

CALL FOR ARTICLES

RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences

ISSUE ON “GENDER INEQUALITY BEYOND CATEGORIES: FEMININITY, MASCULINITY AND GENDER EXPRESSION”

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Gender categories are not homogenous; they have inequalities and hierarchies both within and between them. Within any gender identity category, people enact varying levels of femininity and masculinity, from traditional bipolar or “opposite” conceptions of gender, to various forms of androgyny and nonconformity, to feeling little attachment to gender at all. Contemporary gender theory highlights the importance of understanding these dominant, subordinate and mixed positions within gender categories as key to the overall maintenance of gender inequality (e.g., Connell 1995; Bridges and Pascoe 2014; Vipond 2015). However, outside of social psychology (Lindqvist et al. 2021), most quantitative research to date has been ill-equipped to operationalize concepts of femininity, masculinity, and gender expression.

Supported in part by funding from the Russell Sage Foundation, the 2024 General Social Survey (GSS) included two pairs of femininity and masculinity scales: one asking how respondents see themselves and another asking how “most people” see them. These measures not only capture within-category gender diversity they also recognize that gender is interactionally negotiated (West and Zimmerman 1987) and distinguish whose determination of gender is being measured. Collectively, these improvements bring the empirical operationalization of gender more in line with contemporary social science theory (Westbrook and Saperstein 2015; Saperstein and Westbrook 2021), and help quantitative researchers engage more directly with existing qualitative research on the nature of contemporary gender inequality.

With the 2024 GSS data’s initial release now publicly available (<https://gss.norc.org/us/en/gss/get-the-data.html>), we seek contributions that draw on gradational measures such as these to advance research on gender inequality beyond categories in the contemporary United States. We encourage submissions from many disciplines and perspectives, including but not limited to: sociology, psychology, political science, economics, education, geography, and urban studies. We welcome papers that feature the 2024 GSS data alone, in combination with other data, or using similar

gender measures in other surveys. We also welcome papers that adopt multiple methods, and combine analyses of the 2024 GSS with experiments, in-depth interviews, oral histories, ethnography, or content analysis. For example, the GSS can be the primary or sole data, it can play an important role in setting context and motivation, it can be used to validate or challenge findings from other data sources, and it can be used as illustrative evidence to support theory development. If other data on their own can address the questions posed below, they are also eligible for inclusion in this issue.

Data description

The GSS is the only full-probability, personal-interview survey designed to monitor changes in both social characteristics and attitudes currently being conducted in the United States (Marsden, Smith and Hout 2020). The two pairs of gender scales can be analyzed along with questions on the GSS replicating core, as well as with other one-time or repeated modules included in [the 2024 questionnaire](#). For example, the 2024 GSS includes American National Election Study (ANES) items on politics, as well as respondents' voting preferences in the past several elections.

During face-to-face interviews, the gender scales were included as part of a self-administered questionnaire (SAQ), along with questions from the long-standing “risky behaviors” module. These items were available in English or Spanish and appear on two of the three ballots for the survey (Ballots 2 and 3), which include about 2,100 respondents. Respondents were instructed to answer for both seven-point scales in each pair, with responses ranging from “Not at all (0)” to “Very (6).” The gender scales module also involved two randomized question ordering experiments that are described in the 2024 [GSS Codebook](#) (see pg. 32).

One caution is that the GSS sample is nationally representative of adults living in households, which means a single cross-sectional survey year includes relatively few observations for smaller populations such as self-identified Asian, or American Indian and Alaska Native respondents as well as for categorical gender minorities. This limitation should be considered when designing analyses and is why other data may help to address the questions raised in this call. At the same time, gradational measures, like those in the 2024 GSS, allow for a broader conceptualization of gender diversity, including an important opportunity to study variation within sex categories.

The initial GSS data release also does not include all variables from the 2024 survey. More data is scheduled for Fall 2025 release, following disclosure review, including occupation (OCC), religion (RELIG) and current identity (SEXNOW2).¹ Researchers should confirm which release includes their data of interest (a variable guide is included in all downloads) and note that analyses using restricted data, such as geocodes and/or the original responses from protected variables, require a [sensitive data license](#). This application process can take several months and requires a fee.

