





# Gender traits in relation to work versus career salience



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**Orientation:** The concepts of work- and career-role salience are used interchangeably, yet work focuses on the short-term aspect and career on the long-term aspect.

**Research purpose:** We utilised gender traits, that is, masculinity, femininity and psychological androgyny, to find greater nuances in the salience of work versus career roles. We also set out to confirm the adapted factor structure of the revised Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI).

**Motivation for the study:** Generally, self-reported sex is used to determine differences in role salience between men and women, as opposed to considering the gender roles people associate with.

**Research approach/design and method:** A sample of 395 South African employees was used. Structural equation modelling and *t*-tests were applied.

**Main findings:** We confirmed work- and career-role salience as distinct constructs. The factor structure of the revised BSRI holds for this study. With regard to gender traits, femininity decreased work-role salience, while psychological androgyny increased work-role salience. Masculinity had a direct effect on work-role salience while indirectly influencing career-role salience through work-role salience. Women were found to be significantly more feminine and psychologically androgynous than men.

**Practical/managerial implications:** Utilising gender traits may have greater career guidance relevance for individuals than traditional approaches utilising differences between the sexes.

**Contribution/value-add:** This study confirmed that work and career roles are to be viewed as separate constructs and that people may view the importance placed on work- and career-role salience differently. The study further contributes by including gender traits as a significant contributor to role salience.

## Introduction

Although often used synonymously, differentiation between work- and career-role salience, and their relationship with gender traits, is especially useful when considering workplace mentorship and career guidance, because gender traits may dictate choice of occupation and career outcomes (Sweet, Sarkisian, Matz-Costa, & Pitt-Catsoupes, 2016). Even though workplace outcomes remain varied for men and women, studies are indicating fewer differences in work-role salience when considering sex – man or woman – than previously noted (Ten Brummelhuis & Lautsch, 2016).

Instead, Liu, and Ngo (2017) reported career-role salience differences utilising gender-role orientation, in line with the argument that gender roles, although socially ascribed to the sexes, can be randomly assumed by human beings, irrespective of their biological sex (West & Zimmerman, 1987). As Allen and Ortlepp (2002) reported that work- and career-role salience are independent constructs, there have not been any published studies, to our knowledge, that confirmed their findings. In addition, limited research points to the relationship between gender traits, more specifically psychological androgyny in addition to masculinity and femininity, and work- and career-role salience.

We set out to determine whether work- and career-role salience are indeed distinct constructs as previously reported by Allen and Ortlepp (2002), as such confirmation will inform improved theorising on role salience in both work and career settings. Our second aim was to determine whether gender traits (masculinity, femininity and psychological androgyny), as measured by the revised Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) (Bem, 1974; Geldenhuys & Bosch, 2019), predict work- and career-role salience rather than the use of sex as a variable. We also endeavoured to confirm the

adapted factor structure of the revised BSRI, and whether sex differences (man vs. woman) existed between the variables.

## Work- and career-role salience

Work is 'current and temporal' (Allen & Ortlepp, 2002, p. 7) and 'refers to the set of prescribed tasks that an individual performs while occupying a position in an organization' (Kabanoff, 1980, p. 67). It is focused on earning material benefits (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997) or receiving other benefits that may not be quantifiable but are valued by the person doing the work (Allen & Ortlepp, 2002). Modern forms of work may include project work or part-time work, both requiring delivery of a set of prescribed tasks that are current and temporal in nature, where alternative contractual arrangements may be made to an employment contract. South African women take up the greater share of part-time or non-permanent work in comparison to men (Statistics South Africa, 2018), and reasons provided for this phenomenon often centre on essentialising women's care obligations resulting in the need for such flexibility.

In contrast, a career 'connotes a lifetime experience' (Allen & Ortlepp, 2002, p. 7) and is defined by Greenhaus (1987, p. 6) as 'the pattern of work-related experiences that span the course of a person's life'. Women's careers may be directed by their perception of the socially correct choices, which are largely based on socially ascribed feminine gender roles that remain primarily linked to care obligations (Fernando & Cohen, 2014; Wood & Eagly, 2013).

