to explore the existence of the theoretical constructs. Ben-Yoav and Banai (1992) claimed that the Rahim instrument has a higher internal consistency coefficient than models such as the Thoman-Kilmann instrument (Havenga 2008). The reliability of the questionnaire was determined by means of Cronbach's alpha coefficient ( $\alpha$ ). The overall average of the Cronbach alpha is 0.81, which clearly falls within the range of directives as presented by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) (0.70) as well as Bartholomew et al. (2000) (0.60-0.80) and Khan et al. (2015). According to Field (2005), a construct must be  $\geq 0.6$  to be reliable. In this study, the average of all constructs is 0.81, which makes all constructs reliable.

From Table 1, it is clear that *integrating*, *avoiding* and *compromising* only have one ideal factor, but *masculinity* (6 factors), *femininity* (5 factors), *dominating* (2 factors) and *obliging* (2 factors) all have more than one factor. Although there is more than one factor under masculinity, namely femininity, dominating and obliging, indicating that these factors could be split into more factors, the decision was made to work in this study according to the factors as defined in the original scoring instructions of the different

standardised measuring instruments, especially as a result of the fact that all these factors yielded high Cronbach alpha coefficients.

### Sample

A combined convenience quota sample was used for this study. According to Baker et al. (2013), convenience sampling (as opposed to the alternative, the stratified random sampling method) is one of the most cooperative and convenient sampling methods, as participants are chosen based on their convenience and availability. In this study, the use of this sampling method provided a gender quota of usable data from 64 males (48.12%) and 69 females (51.88%). This specific large manufacturing company has a total of 3 770 personnel, of whom 1 800 are based at the headquarters where the study was conducted. A sample of 150 (N=150) personnel was drawn to participate in the questionnaire. The 150 respondents chosen consisted of workers and personnel of the company represented by top management, middle management and lower management. A total of 133 questionnaires were considered usable and reliable, and provided valid information for the continuation of the study towards data analysis. Permission was granted by all the general managers of the specific organisation, after which the questionnaires were administered electronically and completed by employees of this organisation.

To ensure that this project would be conducted in an ethical manner, ethical issues such as informed consent, confidentiality and the possibility of deception were considered. To ensure that participants would be familiar with what the questionnaires were about, and that biological sex and *gender identity* would be taken in account, the following ethical principles were used, namely honesty, objectivity, integri-

**Table 1: Reliability and validity of the measuring instrument**

Construct	N	Cronbach ( $\alpha$ )	Number of factors	MSA	% age variance explained
Masculinity	118	0.81	6	0.76	62.53
Femininity	126	0.81	5	0.80	60.53
Integrating	126	0.90	1	0.89	64.39
Avoiding	127	0.86	1	0.80	59.72
Dominating	126	0.72	2	0.70	78.32
Obliging	124	0.74	2	0.72	63.23
Compromising	128	0.71	1	0.69	46.43

ty, carefulness, legality and non-discrimination. To maintain objectivity and to ensure that employees would be independent and objective in answering the questions and would not be harmed by their work environment, all information was kept confidential.

### Statistical Analysis

To achieve the desired research objectives, a cross-sectional research design was used, which implies that several groups of participants took part in the survey simultaneously (Salkind 2009). Cross-sectional research is a research method often used in developmental psychology, but is also utilised in several other areas containing social sciences and education (Cherry 2012). Cross-sectional studies are observational in character and are acknowledged as expressive or descriptive research, which suits the requirements of achieving the objectives of this study. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data received from the questionnaires. Results were described and compared using means and standard deviations. The main measures of essential and central tendency used were the mean and median, which reveal what sets of measures are alike, on average, but also compared to test relations.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tables 2 to 4 contain the statistics regarding the perception of conflict causes according to gender and gender identity. The questionnaire determined which constructs were the biggest causes of conflict. It is apparent from Table 2 that **females** perceive a specific leadership style as the biggest cause of conflict, which could mean that most **female** respondents do not like to be managed in a specific way, for example being micro-managed.