Gradational gender measures: What makes the GSS data unique?

Measuring gender as a scale has a long history, dating to the original Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI; see Bem 1974). However, the BSRI and similar indices have been critiqued for imposing

¹ According to NORC, the number of 2024 GSS respondents who currently identify as neither female nor male is similar to the number found in the 2021 and 2022 GSS surveys (~N=25, or 0.7% of the total sample).

definitions of femininity and masculinity and relying on gender stereotypes to assign scores (Magliozzi et al. 2016). In contrast, the first pair of scales in the 2024 GSS asks gender identification directly (see image below; variable names: FEMSELF1, MASCSELF1), offering general measures of femininity and masculinity that allow people to draw on whichever factors contribute to their gendered sense of self when responding. Survey research uses similar gradational measures of self-identification in other domains: for example, to capture political ideology on a spectrum from liberal to conservative, alongside categorical political party affiliation (i.e., whether one votes as a Democrat, Republican, or Independent). The second pair of scales follows a similar format but asks how respondents think “most people” see them. These reflected-appraisal gender scales (FEMSEE1, MASCSEE1) allow for quantitative research that recognizes people are held accountable to prevailing norms and gendered expectations, regardless of how they may identify themselves.

In general, how do you see yourself? Please answer on both scales below.

	Not at all 0	1	2	3	4	5	Very 6
Feminine	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Masculine	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

By gauging femininity and masculinity separately in each pair of items, researchers have the flexibility to include either or both measures in their analysis. As with the BSRI, the femininity and masculinity scores also can be combined in various ways to capture *gender nonconformity* (e.g., a higher response on the binary gender atypical scale per Hart et al. 2019), as well as other concepts such as *androgyny* (e.g., high responses on both scales, per Bem 1974, or low to moderate scores on both scales, per Moore 2006) and identifying as *agender* (e.g., selecting zero on both scales, rejecting categorization as either feminine or masculine). It is also possible to calculate a *polarization* score from the absolute value of the difference between a given pair of scale responses that allows the extent of separation between one’s femininity and masculinity to become an empirical question (e.g., Magliozzi et al. 2016). Gradational gender scale responses can be treated as independent variables in studies of inequality or as dependent variables that allow a person’s gender identification or expression to be an outcome of other social processes. The range of potential variable constructions offers the opportunity to better match theoretical predictions and empirical approaches in research on femininity, masculinity and inequality.

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Inspired by these important new survey measures, we invite papers on contemporary gender inequality in the United States that integrate an analysis of the roles of gender expression and/or perceptions of gender. The GSS can support research on a wide range of topics, and many prior studies that drew on GSS data could be extended by asking how the results might change if we accounted for gradations of femininity and masculinity either in addition to, or instead of, categorical sex or gender identity. The 2024 GSS data can also be contextualized by comparison to other datasets and other methodological approaches.

All submissions should reflect Russell Sage Foundation funding priorities; this excludes studies *solely* focused on health disparities, but includes a variety of questions related to social, political, and economic inequality that can be approached from descriptive, conceptual or analytical perspectives. The following is a non-exhaustive list of potential topics and questions that we invite authors to consider:

Gender Inequality at Home and at Work

The extensive research literature on gender differences in human capital attainment and unequal labor market experiences is rivaled only by the volume of studies on gender inequality in household labor and care work. Yet remarkably few such analyses—especially those that employ quantitative methods—consider the roles of femininity, masculinity, and gender expression in maintaining inequalities within and between gender identity categories in these domains.

Precarious Manhood. Previous research highlights how masculinity for men is narrowly construed and highly policed compared to femininity for women, with balancing labor at home and at work as a key site of contention (e.g., Vandello and Bosson 2013; Matlon 2022). However, researchers often rely on indirect measures of gender presentation because data on how people perceive their own gender in these ways along with how they are perceived by others is often lacking. What home and work life configurations are considered masculine among U.S. adults today? Given longstanding breadwinner norms, how do men report seeing themselves, or think most people perceive them, when they make more (or less) than their partners? Do men who engage in traditionally feminine-typed behaviors, such as housework, see themselves as less masculine, or do they report being perceived as less masculine by others?