Super coined the term *role salience*, which represents the idea that not all life roles are equally important to an individual (Greer & Egan, 2012). A salient role in an individual's life takes greater importance, as the demands of that role must continuously be fulfilled by that individual (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Nazemi, Mortazavi, & Borjalilou, 2012). Therefore, role salience consists of, or explains, the standards and prominence that individuals assign to a specific role (Greer & Egan, 2012).

Allen and Ortlepp (2002) are of the opinion that work-role salience and career-role salience are two different concepts. They specify that *work salience* refers to the 'importance of working or being occupied' (Allen & Ortlepp, 2002, p. 10), thus emphasising the short-term aspect, while noting that career salience refers to the importance placed on a 'pattern of employment' (p. 10), thus emphasising the long-term aspect. According to Super (1990), assessing work-role salience in developmental career counselling is important, because it supports how an individual makes career decisions (Cook, 1994). For example, individuals experiencing low work-role salience may need to become more aware of the importance of their work before they make decisions regarding their career, and they should explore how work fits into their life (Cook, 1994). Career-role salience refers to individuals' planning, progress and overall decision-making regarding their career, which spreads across their lifespan

(Riaz, Ramzan, Ishaq, Akram, & Karim, 2012). However, the terms *work* and *career* are often used interchangeably, without much concern for the difference:

**H1:** Work- and career-role salience show divergent validity.

Work and career roles inform and affect each other. The significance of work-role salience and career-role salience is likely to direct an individual's actions in the respective roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Powell & Greenhaus, 2006, as cited in Greer, 2011). Individuals who identify with their careers have a profound and personal investment in their work role and desire to advance within an organisation, which advancement often entails a higher social standing and an increase in power (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Career-role salience refers to the importance of a career role for an individual in relation to other life roles, such as those related to family (Farmer, 2006). It is socially assumed, and therefore potentially endorsed during career counselling and guidance, that women may not place such importance on their work role and, by extension, their career role, instead placing greater emphasis, or needing to place greater emphasis, on the family role (Wood & Eagly, 2013):

**H2:** Men and women attach different levels of importance to work-role salience and career-role salience.

## Gender

'[Gender] ... as a *master identity*, cuts across situations' (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 128). Gender identity is informed by an individual's sense of self (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000) in relation to social queues about gender. Being born a boy or a girl, and therefore classifying yourself as male or female when research data are collected, no longer satisfies explanations of gender differences. Instead, gender traits – being masculine, feminine or psychologically androgynous (Bem, 1974) – provide a nuanced understanding of work and career decisions and outcomes. Psychological androgyny is regarded as the ability of people to be high on both masculinity and femininity (Bem, 1981).

Women may be primed from a young age to display feminine gender traits such as being caring, affectionate and gentle, and men are encouraged to display masculine gender traits such as assertiveness and dominance (Bem, 1974, 1981). These gender 'master identities' influence how different life roles are taken up and, therefore, also how work and career roles are taken up or rejected. Psychological androgyny increases overall role adaptability and is linked to improved overall health and well-being (Bem & Lenney, 1976; Martin, Cook, & Andrews, 2017). Research links femininity to women, while masculinity is associated with men (Donnelly & Twenge, 2017; Hoffman & Borders, 2001):

**H3:** Being a man is positively associated with masculinity.

**H4:** Being a woman is positively associated with femininity.

Gender expectations influence the salience placed on work and career roles (Lee, 2005). Roles are said to be '*situated identities* – assumed and relinquished as the situation

demands' (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 128). Gender identity (master identities) '... coexist with specific roles [i.e. situated identities] such as ... occupation' (Eagly & Wood, 1999, p. 413). Gender identity is displayed and internalised by everyone, but gender traits could be assumed by any person – in other words, although society ascribes masculine and feminine characteristics to men and women, respectively, men could display feminine traits and women could display masculine traits. Displaying gender traits, that is, masculine and feminine, could lead to roles such as work and career being more or less salient in the lives of people, irrespective of whether they were born a man or a woman. The roles of work and career are therefore assumed and relinquished, based on how people interpret social pressure to conform to gender expectations as a master identity. It is further evident that psychological androgyny increased for women because they entered the workplace (Donnelly & Twenge, 2017; Martin et al., 2017; Twenge, 1997). While women have become more masculine, they have not become less feminine as a result. These changes in gender flexibility are more pronounced in women than in men (cf. Martin et al., 2017). Understanding masculine and feminine gender traits enables us to consider the benefits of being able to enact both, resulting in psychological androgyny, which includes behavioural flexibility and adaptable behaviour (Martin et al., 2017) as dictated by the situation:

