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Gender Display, Time Availability, and Relative Resources: Applicability to Housework Contributions of Members of Same-Sex Couples

Cover Page Footnote

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Incorporating sexual minorities into broader conversations about families is key for developing a more inclusive family theory, including a greater focus on the “similarities as well as differences in findings across couples regardless of the biological sex composition of the partners,”¹ and broader public definitions of family.² Approaching families of sexually homogamous couples as “real” families rather than as something “other” involves including them in tests of existing theories about families. To assume that differential theories are required to explain diverse families is to unnecessarily problematize these families and to prematurely categorize them as “other.” To this end, this paper endeavors to test the scope of extant theories of household labor by assessing their applicability to members of same-sex couples.

Literature Review

Exploring one day-to-day aspect of same-sex marriages, civil unions, and cohabitations – in this case the division of household labor – is an important step toward understanding the everyday impact that “couplehood” has on individuals and identifying the mechanisms by which individual- and couple-level trends become socially stratifying. Intimate relationships are not purely a panacea, and it is important to assess whether same-sex couples experience or avoid the inequalities that commonly accompany marriage, including inequalities in domestic labor. It is a consistent finding that, in heterogamous married and cohabiting couples, domestic labor is divided unevenly, with women performing the majority,³ including housework and general household management.⁴

Conceptualizations of gender are diverse, especially in the LGBTQ community, including the butch/femme delineation among lesbians,⁵ the added blurring of such distinctions (i.e., “gender blender”),⁶ “diagnosis” of gendered interests and psychological traits, and the queer rejection of gendered labels altogether,⁷ among countless others and nuances. None of these, however, defines gender in a “traditional,” heterosexual way. The possibility that stereotypical, 1950s definitions of gender characterize the behavior of present-day lesbians and gay men is precluded. The present study does not approach gender from the point of view of any particular camp. Rather, this paper asks whether out-of-date ideas about gender retain any import in predicting gay men’s and lesbians’ participation in a highly gendered activity – housework.

Of particular value is the ability to delineate gender display and role theory as unique explanations when studying members of same-sex couples. As studies of housework as gender display among different-sex couples use biological sex as a measure of gender, they may actually be testing role theory, in which people behave in ways that help confirm their roles in society, regardless of whether the roles are chosen or assigned.⁸ In role theory, gender categories exist independently of behavior, and people tailor their behavior to suit a particular category (e.g., “one does laundry because one is feminine.”) At the heart of gender display, however, is the idea that gender categories exist *because of* human behavior (e.g., “one is feminine because one does laundry.”) For members of same-sex couples, in which biological sex is held constant, the expression of variation in gender must be actively created and displayed. When an individual wishes to express a masculine or feminine identity to which society does not grant her or him an automatic claim, engaging in stereotypical behaviors and expressing stereotypical characteristics of the “opposite” sex would be the clearest way to communicate one’s identity to others. By

measuring these stereotypical characteristics, one can observe the doing of gender (gender display), rather than the enactment of gender role behavior foisted upon individuals (role theory).

Gender is one of three factors that have been linked to the division of household labor between members of romantic couples. This paper begins with a description of the three corresponding theories originally formulated for different-sex couples, and then discusses some empirical work that studies the correlates of housework in same-sex couples. From there, a discussion of the results and the fit between extant theories and empirical observations from members of same-sex couples is offered.

Original Formulations of Housework Theories

The three main explanations for the housework inequality among different-sex couples are time availability, relative resources, and gender.⁹ Before a brief summary of each explanation, this paper must first differentiate between routine housework and discretionary housework. Routine tasks include cooking, dishes, cleaning, shopping, laundry, driving, and discretionary tasks include outdoor tasks, auto maintenance. Routine chores differ from discretionary tasks in that they occur on a more regular, often daily, basis and must be completed in a timely matter when the need arises.¹⁰ These tasks are sometimes referred to as “female-typed” or “core” housework.¹¹ Discretionary tasks, sometimes referred to as “male-typed,” tend to be performed sporadically and can often be put off for days or even weeks, to be completed at one’s convenience.¹² Tests of the three explanations are often conducted on total housework, but some studies separate them or focus on routine housework, especially when studying gender in conjunction with household labor.