“Doing gender” in relationships. The legalization of same-sex marriage and growing diversity in family forms has prompted calls to move beyond binary understandings of the division of household labor (e.g., Goldberg 2013). Some studies have answered this call qualitatively, or by signaling gender expression indirectly through survey experiment vignettes (e.g., Doan and Quadlin 2019). Gradational gender measures offer the opportunity to account for variation within gender categories more directly in quantitative research. How is self-perceived femininity or masculinity related to engaging in household labor, such as cleaning/housework and child/family care? Do responses on either pair of gender scales differ depending on how couples distribute their paid and unpaid work? Do marriage or parenthood seem to shift how otherwise similar people see themselves in terms of their femininity or masculinity (e.g., Burke and Cast 1997)?

Gendered occupations. Gradational gender measures can be used to revisit previous inequality research on everything from earnings and income (e.g., Hsu 2024) to hours worked and job satisfaction. Femininity and masculinity scales can also help researchers consider how the relationship between gender and occupational segregation may run in both directions. For example, research suggests gendered self-conceptions shape the occupation one pursues (e.g., Cech 2013). At the same time, an individual’s occupation, or industry, might shape how they see their own femininity and masculinity and how they think they are perceived by others. Is a person’s gendered sense of self not only related to their current occupation, or its current level of binary gender segregation, but also to the occupations held by their parents when they were growing up? The cross-sectional nature of the GSS limits researchers’ ability to ask causal questions in which

gender expression is an outcome of social processes. Yet, some initial steps can be taken to inspire future panel data collection and spur further advances in studies of gender inequality.

Politics and Ideology

Scholars of politics have been increasingly vocal about the need to move beyond standard “gender gap” research (e.g., Bittner and Goodyear-Grant 2017; Cassino 2020; Alexander, Bolzendahl and Wängnerud 2021). The 2024 GSS data includes many questions about political and social attitudes along with voting behavior that allow for revisiting what is known about gender differences in politics and ideology with more gradational measures of gender.

Partisan sorting and political participation. Previous research has considered the role of femininity and masculinity in relation to the rhetoric of political elites (e.g., Johnson 2022) and how American adults perceive political parties (e.g., Winter 2010). With femininity and masculinity scales, these lines of research can be connected more directly to individuals’ gender identities and their expression. Given that politics has long been seen as a masculine domain, how do politically active women see themselves in terms of gender conformity (e.g., Coffé and Bolzendahl 2021)? How do they think they are perceived by others? How is “doing gender” related to “doing politics” or being partisan (e.g., Egan 2020)?

Policy preferences and issue positions. Recent research highlights the political consequences of “fragile masculinity” (DiMuccio and Knowles 2020), generally, and the role of masculinity threat in support for LGBTQ+ rights specifically (e.g., Harrison and Michelson 2019). Are these findings consistent with how men report their own masculinity, or how they think they are perceived by others? How does relative gender conformity relate to support for LGBTQ+ rights and a range of other issue positions? How is the question “What are women’s (or men’s) interests?” (Yildirim 2022) further complicated by considering femininity and masculinity scale responses?

Changing gender relations. Studying attitudes towards gender equality, and how they have changed over time, has been a key component of understanding changing gender relations (e.g., Davis and Greenstein 2009). With gender scales, researchers can extend this line of work by asking: Are increases in gender egalitarian beliefs among younger cohorts (e.g., Scarborough, Sin and Risman 2019) related to their more nonconforming gender identities and expressions? Or is gender nonconformity in expression decoupled from beliefs in gender equality? Can researchers use gradational gender measures as a tool for breaking the “gender-binary cycle,” to help discourage essentialist views of gender difference that themselves serve to reinforce non-egalitarian beliefs and behaviors (e.g., Saguy, Reifen-Tagar and Joel 2021)?

Harassment and Violence

Binary thinking is especially evident in studies of gendered harassment and violence, which tend to portray the category of “men” as homogenous perpetrators and the category of “women” as homogenous victims. Femininity and masculinity scales allow for more nuanced analyses that identify differences in terms of experiences of, and attitudes towards, harassment and violence.