**H5:** Women show higher psychological androgyny than men.

## Roles, gender, work and career

While we acknowledge that gender is both 'multifaceted' and 'multidimensional' (Dean & Tate, 2017, p. 650), the measurement of gender traits remains possible by utilising the adapted BSRI (Bem, 1974; Geldenhuys & Bosch, 2019). The BSRI measures masculinity, femininity and a neutral dimension. As the neutral dimension is used to provide a social desirability score on individual feedback, it was not utilised in this study. Psychological androgyny is calculated (Bem, 1974) with valid high scores on both masculinity and femininity by subtracting masculinity from femininity.

**H6:** The revised BSRI measuring masculinity and femininity is valid and reliable.

In the evolution of mankind, different activities and roles were assigned to men and women, because of differences in their reproductive functioning and physical strength (Eagly & Wood, 1999). 'Men's activities typically involved more status and power yielding more dominant behaviour, whereas women's activities usually involved more domestic activities yielding more submissive behaviour' (Zaikman & Marks, 2017, p. 409).

Work, which has previously been established as more temporal and focused on specific tasks while occupying a position in an organisation, is largely masculinised or feminised and therefore predominantly taken up by either men or women. Women and men who identify with being feminine, for example, showing care, submissive behaviour and focusing on precision so as not to take risks (Eagly & Wood, 1999), prefer feminised work and occupations, such as teaching,

domestic work, nursing and administration. Masculinised work, which also holds higher social status (Acker, 1990; Banihani, Lewis, & Syed, 2013), is associated with men and women who identify with being masculine and is characterised by leading, managing and calculating and taking risks (Eagly & Wood, 1999). A career or a pattern of work-related lifetime experiences therefore manifests as a pattern of work in either a masculinised or feminised occupation:

**H7:** Masculinity and femininity have an indirect effect on career-role salience through work-role salience.

**H8:** Psychological androgyny has an indirect effect on career-role salience through work-role salience.

As work is regarded as more temporal, displaying feminine traits may result in patterns around life concerns, such as the role of parent, instead of around career concerns, where work may have a long-term focus and follow a continuous pattern.

## Method

### Research setting and procedure

The data were collected by distributing a paper-and-pencil-format survey to a number of organisations within South Africa. A letter explaining the nature and purpose of the study, as well as an informed consent form, was attached to the questionnaire. Respondents provided their consent to participate in the study by signing the form. The surveys were marked to ensure that the number of questionnaires collected from the respondents matched the number of questionnaires distributed.

### Respondents

Convenience non-probability sampling was used to collect data from a targeted group of 500 employees. We received 395 completed and usable questionnaires – a 79% response rate. The inclusion criteria for participation were that respondents had to have been employed for at least 1 year and have a good command of English. The sample consisted of 53.6% women and 45.7% men. The majority were between the ages of 19 and 29 (46.8%), while 4.1% were in the age category of 60 years and older. The sample consisted of 53.3% Indian, 27.9% black African, 10.4% white, 5.1% mixed race and 2.8% Asian employees. The highest representation in terms of home language was English (46.78%), followed by Afrikaans (22.8%) and Zulu (6.3%). The lowest representation was for Swati (0.5%). The majority of respondents were in possession of a matric or grade-12 qualification (33%), followed by a 4-year postgraduate degree or equivalent (24.1%), a diploma or BTech qualification (14.7%), an undergraduate degree (12.7%), a 5-year postgraduate degree or equivalent (8.9%) and, lastly, any other qualifications that did not fall within the aforementioned categories (5.3%).

### Measures

#### Biographical questionnaire

A biographical questionnaire was used to collect essential demographic data such as age, race, sex, marital status, number of years' work experience and home language.