The gender explanation can be divided into two approaches: (1) gender roles and gender ideology, in which the more one's gender role views support a breadwinner/homemaker model, the more likely a woman is to focus on domestic labor and a man on paid labor¹³ and (2) gender display,¹⁴ the latter of which is utilized in this research. According to the gender display approach, also called "doing gender,"¹⁵ housework is a process by which husbands and wives demonstrate their gender identities to others.¹⁶ This approach looks at the way that people construct gendered identities through their self-presentation, including the use of housework.¹⁷ Despite the blurring of roles over the past forty years, findings still often reflect "traditional" definitions of gender. As a means of enacting the roles of "husband" or "wife" and creating a persona of competence as a man or woman in society, men are somewhat avoidant of housework and women put in the extra hours. This perspective is further supported by research demonstrating that men who earn as much as or less than their wives actually do less housework than other men, ostensibly in an effort to reassert their masculinity in the face of their failure as good providers.¹⁸ Women who out-earn their husbands refrain from using their economic superiority to gain power in the relationship,¹⁹ perhaps in an effort to counteract the normative masculinity of breadwinning.²⁰

The time-availability explanation describes the division of household labor as a function of the amount of time each member of the couple has available to spend in unpaid labor after paid labor is completed.²¹ Thus, women do more housework because they spend fewer hours in the workplace; women who work more paid hours do a smaller share of the housework.²² Men who stay at home have been found to do more housework than men who work the same hours as their wives.²³ Criticisms of this perspective include questionable causation; that is, perhaps the greater housework responsibility foisted upon women results in cutbacks in work hours. Work

hours are conceivably the most “logical,” factor a couple might use in determining housework shares, assuming that equity is the goal. Yet, work hours do not explain a large piece of the gender gap in housework; one must look to other aspects of gendered roles to account for (at least part of) the difference.

The relative resources explanation posits that the person with greater resources will spend his or her energy in paid work, and the person with fewer resources will focus on unpaid labor.²⁴ The negative correlation between resources and housework is not an artifact of the couple’s efforts to increase their efficiency as a productive unit,²⁵ but rather is a matter of the relative power conferred upon the individual by his or her resources and his or her ability to use that power to avoid housework.²⁶ Supporting studies show that the smaller the earnings gap between husband and wife, the more equal the division of housework,²⁷ that women’s income is related to the division of housework, net of the effect of work hours,²⁸ and that women’s share of the housework decreases along with their economic dependence on their husbands/partners.²⁹ Contradictory findings, however, support the claim that men who make less than their wives do the same amount of housework³⁰ or less housework³¹ than other men.

In a series of articles, Gupta argued that women’s absolute earnings and housework hours are superior to proportional or relative measures of earnings and *shares* of housework.³² Using these absolute measures and, in one case, nonparametric modeling, Gupta found that women’s income was negatively associated with their housework, and that this effect was larger than the effect of husband’s income. He argued that effects often attributed to gender display disappear when using absolute earnings. However, Gupta acknowledges that his methodological approach cannot account for the housework that is outsourced or falls to children when women’s pay increases, a phenomenon that is increasingly common among dual-earner couples.³³ It does not

capture the possibility that there is less overall housework to be shared by the couple, and that her *share* may increase, even in cases in which her total housework hours decrease.

Demonstrating that women use their earnings to buy their way out of housework does not support a relative resources explanation in the sense it does not necessarily imply that women are empowered by their own breadwinning. It may in fact imply the opposite - that the main responsibility for household labor still lies with the wife.

