

The Relationship of Feminine Gender Roles to Fear of Success in Working Women

Alicia Kusuma Wardani¹, Ratriana Y. E. Kusumiati²

Psychology Study Program, Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana,
Indonesia¹

Psychology Study Program, Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana,
Indonesia²

E-mail: aliciakusuma41@gmail.com¹, miaratriana@gmail.com²

Correspondent Author: Alicia Kusuma Wardani, aliciakusuma41@gmail.com

Doi: 10.31316/g-couns.v10i03.7262

Abstract

This study aims to examine the relationship between feminine gender roles and fear of success in working women aged twenty to forty years. Various theories suggest that successful women tend to fear losing their femininity, making this empirical investigation essential. A quantitative correlational research method with probability sampling was employed. The participants were 150 working women recruited via online questionnaires. The instruments used were the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) to measure feminine gender role and the Fear of Success Scale (FOSS) by Zuckerman and Allison to measure fear of success. Hypothesis testing revealed a correlation coefficient of -0.210 with a significance value of 0.010, leading to the rejection of the alternative hypothesis and acceptance of the null hypothesis. In conclusion, there is no significant relationship between feminine gender roles and fear of success in working women. These findings indicate that the manifestation and factors of feminine gender role can occur and be influenced by factors other than fear of success, such as educational experiences, cultural context, family support, work-family conflict management, and individual psychological resources including self-compassion and resilience.

Keywords: feminine gender role, fear of success, working women

Article info

Received December 2024, Revised March 2025, Accepted April 2026, Published May 2026

How to Cite:

Wardani, A. K., & Kusumiati, R. Y. E. (2026). The Relationship of Feminine Gender Roles to Fear of Success in Working Women. *G-Couns: Jurnal Bimbingan Dan Konseling*, 10 (03), July, 2712-2720. <https://doi.org/10.31316/g-couns.v10i03.7262>

© 2026. The author(s). G Couns: Jurnal Bimbingan dan Konseling is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

Available online at <https://journal.upy.ac.id/index.php/bk/index>



INTRODUCTION

The relationship between feminine gender roles and fear of success in working women represents a critical area of inquiry in contemporary gender psychology. Fear of success (FOS), conceptualized as the anxiety about achieving success due to anticipated negative consequences, has been extensively linked to traditional feminine role expectations. Research indicates that masculinity as a gender role orientation negatively correlates with fear of success, suggesting that women who internalize more traditionally masculine traits may experience less fear of success, whereas societal expectations tied to feminine roles may exacerbate this fear (Moulik & Ray, 2023). This finding underscores the psychological burden that traditional femininity places on working women who aspire to professional advancement.

Societal expectations and role conflict constitute primary mechanisms through which feminine gender roles influence fear of success. Women frequently face dual expectations: excelling in their careers while simultaneously fulfilling traditional domestic roles. This dual burden creates significant occupational stress and role conflict, which can directly contribute to fear of success. Empirical evidence from healthcare settings demonstrates that women employees in demanding professions report substantial psychological and emotional harm resulting from these conflicting demands (Mohapatra & Mitra, 2019). The inability to reconcile professional ambitions with domestic responsibilities generates internal tension that manifests as avoidance of success-oriented behaviors.

Fear of societal backlash and negative social judgment further reinforces the relationship between feminine gender roles and fear of success. Working mothers with higher career ambition or professional status are often judged negatively as "bad mothers," facing moral blame and societal backlash for perceived neglect of traditional maternal duties (Shao et al., 2026). This fear of negative evaluations reinforces the perceived trade-off between career success and traditional feminine roles. Women internalize the message that professional achievement comes at the cost of social acceptance, thereby fueling fear of success as a protective mechanism against anticipated social rejection.

Many women associate success with unpleasant internalized consequences, including increased social scrutiny, strained personal relationships, and loss of feminine identity. These associations stem from societal pressures to conform to feminine norms that prioritize relational harmony and modesty over individual achievement (Ruderman, 2003). The internalization of these societal expectations can deter women from pursuing or embracing success, as they anticipate that achievement will jeopardize their social standing and personal relationships. This internal conflict represents a significant psychological barrier to career advancement for women across diverse professional contexts.

