Exploring variables in the GSS

The best interface to use for exploring and locating variables in the GSS is the NORC GSS Data Explorer, which will allow you to search by keyword, filter by year, or browse variables by subject. If you don’t see variables relating to an area of interest when you do a keyword search, try browsing by subject, since the language used by the survey may not match the language you use to describe a topic.

For any variable of interest, you’ll be able to see which year(s) it was included in the survey, which survey question(s) it was associated with, answer codes, and a breakdown of responses for each year.

Note that select variables have been recoded over the course of the survey, for instance:

- occ: respondent's census occupation code using categories from the 1970 census (1972- 1990)
- occ80: respondent's census occupation code using categories from the 1980 census (1988- 2010)
- occ10: respondent's census occupation code using categories from the 2010 census (2012- 2014)

If you'd like to combine existing variables to create your own, you can do that by using the SDA interface and clicking on "Create variables" at the top. While the NORC GSS Data Explorer and GSS SDA interface look different and have different functionalities, they contain the same data and the same coding, so coding information you find in the NORC GSS Data Explorer can be applied when working with the GSS in the SDA interface.
A note on race and ethnicity in the GSS (from Stanford SOCI 155 GSS Data Assignment): “The GSS variable for race is RACE, this variable is available for every survey year but it only identifies 3 groups, White/ Black/ Other. If you want to identify [Latinos,] there is a separate HISPANIC variable you could use to identify Hispanics, but this variable is not available for all years, and you would have to recode the variable to combine the different Hispanic national origin groups. As for identifying Asians, the variable ETHNIC is probably your best bet, but it is available for even fewer years, and the total combined number of identifiable Asians across all GSS years is just a few hundred. You could filter for Asians with: ethnic(5,16,31,40)” (GSS data project instructions, 2013).