Elaborations on and “Particularizations” of Housework Theories

Several studies address the division of household labor in gay and lesbian households, but there is not a vast reservoir of information about how same-sex couples divide housework. At a glance, just two of the three main theories appear to apply. Studies of gender and housework have typically compared men to women, using sex as a proxy for gender; in same-sex couples, this is not possible. By typical measurement standards, then, gender explanations would not apply. Stated this way, the error in logic behind traditional measures becomes obvious; sex is not an appropriate way to measure gender, regardless of sexual orientation. In their decade review Timothy J. Biblarz and Evren Savci summarize the literature by noting that same-sex couples “may not be as ‘genderless’ as previously depicted.”³⁴ Gender is an important factor, regardless of the fact that biological sex is held constant.³⁵

Christopher Carrington’s qualitative research on cohabiting lesbian and gay couples in the San Francisco Bay area examines the nuanced role of gender in the division of domestic labor.³⁶ That one or both partners had to perform housework typically delegated to members of the opposite sex gave rise to the need to manage gender identity and the need for creative solutions to gender identity inconsonance. Despite the couples’ identical biological sex, the

relationships were not gender-neutral. Mirroring findings among different-sex couples, Carrington finds that gay and lesbian couples found ways to construe their housework division as fair despite glaring inequities and, in some cases, used outsourcing as a means by which to even out the division of housework. In other studies, household chores were among the top sources of conflict for same-sex intimate partners, indicating that the division of housework is not unproblematic for these couples.³⁷ Recognizing that inequities in housework certainly exist and may be pervasive among same-sex couples, the question becomes, can housework inequalities be traced to some dimension of time availability, income, or gender?

Same-sex relationships are ideal cases for testing the relative resources and time-availability explanations, which, in and of themselves, are gender-neutral formulations. Past research by Carrington discusses the applicability of these explanations to the division of household labor among same-sex cohabitators.³⁸ If either or both of the relative resources and time-availability explanations holds among same-sex couples, whereby the person with the most money performs the least housework, or the person who works the fewest hours performs the most housework, it would be strong evidence that the effects are not tied up in gender per se, but in structural locations within family and workplace.

A recent qualitative study by Saori Kamano discusses findings of in-depth interviews with twelve lesbian couples in Japan.³⁹ Responses from couples in this study mainly point to time availability as a consistent factor in determining who does what household tasks and how often. There were no direct references among the couples' responses indicating that income was a factor, though a comment from one woman indicated that she felt her partner spoke down to her about her status as a *shufu* (housewife) "just because she makes money." Responses

pertaining to gender roles or issues of gender were not direct, sometimes referring to views on housewifery.

In her pilot studies of lesbian couples, Lisa Giddings finds that couples had a wide range of household labor divisions, which, like those of different-sex couples, were tied to income, but also to gender-role ideology.⁴⁰ This provides some preliminary support for the relative resources explanation, but also for gender. Renate Reimann's study of lesbian couples making the transition to parenthood indicates that time availability was the best predictor of family labor contributions, though family labor was undoubtedly skewed by infant care, relative to studies focusing on housework alone.⁴¹

As previously mentioned, a study of members of same-sex couples is an interesting venue to explore the way that gender operates in same-sex relationships by isolating the gender display explanation from role theory. Few studies differentiate the two or frame their results in a way that allows for the distinction. Among Carrington's conclusions are that some patterns of housework sharing could be explained by gender identity management – sometimes in an effort to play a supporting role to a partner's gender presentation, providing support for a gender display process.⁴² Further support can be gleaned from studies of mothering and childcare. Although childcare is a different facet of household labor than analyzed in the current study, childcare and housework are arguably two sides of the same coin, and these studies are useful for identifying gender display processes among members of same-sex couples. Findings regarding parenthood are consistent with a gender construction approach, as engaging in more parenting helped to define one person as the “primary” mother.⁴³ That gender display was a factor at the onset of parenthood suggests that gender display may have a hand in determining a couple's housework routine when they begin to cohabit. The biological mothers shouldered the bulk of

the household chores among the four black, lesbian stepfamilies in Moore's qualitative and survey studies.⁴⁴ Moore notes the association between participation in household labor and the extent to which her participants identify with stereotypically feminine characteristics and stereotypically masculine characteristics, also indicating gender display processes.⁴⁵

Since sex and gender are, by assumption, conflated in studies of different-sex couples, measuring the gender-normative traits of members of same-sex couples will help isolate the effect of gender expression, rather than sex, on household labor.⁴⁶ In this study, rather than testing whether men or women did more housework, the effect of two independent aspects of normative gender – femininity and masculinity – on housework contributions are studied. This allowed for the possibility that an individual could express high (or low) levels of both normative femininity and masculinity, rather than treating the two as polar opposites on a single continuum.