### Work salience questionnaire

The work salience questionnaire (Allen & Ortlepp, 2002) consists of nine items. Each respondent was required to respond on a five-point Likert scale. The scale ranges from 1, *strongly disagree*, to 5, *strongly agree*, with *neutral* as midpoint. Examples of items are: 'If I didn't have bills to pay, I don't think I would work' and 'Most things in my life are more important than work'. The work salience questionnaire has a reliability of  $\alpha = 0.80$  (Allen & Ortlepp, 2002).

### Career salience questionnaire

The career salience questionnaire consists of 11 items. Each respondent was required to respond on a five-point Likert scale. The scale ranges from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), with *neutral* as midpoint. Examples of items are: 'The most important things I do in life involve my career', 'I want to work, but I don't want a demanding career' and 'My friends and family know that my career is very important to my life'. The career salience questionnaire has a reliability of  $\alpha = 0.83$  (Allen & Ortlepp, 2002).

### Gender traits

An adapted version of the 30-item BSRI (Bem, 1974), scored on a seven-point response format ranging from 1 (*almost never true*) to 7 (*almost always true*), was used to measure *masculinity* and *femininity*. Originally, Bem used 10 items each to measure masculinity, femininity and neutral traits. Terms employed to measure masculinity included *assertive*, *dominant* and *forceful*. *Sympathetic*, *affectionate* and *warm* were used to measure femininity. Because of a problematic response format and item functioning in a multicultural context such as South Africa, an adapted version (Geldenhuys & Bosch, 2019) consisting of a six-point response format for a nine-item *femininity* measure and a nine-item *masculinity* measure was used. This study reported an internal consistency of  $\alpha = 0.83$ .

### Analysis

We used the R Core Team 386.3.3.3 (2017) statistical programme, specifically the Psych (Revelle, 2015) and Lavaan (Yves, 2012) packages to analyse the data. The data were tested for the possibility of having a nested structure, which was not found. Descriptive statistics was used to evaluate the mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis of each item and construct. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was applied to investigate the relationships between *masculinity*, *femininity*, *psychological androgyny*, *work-role salience* and *career-role salience*. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to specify the measurement models, while path analysis was conducted to specify the structural model. We applied the weighted least squares measure of variance (WLSMV) robust estimator, which orders variables categorically and deals with violations of normality (Muthén & Muthén, 2010). Weighted least squares measure of variance is useful for its accurate estimation CFA model parameters (Millsap & Yun-Tein, 2004). Further, bootstrapping was applied to test more parameter levels. Two sets of fit statistics were included in

the study, namely absolute fit and incremental fit. The absolute fit indices for this study included the chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) fit statistic, the weighted root mean residual (WRMR) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). Root mean square error of approximation cutoff scores of  $\leq 0.05$  indicated close fit, 0.05 and 0.08 indicated reasonable fit and an RMSEA  $\geq 0.10$  suggested poor fit (Kline, 2011). The incremental fit indices included the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) and the comparative fit index (CFI). For the TLI and CFI, values  $> 0.90$  may indicate good model fit (Kline, 2011). The chi-square difference test was applied to the competing SEM models in support of the most parsimonious model. The reliability coefficients of the factors were also examined, using omega reliability coefficients (Gravetter & Forzano, 2009; McDonald, 1999). According to Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), reliability coefficients  $> 0.70$  are adequate for research instruments.

## Findings

### Validity analysis and correlations

This section reports the results for the validity of both work- and career-role salience (H1) and the adapted BSRI (H6). It further reports the divergent validity of work- and career-role salience (H1) in Table 1 and the correlations between the variables.

### Work- and career-role salience

The factor loadings for *work-role salience* ranged from 0.34 to 0.87, while for *career-role salience*, it ranged from 0.30 to 0.73. The fit statistics for *work-role salience* were  $\chi^2 = 704.89$ ,  $df = 227$ ,  $p < 0.000$ , CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.07 and WRMR = 1.56; while for *career-role salience*, these were  $\chi^2 = 704.89$ ,  $df = 227$ ,  $p < 0.000$ , CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.07 and WRMR = 1.56. The results of this study confirm that both *work-role salience* and *career-role salience*, respectively, are valid and reliable for the sample of South African employees used in this study. Hypothesis 1 specified that *work-* and *career-role salience* show divergent validity. Pagé et al. (2012) further suggested that moderate correlations ( $0.30 < r > 0.70$ ) would indicate adequate divergent validity. The results support the supposition that *work-role salience* and *career-role salience* ( $r = 0.52$ ;  $p < 0.000$ ) measure different phenomena. Hypothesis 1 is therefore supported.