Targets of harassment. Gender nonconformity has been identified as an important predictor of bullying among youth and sexual harassment among adults (e.g., McLaughlin, Uggen, and Blackstone 2012; Mittleman 2023). These findings can be revisited and clarified using both pairs of gender scales. Which forms of gender conformity and nonconformity are most related to experiences of harassment and discrimination? Are third-order perceptions of gender conformity more closely related to reported experiences of harassment than how people perceived themselves?

Fears of violence. Although the GSS does not ask about direct experiences of violence, the GSS can be used to explore the relationship between gender and fear of violence, such as fear of walking alone at night. Men experience more violent crime in every category except for sexual assault, yet women fear violence more than men. Gradational gender measures can be used to examine *which* women and men have these experiences: Is relative femininity or masculinity associated with more (or less) fear of crime or victimization? Do responses differ for sexual minorities, who may be targeted for violence in part because of their perceived gender nonconformity (e.g., Tomsen and Mason 2001; Anderson 2020)?

Attitudes towards violence. Traditionally, support for violence and guns has been associated with masculinity and a sense of masculinity threat (e.g., Cassino and Besen-Cassino 2020). We welcome papers that use either or both pairs of gender scales, along with a range of measures (e.g., attitudes toward police violence, the death penalty, and guns), to further this line of research. Are femininity and masculinity better predictors of these attitudes than categorical gender alone? If people think their gendered self-conceptions and how others see them are not aligned are they more (or less) supportive of guns and violence?

Intersectionality

The “doing” of gender is linked to other axes of inequality. We urge all submissions to consider intersectional perspectives on their own or as a complement to another substantive focus, whenever possible. We welcome studies that examine intersectionality across a range of individual characteristics, social institutions and structural conditions: from age and immigrant status, to marriage and religion, to region or place of residence. We especially encourage work that engages thoughtfully with incorporating intersectionality in quantitative research (e.g., McCall 2005; Scott and Siltanen 2017; Mahendran et al. 2024; Wilkes and Karimi 2024).

Dominant femininities and masculinities. Previous research identifies “hegemonic” or “hybrid” forms of gender expression and highlights their associations with race and class (e.g., Bridges and Pascoe 2014; Hamilton et al. 2019). Gradational gender scales allow for asking related questions, such as: How is having a more traditional or polarized view of one’s gender related to other demographic characteristics (e.g., Magliozzi et al. 2016)? Is gender conformity more common among relatively privileged groups, or those who have been historically marginalized? Is gender nonconformity associated with more disadvantage for men than women, as theories of precarious masculinity imply, or do nonconformity penalties (e.g., in income or educational attainment) also differ among men and women, depending on other factors (e.g., Mittleman 2022)? Do these relationships remain consistent when considering both how people see themselves and how they think they are seen by others?

Identity and behavior. Most research on gender inequality assumes that behaviors associated with men are masculine typed and behaviors associated with women are feminine typed. With measures of attitudes and behaviors, identity, and gender expression scale responses these assumptions can be put to empirical test. Are certain attitudes and behaviors coded as feminine or masculine regardless of who endorses them? When people engage in traditionally gender-typed behaviors, is this reflected in how they see themselves in terms of femininity and masculinity, or primarily in how they think they are seen by others? Studies of sexuality have long noted that people's identities, attractions, and behaviors do not necessarily align. Do we see similar patterns for gender identity, gender expression, and traditionally gendered attitudes or behaviors?

Sexual orientation and gender expression. Cultural stereotypes fuel determinist beliefs that all lesbians and gay men are gender nonconforming and all straight people are gender conforming (Sandfort 2005), despite the range of gender presentations among both sexual minorities (e.g., Moore 2006; Wilson et al. 2010) and majority groups (e.g., Bridges 2014). With gradational gender measures, researchers can consider gender conformity separately from sexual identity and/or sexual behaviors (e.g., Silva 2024), as well as explore their combined relationships to other outcomes. These questions can range from descriptive contributions—how gender conforming are respondents who indicate that they identify as straight compared to those who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual?—to studies revealing complex patterns of inequality—e.g., which men are falling behind in educational attainment (Mittleman 2022)?—to more speculative theoretical work regarding how experiences of both gender and sexuality combine to create intersectional “binds” as well as “freedoms” (Ridgeway and Kricheli-Katz 2013).