Numerous studies of gender expression among gay men and lesbians support the idea that, in the context of the gay community, in which gender is viewed as fluid and individually defined, stereotypical gender display is a common vehicle for indicating a non-normative gender, or to reinforce that one's gender is in fact normative, regardless of sexual identity. Richard Lippa's research on gender-related traits among gay men and lesbians shows that the interests of lesbians were similar (but not equivalent to) to those of men in general, and the reverse was true for gay men.⁴⁷ That gay men's and lesbians' interests, on average, fall between the typical interests of men and women in general indicates that gender is less defined amongst them, leaving gender expression more open to variation. Moore's qualitative study of black lesbians in New York City focuses upon gender presentation, noting a resurgence of 1950s "butch/femme" presentations in the 1990s, following a rejection of gendered expression in the 1970s.⁴⁸ She finds that about half of her sample fell into the category "femme," exhibiting a feminine display,

about a third were considered “gender blenders,” combining aspects of femininity and masculinity, and 18 percent were “transgressives,” indicating an aggressive, masculine gender display. Moore makes reference to repeated assertions by participants that gender expression was an important factor in romantic pairing, such that femmes were attracted to a woman with aggressive or masculine characteristics, and that transgressives rarely pair with each other. Moore does not encounter an instance in which two transgressives were romantically involved. Gender expression was at least in part achieved through physical appearance, including clothing and the use or absence of accessories, hair, make-up, and earrings.⁴⁹

Additional information is revealed about lesbian gender identities from studies of women who self-identified as “femme” or “butch.”⁵⁰ Whereas femme respondents were split on whether they felt their femme identity was essential or non-prescriptive, nearly all butch respondents reported a core or essential aspect to their identities. Many participants in the latter study did not refer to themselves as masculine; some indicated distaste for the term, pointing out that they are not men and identify securely as women. Some identified as masculine, transgendered, or as “third sex,” indicating that they have (stereotypically) masculine traits, hobbies, and roles. All, however, were similar in their discomfort with (stereotypically) feminine things – clothes, behaviors, or traits. Conversely, the femme respondents from the 2003 study identified with feminine appearances – make up, clothes, and provocative dress. Femme participants also, however, indicated an association with strength, which is stereotypically masculine, and honesty, which is arguably neutral. Taken together, work by Moore, Levitt, and colleagues find a great deal of variation in gender expression, but there tends to be a degree of alignment along characteristics that are associated with stereotypical masculinity and/or femininity.

It is possible, of course, that members of same-sex couples will report fairly balanced divisions of household labor, as some others have found.⁵¹ Specifically, Balsam and his co-authors find that both people did approximately six to ten hours of housework per week.⁵² Their reported hours align with those of heterosexually married fathers; it was only heterosexually married mothers who deviated, reporting eleven to twenty hours of housework per week. Similarly, Solomon, Rothblum, and Balsam conclude that same-sex couples were more egalitarian in their division of household labor than different-sex couples, because sexual orientation was a better predictor of the division of labor than income.⁵³

As gay men and lesbians are more liberal on social issues than the U.S. population on average,⁵⁴ they may be more conscious of the way that unpaid labor is often burdensome and disadvantageous to the unpaid laborers. One may therefore expect that both men and women in same-sex couples will determine their division of household labor on the most rational factor – time availability. An increased awareness of equity in the home may prompt a person who spends less time in paid labor relative to her/his spouse or partner to do a greater share of the unpaid labor. It is also possible that gender will operate in a matter completely opposite to findings for different-sex couples. Those who identify more with stereotypically feminine traits may do less housework in order to eschew normative gender roles, and those who identify more strongly with stereotypically masculine traits may make a conscious effort to pitch in for the same reason.