### Adapted Bem Sex Role Inventory

Hypothesis 6 set out to confirm the factor structure of the adapted and re-scaled version of the BSRI presented by Geldenhuys and Bosch (2019), which indicated that both

**TABLE 1:** Correlation coefficients for the latent variables.

Item	1	2	3	4
Masculinity	-	-	-	-
Femininity	0.10	-	-	-
Psychological androgyny	0.66**	-0.69**	-	-
Work-role salience	0.21*	0.02	0.14*	-
Career-role salience	0.32*	-0.01	0.25*	0.52*

\*,  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*,  $p < 0.001$ .

*masculinity* and *femininity* consist of nine items, as opposed to the original 10 items, rated on a six-point response format (see Geldenhuys & Bosch, 2019). The fit statistics for *gender traits* were  $\chi^2 = 704.89$ ,  $df = 227$ ,  $p < 0.000$ , CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.07 and WRMR = 1.56. Regarding the chi-square test, the overall model was significant, indicating that the model did not produce perfect fit. Additionally, the fit statistics indicated sufficient CFI and TLI scores – above 0.90, while adequate RMSEA scores were found (<0.08). We therefore support the suitability of the revised six-point-rated BSRI. The factor loading for *masculinity* ranged from 0.59 to 0.83, and from 0.70 to 0.90 for *femininity*.

## Relationships between variables

The relationships of gender traits with work-role salience and career-role salience are reported in Table 2. We calculated the psychological androgyny score as *M* minus *F*, as suggested by Bem (1974), to make inferences regarding the relationships of gender traits with work- and career-role salience. Table 1 shows that *masculinity*, *femininity* and *psychological androgyny* are related. *Work-role salience* and *career-role salience* are related. Regarding the correlations, *masculinity* and *femininity* were unrelated. Both *masculinity* ( $r = 0.66$ ;  $p < 0.00$ ) and *femininity* ( $r = -0.69$ ;  $p < 0.00$ ) have a relationship with *psychological androgyny*.

## Sex differences

Hypotheses 2–4 set out to determine if men and women experience *work-role salience* and *career-role salience* (H2), *masculinity* (H3), *femininity* (H4) and *psychological androgyny* (H5) differently. We expected that men and women would attach different levels of importance to work and career roles, with men positively associated with masculinity, women positively associated with femininity and women being more *psychologically androgynous* than men. The *t*-test results indicated that women are more *feminine* ( $M = 4.70$ ;  $F_{(372)} = 0.06$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) than men ( $M = 4.33$ ;  $F_{(372)} = 0.06$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), and that women ( $M = -6.07$ ;  $F_{(353)} = 1.47$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) are more *psychologically androgynous* than men ( $M = -1.79$ ;  $F_{(353)} = 1.47$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). No statistically significant differences between men and women with respect to *masculinity*, *work-role salience* and *career-role salience* were found. Hypotheses 4 and 5 were accepted.

## Structural equation modelling

### Measurement model

We used CFA to test three different competing measurement models. The hypothesised model (Model 1) consisted of four latent variables, namely: (1) *masculinity*, (2) *femininity*, (3)

TABLE 2: Fit statistics for the three competing measurement models.

Model	$\chi^2$	<i>P</i>	<i>df</i>	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	WRMR	CI
1	2567.77	0.000	1117	0.90	0.90	0.06	1.67	0.06   0.07
2	4773.53	0.000	1126	0.75	0.73	0.10	2.69	0.09   0.10
3	7526.60	0.000	1080	0.56	0.54	0.14	3.64	0.13   0.14

$\chi^2$ , chi-square; *p*, significance; *df*, degrees of freedom; TLI, Tucker–Lewis indicator; CFI, Comparative Fit Index; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; WRMR, weighted root mean square residual; CI, confidence interval.