The impostor phenomenon provides an additional lens for understanding how feminine gender roles relate to fear of success. Women with feminine or undifferentiated gender role orientations are more likely to experience impostor feelings, characterized by self-doubt and fear of being exposed as inadequate despite objective competence (Patzak et al., 2017). These feelings are linked to lower self-compassion and may amplify fear of success by leading women to believe their achievements are undeserved or temporary. The impostor phenomenon thus serves as a mediating mechanism through which feminine gender role socialization produces anxiety about professional success.



Understanding the relationship between feminine gender roles and fear of success carries important implications for organizational practice and psychological intervention. Addressing fear of success in working women requires challenging traditional gender norms, promoting supportive organizational policies that accommodate work-family integration, and fostering self-compassion as a buffer against impostor feelings and societal backlash. Interventions that reduce work-family conflict and mitigate fears of negative social evaluation can empower women to pursue professional success without fear of losing their feminine identity or social acceptance, ultimately contributing to greater gender equity in the workplace.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research approach with a correlational design. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), quantitative research is a positivist-based method that focuses on concrete data, where research data take the form of numerical values measured using statistical analysis to draw conclusions related to the research problem. The correlational design was selected to examine the relationship between two variables: the independent variable (feminine gender role) and the dependent variable (fear of success) among working women.

Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of working women with the following characteristics: (1) employed as employees, (2) aged 20 to 40 years, and (3) either married or unmarried. The sampling technique employed was probability sampling, which, according to Trochim and Donnelly (2008), provides every element or member of the population with an equal chance of being selected as a sample participant. A total of 150 working women participated in this study, recruited via online questionnaires distributed across various regions of Indonesia.

Research Instruments

Two instruments were utilized in this study. First, the Fear of Success Scale (FOSS) developed by Zuckerman and Allison (1976) was used to measure fear of success. This scale consists of 27 items, comprising 16 favorable and 11 unfavorable, measuring three aspects according to Shaw and Costanzo (1982): loss of femininity, loss of social self-esteem, and social rejection. Second, the feminine subscale of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) developed by Bem (1974) was used to measure feminine gender role. This subscale consists of 20 feminine characteristics, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.918, and uses a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (always).

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted from May 16, 2024, to July 5, 2024, through an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The questionnaire included informed consent, demographic information (age, marital status, employment status), and all items from both scales. Participants were recruited through social media platforms and online communities for working women. Prior to participation, all participants read and electronically signed the informed consent form. After data collection was completed, the researchers screened the data for completeness and removed any responses that did not meet the inclusion criteria.



Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Prior to hypothesis testing, assumption tests, including normality and linearity tests, were conducted. According to Field (2018), the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test is used to determine whether data are normally distributed, with data considered normally distributed if the p-value is > 0.05 . The linearity test was conducted to determine whether the relationship between variables was linear. After assumptions were met, hypothesis testing was performed using Pearson Product-Moment correlation analysis to examine the significance of the relationship between feminine gender role and fear of success among working women.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistical analysis revealed the distribution of scores for both variables among the 150 working women participants. For the feminine gender role variable, scores ranged from 29 to 78, with a mean of 66.61 and a standard deviation of 6.608. For the fear of success variable, scores ranged from 43 to 99, with a mean of 78.19 and a standard deviation of 9.142. The complete descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
 Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Feminine Gender Role	150	29	78	66.61	6.608
Fear of Success	150	43	99	78.19	9.142

Normality Test Results

A normality test was conducted using the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test to determine whether the data distribution in this study was normal. According to Field (2018), data are considered normally distributed if the significance value (p) is greater than 0.05. The results of the normality test are presented in Table 2. The analysis showed a significance value of 0.200 ($p > 0.05$), indicating that the data were normally distributed and met the assumption required for parametric correlation analysis.

Table 2.
 One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Normality Test

N	Test Statistic	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	Monte Carlo Sig. (2-tailed)	99% Confidence Interval Lower Bound	Upper Bound
150	0.053	0.200	0.381	0.368	0.393

Linearity Test Results

The linearity test was conducted to determine whether the relationship between feminine gender role and fear of success was linear. As stated by Tabachnick and Fidell (2019), linearity is an essential assumption for Pearson correlation analysis. The test results, presented in Table 3, showed an F-value for Deviation from Linearity of 1.875 and a significance value of 0.013 ($p < 0.05$). This indicates that the relationship between the two variables was linear, satisfying another key assumption for parametric correlation analysis.



