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The In-Between Space: Exploration of Gender Expression in Female-Bodied Heterosexual Women

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Understanding how men express 'being a man' and their masculinity has been of considerable interest in recent years. However, female gender expressions have received less attention. Furthermore, much of the work within this field has examined the experiences of queer women leaving heterosexual gender expressions a relatively under explored area. My research investigates the different ways in which heterosexual women express their gender. Five focus groups were conducted with women from various communities of practice. This paper presents part of my findings about non-dominant gender expressions for female-bodied heterosexual women. While understandings of ideal female gender expression were found to be similar and readily articulated across all groups, non-dominant gender expressions were more varied and difficult to identify. A key argument in my paper is that the language available to describe and make sense of nondominant gender expressions was restricted by a lack of terminology outside of the binary of male and female. A surprising finding was that this inability to escape the boundaries of binary gender resulted in the women using the term 'unfeminine' to describe non-dominant gender expressions. These findings have implications for theorizing gender relations, both between genders and within them.