*work-role salience* and (4) *career-role salience*. *Psychological androgyny* was calculated for the structural model. The first alternative model (Model 2) consisted of two latent variables, namely *gender traits* (combining *femininity* and *masculinity* as one dimension) and *occupational salience* (combining *work-role salience* and *career-role salience* as one dimension), while the second alternative model (Model 3) consisted of only one latent variable, namely *roles*. The fit statistics indicated that Model 1 fit the data best.

Table 2 indicates that none of the models produced perfect fit based on the chi-square coefficients ( $\chi^2 = 2567.77$  for Model 1,  $\chi^2 = 4773.53$  for Model 2 and  $\chi^2 = 7526.60$  for Model 3). However, based on the incremental fit statistics and CFI, Model 1 fit the data best (TLI = 0.93; CFI = 0.94; RMSEA = 0.05; WRMR = 1.47). Additionally, the chi-square difference test favoured Model 1 ( $\chi^2 = 2205.76$ ;  $df = 9$ ).

### Structural model (direct and indirect effects)

Hypothesis 7 was set to investigate if *masculinity* and *femininity* have an indirect effect on *career-role salience* through *work-role salience*, while Hypothesis 8 was set to determine if *psychological androgyny* has an indirect effect on *career-role salience* through *work-role salience*. Path analysis was conducted on the hypothesised measurement model (Model 1). The fit statistics for the path analysis of the hypothesised model indicated good fit ( $\chi^2 = 1684.74$ ,  $df = 850$ ,  $p < 0.000$ , CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.05 and WRMR = 1.56).

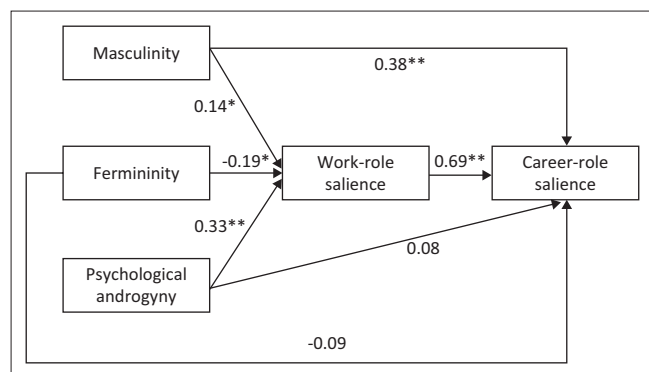
Table 3 shows that *masculinity* increases *career-role salience* ( $\beta = 0.38$ ;  $p < 0.000$ ). *Masculinity* ( $\beta = 0.14$ ;  $p < 0.000$ ) and *psychological androgyny* ( $\beta = 0.33$ ;  $p < 0.000$ ) increase *work-role salience*, while *femininity* decreases *work-role salience* ( $\beta = -0.19$ ;  $p < 0.000$ ). *Work-role salience* ( $\beta = 0.69$ ;  $p < 0.000$ ) predicts *career-role salience*. Regarding the indirect effects, *masculinity* indirectly affects *career-role salience* with a partial mediation through *work-role salience*.

The results in Figure 1 suggest that masculinity has a direct effect on career-role salience, while also showing a partial indirect effect through work-role salience. It is evident that

TABLE 3: Path analysis of indirect and direct effects.

Variable	Variable	$\beta$	Estimate	SE	Z	<i>p</i>
<b>Direct effects</b>						
Career-role salience	Masculinity	0.38	0.42	0.07	60.35	0.000**
	Femininity	-0.09	-0.10	0.07	-10.42	0.157
	Androgyny	0.08	0.09	0.09	00.98	0.236
Work-role salience	Masculinity	0.14	0.15	0.07	20.19	0.028*
	Femininity	-0.19	-0.20	0.07	-20.75	0.000**
	Androgyny	0.33	0.35	0.09	30.76	0.000**
Career-role salience	Work-role salience	0.69	0.95	0.09	100.25	0.000**
<b>Indirect effects</b>						
Career-role salience	Masculinity	0.30	0.41	0.07	50.58	0.000**
	Femininity	0.01	0.02	0.08	0.25	0.804
	Androgyny	-0.11	-0.15	0.10	-10.42	0.157
	Work-role salience	0.57	0.78	0.08	90.40	0.000**

\*,  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*,  $p < 0.001$ .



\*,  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*,  $p < 0.001$ .