This is followed by rumours/gossiping and ineffective communication. For **males**, favouritism/jealousy is the biggest cause of conflict, followed by a lack of effective personnel. By comparing **males** and **females**, it is evident that **males** seek a more structured and productive environment, whereas **females** prefer an equal environment, with a consolidated leadership style and effective communication. As discussed in the introduction, the qualities of a 'perfect woman' include emotional, caring, nurturing and independent, whereas the qualities of a 'perfect man' include independent, strong, a provider and less emotional. Studies such as those by Chusmir and Mills (2008), Hay et al. (2011) and King (2016) have shown that there is a gender difference in terms of conflict, and that men and women in fact do differ in their ways of experiencing conflict.

Table 3 shows that both **masculine males** and **feminine males** perceive ineffective communication as the biggest cause of conflict. **Masculine males** perceived the lack of effective personnel as the second biggest cause of conflict, which relates to Li et al. (2017). The impact of stereotypes and supervisor perceptions of employee work–family conflict on job performance ratings. *human relations*, 70(1), 119-145. Fang's (2011) study that masculinity relates positively to job performance. King (2016) and Twenge (1997) stated that if you have a strong **masculine** side, you are in charge of your own life because you are internally controlled; however, in a workplace, one works in teams and then the **masculine** side could consider ineffective personnel as a reason if job performance decreases. **Masculine males** perceived favouritism/jealousy as the third biggest cause of conflict within the company, and this could be because the **masculine** side is competitive, independent and experienced and dislikes inequity (Twenge 1997). Looking at especially the first

**Table 2: Perception of conflict causes: Males/females**

Item/variable	N		Mean		Std.	
	M	F	M/M	F/M	M	F
Favouritism/jealousy	63	67	2.95	2.79	0.87	0.91
Lack of effective personnel	63	-	2.95	-	0.81	-
Specific leadership style	63	67	2.87	2.90	0.91	0.87
Rumours/gossiping	3	67	2.81	2.88	0.88	0.99
Cultural difference	3	67	2.75	2.73	0.95	0.99
Ineffective communication	-	67	-	2.87	-	1.03



**Table 3: Perception of conflict causes: Masculine males/feminine males**

Item/variable	N		Mean		Std.	
	M/M	F/M	M/M	F/M	M/M	F/M
Ineffective communication	50	8	3.00	3.38	0.81	1.08
Lack of effective personnel	50	-	2.90	-	0.87	-
Favouritism/jealousy	50	8	2.90	3.13	0.89	1.13
Specific leadership style	50	8	2.80	3.00	0.93	0.76
Rumours/gossiping	50	8	2.72	3.13	0.88	1.13
Misuse of power	-	8	-	3.00	-0.76	-

two factors that **masculine males** regard as causes of conflict, it is evident that masculinity relates positively to job performance (Fang 2011). **Feminine males** also perceive ineffective communication as the biggest cause of conflict, followed by favouritism/jealousy and thereafter rumours and/or gossiping. According to Heartiste (2013), **feminine females** usually have the following personality traits: loving, sensitive to the needs of others, affectionate and emotional; therefore, it makes sense that they perceived rumours/gossiping as the biggest cause of conflict, followed by a co-worker with an incompatible personality and subsequently ineffective communication. Here, it is also evident in Table 4 that **feminine females** seek an equal environment, with a considerate leadership style and effective communication.

For **masculine females**, specific leadership style is the biggest cause of conflict, which could also mean that they do not like to be managed in a specific way, for example being micro-managed. **Masculine females** perceive ineffective communication as the second, and favouritism/jealousy as the third biggest cause of conflict within the manufacturing company. **Masculine females** perceive meeting production targets or deadlines as the fourth biggest cause of conflict; therefore, it

can be seen that they have the following personality traits: assertive, analytical, independent, aggressive, competitive and dominant.

In order to determine the perceptions of conflict of the different genders and *gender identities*, it was also necessary to determine what these different groups perceived as the consequences of conflict. Table 5 relates the perception of conflict consequences between masculine male and feminine females.

Cohen (1988), as supported by Cloete (2010), provided guidelines for interpreting the phi-coefficient, which are as follows:  $\Phi = |0.1|$  (small effect);  $\Phi = |0.3|$  (medium effect, noticeable with the naked eye) and  $\Phi > |0.5|$  (large effect or practically significant). Factors measuring 0.3 and higher (phi-coefficient  $> 0.3$ ) are seen as an effect in practice, and are therefore reported on.

After the completion of the statistical analysis, it was discovered that there were no differences in what **males** vs. **females** perceived as the biggest consequences of conflict. No one of the 11 factors had a phi-coefficient of 0.3 or higher, which means that when comparing gender, both groups have consensus on what they regard as the result that conflict has on their work environment.