Table 3.
 Linearity Test Results

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups (Combined)	3835.878	26	147.534	2.106	0.004
Linearity	551.399	1	551.399	7.871	0.006
Deviation from Linearity	3284.480	25	131.379	1.875	0.013
Within Groups	8616.895	123	70.056		
Total	12452.773	149			

Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis testing was performed using Pearson Product-Moment correlation analysis to examine the relationship between feminine gender role and fear of success among working women. According to Pallant (2020), Pearson correlation is appropriate for measuring the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two continuous variables. The results, displayed in Table 4, revealed a Pearson correlation coefficient (r) of -0.210 with a significance value (p) of 0.010. Since $p = 0.010 > 0.05$, the null hypothesis (H_0) was accepted, and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) was rejected. This indicates that there is no significant relationship between feminine gender roles and fear of success in working women.

Table 4.
 Pearson Correlation Test Results

Variable		Feminine Gender Role	Fear of Success
Feminine Gender Role	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.210
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.010
	N	150	150
Fear of Success	Pearson Correlation	-0.210	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.010	
	N	150	150

Interpretation of Findings

The negative correlation coefficient ($r = -0.210$) indicates a very weak negative relationship, higher levels of feminine gender role were associated with slightly lower levels of fear of success, although this relationship was not statistically significant at the conventional threshold ($p > 0.05$). According to Cohen (1988), correlation coefficients between 0.10 and 0.29 are considered small effect sizes. The magnitude of the correlation coefficient indicates that only approximately 4.4% of the variance in fear of success could potentially be explained by feminine gender role ($r^2 = 0.0441$), leaving more than 95% of the variance attributable to other factors not examined in this study.



Summary of Statistical Results

In summary, the statistical analyses demonstrated that all assumption tests for parametric correlation were satisfied, with the data showing normal distribution and linearity between variables. However, the hypothesis test confirmed that the feminine gender role was not significantly correlated with fear of success among the 150 working women participants aged 20 to 40 years. These findings suggest that the femininity characteristics measured by the BSRI, including being affectionate, gentle, empathetic, and nurturing, do not meaningfully predict or relate to the level of fear of success experienced by working women.

Discussion

The present study found no significant relationship between feminine gender role and fear of success among working women ($r = -0.210$, $p = 0.010 > 0.05$). This finding contradicts earlier theoretical assumptions suggesting that femininity is associated with fear of success. One possible explanation is that educational systems have begun to transform women's perceptions of their career potential. Research by Gajda and Wołowicz (2022) demonstrated that school textbooks often portray gendered stereotypes with significant disparities in the representation of male and female characters, yet contemporary educational reforms have increasingly challenged these traditional portrayals. The shift toward more balanced representations may explain why feminine gender-role characteristics did not significantly predict fear of success in this sample, as women today receive educational messages that validate diverse career aspirations regardless of their expression of feminine traits.

The absence of a significant relationship may also be attributed to changing dynamics in career guidance and vocational discussions within educational settings. Van der Vleuten et al. (2016) found that girls are more likely to internalize expectations about appropriate feminine behavior, which influences their competence beliefs and occupational values. However, more recent research by Vernon and Drane (2020) indicates that discussions with parents, teachers, and friends have evolved to become more supportive of diverse vocational pathways for women. The current study's participants, aged 20-40 years, likely benefited from these more progressive educational approaches, potentially buffering the traditional link between femininity and fear of success. Carvalho Silva et al. (2024) similarly noted that while gender stereotypes persist, there is observable change in how feminine identity is constructed in relation to professional achievement.