Methodology

We encourage all submissions to take methodological concerns seriously, including the match between theory and measurement. We also welcome studies that focus on methodology, such as how best to incorporate gender scale data in quantitative studies and how to operationalize femininity, masculinity, and gender expression in inequality research regardless of method.

Combining the scales. Different combinations of the scale measures can be used to answer different kinds of questions about gender and gender inequality. Is the polarization (or distance) between a pair of feminine and masculine scales theoretically relevant (e.g., Magliozzi et al. 2016)? What can we learn from the difference between how people see themselves and how they think others see them (e.g., Hart et al. 2019)? Should the scales be used as absolute or relative measures? How should measures of conformity be constructed?

Optimal scale design. Many prior studies treat femininity and masculinity as opposite ends of a single bipolar scale. Although there are long-standing critiques of this practice in psychology (e.g., Constantinople 1973), it remains common, in part because it reduces the number of survey items required. Research that explicitly compares results between the GSS unipolar scales and bipolar scales in other samples of U.S. adults is especially welcome (e.g., Gidengil and Stolle 2021; Gabarski 2023). Other important methodological questions include: What are the strengths and weaknesses of the general measures of femininity and masculinity in the GSS compared to gradational measures that offer greater specificity in terms of the relevant context, whether interactional (e.g., appearance vs. mannerisms as in Wylie et al. 2010) or social (e.g., home vs.

work)? How do results from gradational gender measures in the U.S. compare to results from other countries? How does using the GSS gender scales to study inequality compare to other indirect methods of creating nonbinary gender measures, such as by aggregating across multiple gender-related survey responses (e.g., Nielsen et al. 2021; Mittleman 2022; Quintana 2022)?

Validity and reliability. Researchers can take advantage of the full range of GSS questions to further validate the gender scales. For example, do people who have more polarized scale responses, suggesting they see femininity and masculinity as “opposites,” also report more traditional gender attitudes? What is the relationship between the gender scale responses and gender-typed behaviors like “keeping house”? Should it be considered a validity concern if these measures do not align as expected? Researchers also may be concerned about reliability, such as whether gender scale responses are sensitive to where they are included in surveys. Does the split-ballot ordering experiment with the “risky behavior” module suggest scale responses are subject to question order priming effects? Does presenting the feminine scale first polarize men’s responses, indicating a gender threat for men, or do responses not differ by which scale is listed first? The 2024 GSS data were also collected using different modes (web, telephone and face-to-face interviews): do gender scale responses vary when an interviewer was present or asked the questions aloud? (How) do these methodological differences affect studies of gender inequality?

Anticipated Timeline

Prospective contributors should submit a CV and an abstract (up to two pages in length, single or double spaced) of their study along with up to three pages of supporting material (e.g., tables, figures, pictures, etc.) no later than 5 PM EST on October 15, 2025, to:

<https://rsf.fluxx.io>

NOTE that if you wish to submit an abstract and do not yet have an account with us, it can take up to 48 hours to get credentials, so please start your application at least two days before the deadline. All submissions must be original work that has not been previously published in part or in full. Only abstracts submitted to <https://rsf.fluxx.io> will be considered. Each paper will receive a \$1,000 honorarium when the issue is published. All questions regarding this issue should be directed to Suzanne Nichols, Director of Publications, at journal@rsage.org. **Do not email the editors of the issue.**

A conference will take place at the Russell Sage Foundation in New York City on **June 26, 2026** (with a group dinner the night before). The selected contributors will gather for a one-day workshop to present draft papers (due a month prior to the conference **on 5/26/26**) and receive feedback from the other contributors and editors. Travel costs, food, and lodging for one author per paper will be covered by the foundation. Papers will be circulated before the conference. After the conference, the authors will submit their revised drafts by 10/15/26. The papers will then be sent out to three additional scholars for formal peer review. Having received feedback from reviewers and the RSF board, authors will revise their papers by 5/10/27. The full and final issue

will be published in the late fall 2027. Papers will be published open access on the RSF website as well as in several digital repositories, including JSTOR and UPCC/Muse.

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