**Table 4: Perception of conflict causes: Masculine females/feminine females**

Item/variable	N		Mean		Std.	
	M/M	F/M	M/M	F/M	M/M	F/M
Rumours/gossiping	30	30	3.13	3.63	0.97	0.93
Co-worker with an incompatible personality	30	-	2.93	-	0.94	-
Ineffective communication	30	30	2.87	2.87	1.11	1.17
Specific leadership style	30	30	2.83	2.93	0.87	0.94
Cultural differences	30	-	2.83	-	0.95	-
Favouritism/Jealousy	-	30	-	2.80	-	0.93
Meeting production standards/ deadlines	-	30	-	2.67	-	0.99

The results in Table 5 show that there were only in two factors differences in association between **masculine male** and **feminine male** with a medium practical effect, namely *decline cooperation* and *consider a change of job*. Thirty-two percent of **masculine males** said that experiencing conflict in the workplace would influence them to *decline cooperation*, whereas seventy-five percent of **feminine males** felt the same, meaning that **feminine males** will easier *decline cooperation* than **masculine males** will. Twenty-eight percent of **masculine males** said that conflict in the workplace would cause them to *consider a change of job*, whereas seventy-five percent of **feminine males** said that they would *consider a change of job* should they experience conflict in the workplace.

It was seen that **masculine males** and **feminine males** contrasted in the following consequences that they perceived as the biggest consequences of conflict: Decline cooperation (phi-coefficient ( $\Phi$ ) = 0.31) and consider change of job (phi-coefficient ( $\Phi$ ) = 0.34). Seventy-five percent of **feminine males** said that they would decline their cooperation if they experienced conflict in the workplace; whereas only thirty-two percent of **masculine males** agreed. This could mean that **feminine males** would prefer to work individually rather than in a team if they perceived conflict, whereas **masculine males** would prefer solidarity and teamwork even though they experienced conflict in the workplace. Twenge (1997) also stated that a feminine characteristic is to be sensitive; this could mean that the **feminine** side takes conflict in a sensitive way and feels offended and therefore declines cooperation. Another consequence where **masculine males** and **feminine males** differ is in

considering a change of job; seventy-five percent of **feminine males** agreed that they would consider changing jobs if they experienced conflict in the workplace; whereas only twenty-eight percent of **masculine males** felt the same way. In a study done by Wang and Fangin (2011), the results showed significant differences in job performance between different *gender identities*, and the study found that the level of masculinity is positively related to job performance; this could mean that the **masculine** side would be more tough-skinned and competitive (Twenge 1997), even though they experience conflict, whereas the **feminine** side would react more uncreative and unwilling (Twenge 1997) towards the conflict. Here, it is also apparent that **masculine males** seek a more structured and productive environment (Fang 2011); even though there is conflict, the team must remain structured and productive. Heartiste (2013), Beneke (2015) and King (2016) described **feminine males** as more emotional, understanding, loyal, sensitive and sympathetic; therefore, it is understandable why **feminine males** would decline their cooperation and consider changing jobs if they experienced conflict to a greater extent than **masculine males** will.

It has been revealed that **feminine females** and **masculine females** also differ in their perceptiveness of two consequences, namely experience depression (phi-coefficient ( $\Phi$ ) = 0.37) and consider change of job (phi-coefficient ( $\Phi$ ) = 0.30). It is seen that 48.39 percent of **feminine females** experience depression as an influence of conflict in the workplace, whereas only 13.79 percent of **masculine females** experience depression due to conflict in the workplace. This can be ascribed to **feminine females** being loving,

**Table 5: Perception of conflict consequences: Masculine males vs. feminine males and feminine females vs. masculine females**