**FIGURE 1:** Direct and indirect effects.

masculinity, femininity and androgyny have a direct effect on work-role salience, with femininity decreasing work-role salience.

## Ethical consideration

The study adhered to all ethical considerations, and the research was approved by the ethical committee at the University of Johannesburg. Confidentiality was maintained, and the research and data collection process were explained to the participants in a cover letter accompanying the survey that was sent out.

## Discussion

The study set out to empirically distinguish between work-role salience and career-role salience as separate constructs (see Allen & Ortlepp, 2002), while confirming the factor structure of the revised BSRI (see Bem, 1974; Geldenhuys & Bosch, 2019). Additionally, as work and careers are less influenced by sex (i.e. man or woman) in current times (Ten Brummelhuis & Lautsch, 2016), but rather by gender, that is, masculinity and femininity (Liu & Ngo, 2017), we set out to determine the effect of gender traits on work- and career-role salience. This study makes another important contribution by determining that psychological androgyny, or gender-flexible behaviour, creates salience in a person's work and career role. The study furthermore supports the notion that women at work are more gender-adaptable (Donnelly & Twenge, 2017) than men. This has important implications for the career development of women specifically.

## Interpretation of the findings

The results confirmed that the work- and career-role salience dimensions are valid and reliable for the sample consisting of South African employees. This is in line with previous research by Allen and Ortlepp (2002). The results confirmed that work- and career-role salience are related but show sufficient divergence (Pagé et al., 2012) and should be defined as separate terms (Allen & Ortlepp, 2002). This makes an important contribution to career development by helping employees focus on work-role salience, as it can inform how careers progress through work (cf. Powell & Greenhaus, 2006). Farmer (2006) pointed out that the career role is

influenced by other life roles. Placing emphasis on developing work and careers as entities that inform each other could be beneficial to career choices. Riaz et al. (2012) suggested that career-role salience is associated with the decisions and progress that people make in their life roles. Therefore, if family is a priority, a different level of importance will be allocated to work and career.

The factor structure of the revised BSRI suggested by Geldenhuys and Bosch (2019) holds true for the sample of this study. The revised BSRI consists of a nine-item *masculinity* dimension and a nine-item *femininity* dimension, all of which are rated on a six-point response format (the *neutral* dimension was not used in this study). The valid *masculinity* and *femininity* dimensions were used to calculate *psychological androgyny* (scoring high on *masculinity* and *femininity*), enabling valid inferences relating to gender flexibility.

## Sex differences in the experience of role salience

While we could not confirm that men are more masculine than women, the women in this study were significantly more feminine and more psychologically androgynous than the men. Although Hoffman and Borders (2001) stated that, because of societal and cultural expectations placed on men and women, women display more feminine behaviours such as caring and being compassionate and understanding, the work environment is seeing a shift in women's display of gender, where masculine traits are rewarded. Although women's display of masculinity has increased, also evidenced in this study, we show that they have not rejected feminine traits and 'have not discarded their womanhood' (Donnelly & Twenge, 2017, p. 561). Family responsibilities further play a role, as women are both working and taking care of their households, while men still focus mainly on their careers. These shifts for women have resulted in greater gender flexibility on the part of women. Analysis of the traditional focus on differences between men and women shows that work- and career-role salience are less affected by sex than was previously found (Ten Brummelhuis & Lautsch, 2016). This study confirms that both sexes place the same importance on these roles. Gender traits, as operationalised by the BSRI, therefore provide nuanced results in the interpretation of the importance that people place on work and career roles. Men and women do not experience work- and career-role salience differently. Cook (1994) posited that it is more likely that men and women experience differences in how certain roles are enacted or managed, rather than showing differences in role salience.

## Direct and indirect effects

Socially ascribed gender roles have become entrenched in how men and women function in society (Hoffman & Borders, 2001) and in workplaces (Liu & Ngo, 2017). Women are often viewed as more feminine (Hoffman & Borders, 2001) and often occupy competing roles outside of work. We sought to explore the effects of masculinity, femininity and,



specifically, psychological androgyny on work- and career-role salience. The results confirmed that masculinity is important for both work- and career-role salience, while psychological androgyny and femininity relate to only work-role salience. This is not surprising, as the workplace is often 'controlled by men' (Banihani et al., 2013, p. 408) and characterised by masculinity (Acker, 1990). An important finding regarding femininity and work-role salience is that feminine gender traits decrease work-role salience and have no effect on career-role salience. Therefore, being caring, compassionate, understanding and soothing, as examples of feminine gender traits, can decrease the importance that people attach to the work role. Further, it was found that work-role salience partially mediates the relationship between masculinity and career-role salience.