Another important consideration is the feminization of certain career paths and its evolving impact on women's fear of success. Cafferata-Peña et al. (2025) highlighted that the feminization of education-related careers, particularly in early childhood and primary education, reinforces the perception that these roles are more suitable for women. However, the present study's sample included working women across various industries, not limited to traditionally feminized professions. This diversity may have attenuated any potential relationship between feminine gender role and fear of success, as women in less feminized fields may have already developed psychological resources to navigate gender-based expectations. Bogatova (2013) argued that gender concepts in modern education have undergone significant transformation, supporting the notion that contemporary working women may separate their feminine self-concept from anxiety about professional achievement.



The role of educational tracking systems and institutional structures provides additional context for interpreting these null findings. Burger (2023) and Samuel et al (2014) demonstrated that educational systems with rigid tracking mechanisms often channel students into gendered career paths, limiting women's access to male-dominated professions. However, participants in the present study represented a generation that has experienced expanded educational opportunities and reduced gender-based tracking. The lack of a significant correlation between feminine gender roles and fear of success may reflect the success of policies aimed at reducing gender-based educational segregation, allowing women to pursue careers without conflating the expression of feminine traits with professional limitations.

Cultural and societal norms embedded in family and educational structures have traditionally reinforced expectations of femininity that limit women's career aspirations. Research by Ma (2025) and Basma and Rubie-Davies (2025) demonstrated that in many societies, traditional gender roles are deeply embedded within educational settings. However, Lee et al (2020) found that cultural factors facilitating or inhibiting support for traditional household gender roles vary significantly across contexts. The Indonesian context of the present study may reflect a cultural setting in which the connection between femininity and fear of success has weakened due to growing gender equality movements and emancipation efforts. This cultural shift may explain why feminine traits did not significantly predict fear of success among Indonesian working women.

Finally, the phenomenon of self-discrimination and internalized stereotypes, as noted by Carvalho Silva et al. (2024), suggests that women may unconsciously perpetuate gender norms by internalizing societal expectations. However, the present findings indicate that such internalization did not translate into a measurable relationship between feminine gender role and fear of success. One possible explanation is that self-compassion and psychological resources may mediate this relationship, as suggested by Patzak et al (2017), who found that women with feminine or undifferentiated gender role orientations are more likely to experience impostor feelings, but self-compassion serves as a buffering mechanism. Future research should examine these mediating factors to better understand the conditions under which feminine gender role orientation relates to fear of success.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the relationship between feminine gender roles and fear of success among working women aged 20 to 40 years. Based on the statistical analysis using Pearson correlation, the results revealed no significant relationship between feminine gender role and fear of success among working women. The finding indicates that feminine gender role characteristics, including being affectionate, gentle, empathetic, and nurturing, do not meaningfully predict or influence the level of fear of success experienced by working women. The manifestation and factors associated with the feminine gender role can occur and be influenced by variables other than fear of success, such as educational experiences, cultural context, family support, work-family conflict management, and individual psychological resources, including self-compassion and resilience. These findings contribute to the growing body of literature challenging traditional assumptions about femininity as a barrier to professional achievement. Future research should explore mediating and moderating variables that may clarify under what conditions feminine gender role orientation relates to fear of success, employing longitudinal designs and diverse cultural samples to enhance generalizability. Practical implications suggest that interventions aimed at reducing fear of success among working



women need not focus on modifying the expression of feminine traits, but rather on addressing systemic barriers, promoting organizational policies that support work-life integration, and fostering psychological empowerment regardless of gender role orientation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to express their deepest gratitude to all parties who contributed to the completion of this research. Special thanks are extended to the Faculty of Psychology at Satya Wacana Christian University for providing the necessary support and resources throughout the research process. The authors also sincerely appreciate all the working women who willingly participated in this study by completing the online questionnaires, without whom this research would not have been possible. Furthermore, gratitude is expressed to the families, friends, and colleagues who provided continuous encouragement, moral support, and understanding throughout this research, from data collection to manuscript preparation. Finally, the authors acknowledge the valuable contributions of all researchers whose previous work formed the foundation for this study. This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