Hypotheses

Since routine housework is different in nature from discretionary household tasks and composes the vast majority of total housework, this paper presents one set of claims about the display of total and routine housework and one set of claims about discretionary housework. The

display of discretionary housework can serve as a perceptual equalizer, a token responsibility, utilized by the lesser-contributing party to tally a disproportionately large number of points in one's favor. A partner who works more hours or provides more income to the household may be assigned responsibility for auto maintenance, for example, and the couple may perceive this as *quid pro quo* for the other partner's daily cleaning responsibilities. Due to the differences between routine and discretionary housework, this paper derives hypotheses testing for effects on total housework and on each type. The first four hypotheses address possible effects of femininity and masculinity:

Hypothesis 1: People who express greater femininity will perform greater proportions of total and routine housework than people who express less femininity.

Hypothesis 2: People who express greater femininity will perform a smaller proportion of discretionary housework than people who express less femininity.

Hypothesis 3: People who express greater masculinity will perform smaller proportions of total and routine housework than people who express less masculinity.

Hypothesis 4: People who express greater masculinity will perform a greater proportion of discretionary housework than people who express less masculinity.

The remaining hypotheses address time availability and relative resources:

Hypothesis 5: People who work more hours, relative to their spouse/partner, will perform a smaller proportion of total and routine housework than people who work fewer hours.

Hypothesis 6: People who work more hours, relative to their spouse/partner, will perform a greater proportion of discretionary housework than people who work fewer hours.

Hypothesis 7: People who make a greater proportion of the household income will perform a smaller proportion of total and routine housework than people who make a smaller proportion of the household income.

Hypothesis 8: People who make a greater proportion of the household income will perform a greater proportion of discretionary housework than people who make a smaller proportion of the household income.

It is important to note that the hypotheses are designed to be tested simultaneously. That is, the effect of each is predicted net of the effects of the others. Primarily in the instance of income and work hours, there is likely a great deal of overlap. Although a successful argument can be made that the effect of work hours is meaningful regardless of income, it is especially important to consider the effect of income net of work hours, as the root of the relative resources theory is the idea that an individual can “buy” her/his way out of performing housework in an exercise of power. However, this idea implies that, even when one member of the couple is working full time and the other is non-employed (and therefore one person makes 100 percent of the household income), it is in some way inequitable if they do not share the housework equally. Thus, this study controls for work hours, accounting for the mere practicality that people who spend less time at work will have more time available to spend in household labor. It then becomes a test of whether people who made more than their spouse/partner parlayed that income differential into a show of power. Higher earners may then perform a greater proportion of the discretionary housework, perhaps in an effort to maintain an illusion of equity.

Methods

Survey Overview

This study utilizes a web-based survey that consisted of seven question sets. The set “Background” includes basic demographic questions and questions about the respondent’s children and employment. The set “Relationships” covers relationship status, sex of partner, relationship duration, commitment, general and sexual satisfaction, past marriages, and sexual attraction. The set “Household Labor,” was only asked of respondents currently living with a romantic partner (cohabiting, civil unions, and marriages), and those with co-residential children received questions about the division of childcare between the respondent and the partner. The set “Family” obtains background information on the respondent’s family of origin, the composition of the household during the respondent’s childhood, and the current partner’s employment. The set “Attitudes” includes gender ideology and gender identity scales. The two remaining sets (“Feelings” and “Health”) were not utilized in the current analyses.

Sampling Procedures

Participants were recruited participants between 2007 and 2009 through a variety of methods, including mailings to a random sample of residents in four Boston-area communities, announcements on public posting boards in those communities, email newsletter announcements to Massachusetts LGB e-news subscribers (*Edge Publications Boston* and *Edge Publications Provincetown*),⁵⁵ and snowball samples both through academic contacts across the United States and through Boston LGB organizations. The first two strategies provided a small proportion of the final sample. The e-newsletter yielded 258 respondents, 217 of whom were same-sex attracted. The final sampling strategy utilized snowball sampling through academic contacts and Boston organizations. Snowball sampling points included 78 researchers who had recently

published studies related to same-sex couples, the listserv of the Sociologists for Women in Society, which reaches thousands of faculty members and students, and six Boston-based LGBT groups. I asked the recipients to pass on the study announcement to any organizations, colleagues, or individuals who might be willing to respond. An additional 298 respondents came in through these channels, 161 of whom were same-sex attracted.