Factor	Gender identity	n	% Yes	% No	P- value	Phi- coefficient ( $\Phi$ )
<i>Decline Cooperation</i>	Masculine males	50	32	68	0.02	0.31
	Feminine males	8	75	25		
<i>Consider Change of Job</i>	Masculine males	50	28	72	0.01	0.34
	Feminine males	8	75	25		
<i>Experience Depression</i>	Feminine females	31	48	52	0	0.37
	Masculine females	29	14	86		
<i>Consider Change of Job</i>	Feminine females	31	61	39	0.02	0.3
	Masculine females	29	31	69		

p-value yielded by Chi-square test

d-value = 0.5 – medium effect in practice (°)

sensitive to the needs of others, affectionate and emotional (Heartiste 2013); they seek an equal environment, with a considering leadership style and effective communication and could experience depression if this is not the case. **Masculine females** are more assertive, independent, aggressive, competitive, analytical and dominant (Heartiste 2013; Echabe 2010); characteristics that are less associated with depression. The research study has shown that *gender identity* conflict is often related to larger problems, including depression, anxiety, relationship problems, low self-esteem and violence. Furthermore, 61.29 percent of **feminine females** would consider changing jobs if they perceive conflict in the workplace; whereas only 31.03 percent of **masculine females** agreed. This could also be because of **feminine females'** characteristics of being loving, caring, sensitive to the needs of others, affectionate and emotional, that they would rather consider a new job as a consequence of conflict as they do not like competition, assertiveness and dominance; whereas the **masculine female** is assertive, competitive, more independent (Heartiste 2013; Echabe 2010) and would not let conflict cause her to change jobs that easily.

In Table 6, it can be seen that no medium (0.5) or large effect (0.8) in terms of determining a practically significant difference was detected in any of the constructs, meaning that there were no differences when measuring **males** versus **females**. The lower the mean, the more applicable the conflict-handling style: **females** used the *integrating*, *avoiding*, *obliging* and *compromising*

*styles* more with their colleagues than **males**; whereas males used the *dominating* style more with their colleagues than **females**. Davis et al. (2010) found that **males** would react in a more forceful or *dominating* way during conflict, consistent with their gender stereotype of being confident and task orientated; whereas **females** would react in a conciliatory or *obliging* way, which is consistent with their gender stereotype of being communal and relationship orientated. Havenga (2008) stated that **males** prefer to use the *dominating* conflict-handling style before utilising the *avoiding* strategy. These differences were too small, however, to be of practical significance ( $d \geq 0.8$ ). This means that when comparing the **male** and **female** employees of this specific company regarding their handling styles of conflict that they would predominantly use in a situation between them and their colleagues, all of the conflict-handling styles were used to the same degree, and no one conflict-handling style was favoured among **males** and **females**. This means that there were no differences in how biological sex (**male** and **female**) handles conflict in the manufacturing company.

In Table 7, when comparing the conflict-handling styles between respondents of a different gender identity, it can be seen that masculine males and feminine males showed that both *dominating* and *compromising* conflict-handling styles have a medium effect (if d-value = 0.5). Twenge (1997) described the **masculine** side as dominating, tough-skinned, competitive and non-emotional; therefore, it makes sense that the **masculine** attributes are more likely to use

**Table 6: Effect sizes regarding conflict-handling styles towards colleagues for males (1) and females (2)**

Construct	Gender	N	Mean	Std.	p-value (in case of random sampling)	d-value
<i>Integrating</i>	1	62	2.02	0.66	0.94	0.01
	2	65	2.01	0.66		
<i>Avoiding</i>	1	62	3.14	0.89	0.38	0.15
	2	65	3.01	0.77		
<i>Dominating</i>	1	62	3.02	0.74	0.07	0.32
	2	65	3.26	0.77		
<i>Obliging</i>	1	62	2.9	0.56	0.85	0.03
	2	65	2.88	0.57		
<i>Compromising</i>	1	62	2.49	0.73	0.09	0.28
	2	65	2.29	0.58		

p-value yielded by t-test for independent group

Note – 1 = Male; 2 = Female; std. = standard deviation

Note – Difference in total number of participants, namely 127 (62 + 65) instead of 133 due to missing values.



**Table 7: Effect sizes regarding conflict-handling styles towards colleagues for masculine males (1) and feminine males (2), feminine females (3) and masculine females (4)**

Construct	Gender	N	Mean	Std.	p-value (in case of random sampling)	d-value
Integrating	1	49	1.96	0.61		
	2	8	2.16	0.64	0.44	0.3
	3	31	1.98	0.69	0.92	0.03
	4	29	2	0.69		
Avoiding	1	49	3.3	0.84		
	2	8	2.52	0.97	0.06	0.80 <sup>△</sup>
	3	31	3.05	0.77	0.9	0.03
	4	29	3.02	0.8		
Dominating	1	49	2.93	0.71		
	2	8	3.33	0.85	0.25	0.5
	3	31	3.49	0.58	0.02*	0.54
	4	21	3.01	0.88		
Obliging	1	49	3.01	0.52		
	2	8	2.44	0.64	0.04*	0.89 <sup>▲</sup>
	3	31	2.9	0.65	0.88	0.04
	4	29	2.87	0.53		
Compromising	1	49	2.52	0.73		
	2	8	2.16	0.64	0.18	0.5
	3	31	2.87	0.53	0.79	0.06
	4	29	2.29	0.69		