Consistent with the literature, people displaying masculine gender traits attach importance to work or career roles, while people displaying feminine gender traits place work and career secondary to other roles (Wood & Eagly, 2013). The results of this study suggest that psychological androgyny is positively linked to work-role salience. From a theoretical viewpoint, psychological androgyny allows people to display both feminine and masculine traits (see Bem, 1974; Donnelly & Twenge, 2017). Research by Donnelly and Twenge (2017) pointed out that psychological androgyny may result in improved role adaptability behaviour. The importance attached to work, which is more short term in nature than a career, is therefore experienced by people who show gender flexibility but may not readily subscribe to masculine traits. Studies have pointed to the benefits of psychological androgyny (Martin et al., 2017), which were confirmed by McGinley (2013), who stated that 'women have demonstrated more adaptability than men' (p. 796).

Women in the modern era portray more masculine traits, which supports the idea that psychological androgyny can counter the negative effects of femininity and allow people to become less sex-typed (Donnelly & Twenge, 2017) at work. Increased psychological androgyny will enable people to experience more salience in their work role. In addition, Hyde and Quest (2013) posited that psychological androgyny may be dependent on a person's situation. It is often the case that women compromise their careers in order to comply with societally imposed behavioural norms (Radhakrishnan, 2009) and may not want to threaten masculinity at work. Fernando and Cohen (2014) indicated that, for women, 'respectable femininity' is encouraged, in order for them to advance in and build their careers.

## Limitations

While the study contributes to understanding gender in the context of work- and career-role salience, it has some limitations. The sample was not representative of all the race and language groups in the multicultural South African environment. Future samples should include larger white and mixed race groupings. In addition, the majority of the sample consisted of younger working people (21–44 years).

The study did not take other demographic variables into account in terms of their effect on gender and work- and career-role salience. A cross-sectional design was used, and future studies should consider longitudinal analysis or multilevel analysis to measure possible changes in work- and career-role salience over time.

## Recommendations

Rothwell (2005) is of the opinion that improved career development plans should be established by organisations to improve employees' ability to cope with changes in the workplace. Viewing people as independent from socially ascribed gender expectations linked to sex, is becoming increasingly important, and gender traits should be measured using instruments such as the adapted BSRI (Bem, 1974; Geldenhuys & Bosch, 2019). Gender traits may inform us of the individual differences that exist in employees that are not always directly observable, but are useful in creating inclusive organisations. Because of the nature of the changes in workplaces to accommodate more women, more research should be performed on psychological androgyny, specifically investigations about the benefits of a person being gender flexible. Alternative ways of measuring psychological androgyny should be considered beyond the BSRI. The differences in distinction between work- and career-role salience should also be explored in relation to modern work phenomena such as portfolio work (Grigg, 1997) and project work, which may or may not lead to a career.

## Conclusion

Feminine gender traits, such as compassion, caring, sensitivity to others' needs and being affectionate, predict less work-role salience, whereas masculinity is characterised by assertiveness, being independent, and defending one's own beliefs, and increases both work- and career-role salience. Sex does not influence this relationship. Sex differences exist for femininity and psychological androgyny, with women being more psychologically androgynous than men.

Sex, however, does not affect the relationships of any of the gender traits with work- and career-role salience. We confirmed that work- and career-role salience are indeed independent constructs. In addition, this study extends knowledge about gender and work- and career-role salience by showing that gender traits may have greater power in measures of the importance of differences between work and career roles than that of more traditional measures of differences, such as sex.

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### Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

## Authors' contribution

M.G. and A.B. conceptualised the research design and collaborated on the discussion. A.B. wrote the literature review. M.G. conducted the analyses and wrote the results. I.K. and S.J. collected the data. All researchers agreed to the terms as stated in the contributions of each author.

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