REFERENCE

- Basma, L., & Rubie-Davies, C. M. (2025). Exploring beliefs about gender roles and gender equality in Lebanon. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 38(2), 215-232. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2024.2318295>
- Bem, S. L. (1974). The measurement of psychological androgyny. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 42 (2), 155-162. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0036215>
- Bogatova, L. M. (2013). Gender concept of modern education in Russia. 2013 International Conference on Interactive Collaborative Learning (ICL), 456-462. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ICL.2013.6644616>
- Burger, K. (2023). Revisiting the power of future expectations and educational path dependencies. *Advances in Life Course Research*, 56, 100543. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.alcr.2023.100543>
- Cafferata-Peña, V. F., Chávez-Ruiz, A. B., Ruiz-Ruiz, M. F., & Sallandt, U. (2025). Vocational motivations in male students for the teaching profession: Breaking into a traditionally female-dominated field. *Proceedings of International Conference on Research in Education and Science*, 11(1), 45-58. (No DOI available)
- Carvalho Silva, R., Vezzoli, M., Menesello, V., & Minelli, A. (2024). Everything changes but nothing changes: Gender stereotypes in the Italian population. *Archives of Women's Mental Health*, 27(1), 89-101. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00737-023-01352-1>
- Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences* (2nd ed.). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Field, A. (2018). *Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS statistics* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Gajda, A., & Wołowicz, A. (2022). If not in science, then where are the women? A content analysis of school textbooks. *Education as Change*, 26(1), 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.25159/1947-9417/10115>



- Lee, I.-C., Hu, F., & Li, W.-Q. (2020). Cultural factors facilitating or inhibiting the support for traditional household gender roles. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 51(3-4), 234-251. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022120910455>
- Ma, N. (2025). Breaking barriers: Gender equality and educational empowerment in rural China. *Asian Women*, 41(1), 25-44. <https://doi.org/10.14431/aw.2025.3.41.1.25>
- Mohapatra, J., & Mitra, A. (2019). The mechanics of occupational stress and role expectations: An empirical study of women employees in a private hospital in Bhubaneswar. *Journal of Advanced Research in Dynamical and Control Systems*, 11 (6), 1023-1035.
- Moulik, S. B., & Ray, D. (2023). An exploration of the psycho-sexual aspects of the motivation to avoid success and its association with gender roles and work-family conflict using a mixed method. *Journal of Psychosexual Health*, 5(2), 89-98. <https://doi.org/10.1177/26318318231207171>
- Pallant, J. (2020). *SPSS survival manual: A step by step guide to data analysis using IBM SPSS (7th ed.)*. McGraw-Hill Education.
- Patzak, A., Kollmayer, M., & Schober, B. (2017). Buffering impostor feelings with kindness: The mediating role of self-compassion between gender-role orientation and the impostor phenomenon. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8, 1289. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01289>
- Ruderman, E. G. (2003). Women shaping their destinies: Psychoanalytic perspectives and contemporary clinical portraits. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 31 (1), 45-58. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021467005833>
- Samuel, R., Bergman, M. M., & Hupka-Brunner, S. (2014). Longitudinal effects of social background on educational and occupational pathways within early and strong school tracking. *Longitudinal and Life Course Studies*, 5(1), 58-76. <https://doi.org/10.14301/llcs.v5i1.251>
- Shao, Y., Zhou, J., Chen, L., & Wang, F. (2026). Successful women but "bad mothers": Negative motherhood evaluations as backlash against working mothers. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 50(1), 45-58.
- Shaw, M. E., & Costanzo, P. R. (1982). *Theories of social psychology (2nd ed.)*. McGraw-Hill.
- Tabachnick, B. G., & Fidell, L. S. (2019). *Using multivariate statistics (7th ed.)*. Pearson.
- Trochim, W. M. K., & Donnelly, J. P. (2008). *Research methods knowledge base (3rd ed.)*. Atomic Dog Publishing.
- Van der Vleuten, M., Jaspers, E., Maas, I., & van der Lippe, T. (2016). Boys' and girls' educational choices in secondary education: The role of gender ideology. *Educational Studies*, 42(1), 57-75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2016.1148581>
- Vernon, L., & Drane, C. F. (2020). Influencers: The importance of discussions with parents, teachers and friends to support vocational and university pathways. *International Journal of Training Research*, 18(1), 45-62. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14480220.2020.1759023>
- Zuckerman, M., & Allison, S. N. (1976). An objective measure of fear of success: Construction and validation. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 40 (4), 422-430. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327752jpa4004_12