Note- 1 = Masculine male; 2 = Feminine male; 3=Feminine female 4= Masculine female. std. = standard deviation  
 \* Statistically significant at 0.05 level according to t-test results for independent groups  
 d-value = 0.5 – medium effect in practice ( )<sup>▲</sup>  
 d-value ≥ 0.8 – large effect in practice and practical significant ( )

the *dominating* conflict-handling style than the **feminine** attributes. It can also be seen that *compromising* had a medium effect and that **feminine males** (mean = 2.16) tend to use the *compromising* handling style more often than the **masculine male** group (mean = 2.52). Both *avoiding* and *obliging* had a large effect and are practically significant (if d-value = ≥ 0.8). **Feminine males** (mean = 2.52) are more likely to use the *avoiding* conflict-handling style than **masculine males** (mean = 3.30). This is evident from Twenge's (1997) opinion that the **masculine** attribute is competitive, non-emotional, independent and a provider; characteristics that do not align with the *avoiding* conflict-handling style. However, the **feminine** attribute is dependent, sensitive, respectful and nurturing; characteristics that could align with the *avoiding* conflict-handling style. It is also evident that both **masculine males** and **feminine males** used the *integrating* conflict-handling style, and that **masculine males** used it more than **feminine males**, but to a very small extent, which had no effect in practice.

Where the conflict-handling styles between the respondent and his colleague of the differ-

ent *gender identity* were compared, it became clear that the *domination* conflict-handling style had a medium effect (if d-value = 0.5). It can be seen that **masculine females** (mean = 3.01) tend to use the *dominating* conflict-handling style to a greater extent than the **feminine female** group (mean = 3.49). Twenge (1997) described the masculine side as dominating, tough-skinned, competitive and non-emotional, and therefore it can be concluded that the masculine attributes are more likely to use the *dominating* conflict-handling style than the feminine attributes. **Masculine females** used the *avoiding*, *obliging* and *compromising* styles more with their colleagues than **feminine females**, whereas **feminine females** used the *integrating* conflict-handling style to a greater extent with their colleagues than **masculine females** did.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to investigate the experience and handling of interpersonal conflict within the gender spectrum compilation of biological sex and *gender identity*. Overall, re-

search has shown that *gender identity* conflict is often related to larger problems, including depression, anxiety, relationship problems, low self-esteem, violence and a variety of other undesirable aspects. It should therefore be noted that this study will fill the gap in research by looking at the *gender identity differences* and workplace conflict differences, as opposed to the well-researched field called *gender identity conflict*, thereby supporting the motivation towards this study.

The most significant contribution of this study was the conclusion that although there is no difference in how basic gender (male and female) perceives and handles conflict in the workplace where this study was conducted, there is a difference in how the different gender identity groups within each gender perceive and handle conflict in the workplace, and that future scientific research, and the leadership of any organisation, regardless of what type of industry, should take cognisance of it.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The empirical research was done within one manufacturing company and the results therefore cannot be generalised. All the factors that can contribute to conflict or the consequences could not be accommodated in the study as it would have resulted in the study becoming too comprehensive. Group responses were not measured, but focus was placed on the individual and his/her perceptions instead. Due to the complexity of the measuring instrument, the questionnaire could not be administered at all job levels of the company.

Further research can and should include a comparative study between two or three manufacturing companies to see how different companies within the same industry deviate or resemble; and also to determine whether there is a difference in the perception and handling of conflict between the respondent and colleagues categorised according to different biographical backgrounds such as job position or years in service; the determination whether there are differences, by cross-checking all four *gender identity* groups (masculine males, feminine males, feminine females and masculine females) using the MANOVA (multivariate analysis of variance) statistical procedure; the use of ROCI-II to measure conflict-handling styles among subordi-

nates, colleagues and superiors on the basis of gender identity.

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