

This Week's Citation Classic®

Spence J T & Helmreich R L. *Masculinity & femininity: their psychological dimensions, correlates, & antecedents*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1978. 297 p.
[University of Texas, Austin, TX]

The book explores the components of the multifaceted concepts of masculinity and femininity, and some of the determinants of individual differences in these components within each sex. Results are reported from batteries of measures devised by the authors that included gender-related traits and attitudes, self-esteem, achievement motives, and child-rearing practices, given to samples of diverse ages and socioeconomic backgrounds. [The *SSC*[®] and the *SC*[®] indicate that this book has been cited in more than 700 publications.]

The Second Sex
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The title of Simone de Beauvoir's well-known book, *The Second Sex*, placed a spotlight on women's inferior status. Until the late 1960s, however, the impression one might have gained from reading many research journals in psychology was that there was no second sex but only one. Some investigators used both men and women in their research, although they typically ignored the gender variable. A disproportionate number, however, studied only men, as was later systematically documented. Yet the conclusion drawn from such studies was about people.

The emergence of the women's movement brought about a good deal of "consciousness raising," in the phrase of the time, along with the "click" phenomenon. It was just such a "click" that led me, almost on a whim, to embark on a study that departed radically from anything I had done before and led to what has amounted to a second research career. I happened to read an experiment¹ which determined the reactions of subjects to a videotape of a (staged) job interview of a very competent or incompetent stimulus person. The conclusion: People find competent people more likable than incompetent people (especially under certain conditions which actually were the main focus of the study). Then came the "click": The interviewees were both men, and so were the subjects.

And then the question: But who likes competent women?

The next day I approached my colleague, Robert Helmreich, and proposed a little study to find out. The "little study" grew to be a large one, since further thought suggested other questions in addition to the original one. Women competent doing what, stereotypically masculine things or feminine things? And wouldn't subjects' sex-role attitudes make a difference? The former question was easy enough to address by developing "masculine" and "feminine" scripts for our competent and incompetent female stimulus persons, but developing an attitude scale was a major research effort in itself. (It paid off; now, almost 25 years later, the Attitudes Toward Women Scale² is still widely used and widely cited.)

The results, published in 1972 in an article quite predictably titled "Who likes competent women?,"³ were not at all as expected. The best liked, not merely by liberal women but even by men with conservative attitudes, turned out to be the competent woman doing *masculine* things. Had the outcome been otherwise, Helmreich and I might have gone back to the kind of research we each had been doing. But these seemingly counter-intuitive results only whetted our appetite for more. So we forged on, trying to understand what we had found, and soon we were hooked. What followed was a series of studies that culminated in the major project reported in our 1978 book in which we investigated, among other things, classic theories about purported temperamental differences between men and women and women's supposed lack of achievement motivation. Those data laid the initial foundation for a theoretical conception of gender identity that I later developed,⁴ a conception that departs radically from traditional approaches and is only just beginning to be understood and to influence others' thinking. The book and other publications that followed in the next few years continue to be widely cited; ironically, to date they are often cited for the wrong reasons!

1. Aronson E, Willerman R & Floyd J. The effect of a pratfall on increasing interpersonal attractiveness. *Psychonomic Sci.* 4:227-8, 1966. (Cited 40 times.)
2. Spence J T & Helmreich R L. The Attitudes Toward Women Scale: an objective instrument to measure attitudes toward the rights and roles of women in contemporary society. *JSAS Cat. Select. Doc. Psychol.* 2:66-7, 1972. (Cited 295 times.)
3. ----- . Who likes competent women? Competence, sex-role congruence of interests, and attitudes towards women as determinants of interpersonal attraction. *J. Appl. Soc. Psychol.* 2:197-213, 1972. (Cited 75 times.)
4. Spence J T. Gender identity and its implications for masculinity and femininity. (Sonderegger T B, ed.) *Nebraska symposium on motivation and achievement: psychology and gender. Volume 32*. Lincoln, ME: University of Nebraska Press, 1985. p. 59-95.

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