The resulting sample consisted of 51 percent recruited through the LGBT e-newsletter, 38 percent through snowball sampling, and 11 percent through direct mailings and local postings. The number of respondents totaled 761 people from the across the United States, with an intentional oversampling of Massachusetts residents to capture a greater number of legally married same-sex couples. Individuals, not couples, were recruited, though it is possible that two members of the sample couple could have participated by snowball recruitment of a spouse. Of these 244 were in a same-sex, co-residential relationship; these individuals compose the sample for the current analyses.

Dependent Measures

The division of housework was measured by asking respondents to indicate how they divide the work associated with each of nine tasks involved in maintaining a household, using the response set: 1 = *I do all the work*, 2 = *I do most of the work*, 3 = *We divide the work equally*, 4 = *My spouse/partner does most of the work*, and 5 = *My spouse/partner does all of the work*. Numerical values were reversed, so that a higher score indicated a greater proportion of the housework. The respondent's scores were averaged on the nine items. The Cronbach's alpha for the total housework scale was 0.40, indicating high levels of diversity within subjects in the proportion of each task they performed. Household tasks were divided into routine tasks

(*cooking, dishes, cleaning, shopping, laundry, driving*) and discretionary tasks (*outdoor tasks, auto maintenance*). Research suggests that bill paying is gender-neutral,⁵⁶ so while it is included in the total housework measure, it was excluded from both subsets. Routine and discretionary housework scores were calculated in the same way as total housework. Cronbach's alphas for these subscales were 0.60 for routine tasks and 0.55 for discretionary tasks, which could be reflective of a higher level of outsourcing for discretionary tasks.

Independent and Control Variables

To test the three competing explanations of the division of household labor the study included measures of femininity and masculinity (gender), proportional work hours (time availability), and proportional income (relative resources). A major shortcoming of research on different-sex couples has been the reliance on biological sex as an indicator of gender. To avoid confounding the two, I used a short form of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI)⁵⁷ derived by Zhang, Norvilitis, and Jin⁵⁸ to measure the respondents' feminine-typed and masculine-typed characteristics. The short form lists sixteen items, eight of which indicate stereotypical masculinity (*independent, assertive, strong personality, forceful, has leader abilities, willing to take risks, willing to take a stand, aggressive*) and eight of which indicate stereotypical femininity (*affectionate, sympathetic, sensitive to other's needs, understanding, compassionate, warm, tender, gentle*). Respondents used a seven-point Likert-type scale to indicate how much they felt each item applied to them in general. The respondents' scores were averaged on the eight items in each subscale to capture normative, stereotypical femininity and masculinity as independent characteristics. The Cronbach's alphas were .92 for the femininity scale and .84 for the masculinity scale. The short form has been found to be more reliable than the long form,⁵⁹

and it also has the benefit of greater validity among more recent samples compared to the long form, which contains more outdated items. The eight-item subscales in the short form used here are valid and reliable.⁶⁰ The multi-dimensional measures of normative gender align in some ways with Carothers & Reis' conception of gender as dimensional, rather than taxonic (i.e., categorical).⁶¹

Some may take issue with the use of gender-stereotypical traits – a valid concern, given that even the gendered traits in the short form are arguably more common in our memories than in reality. However, using stereotypical conceptualizations of masculinity and femininity, especially among a sample likely to be gender-progressive, makes for a conservative test of the impact of gender display on housework. On measures of stereotypical gendered traits, a gender progressive sample would tend to cluster near the middle; thus, finding even a modest difference would indicate that these stereotypes are still an organizing factor when it comes to housework.

Proportional work hours and income were appropriate given the proportional measure of housework. They were computed by dividing the respondent's average weekly work hours by the sum of respondent's and the spouse/partner's weekly work hours. Similarly, proportional income was the respondent's income divided by the total household income. Proportional measures are useful for interpretation because they control for the level of cleanliness in a household, the amount of work the children create, and the outsourcing of household labor.

Control variables included ethnicity (*Black, Hispanic, and Other; White* as the excluded category), education (in number of years completed), age, whether the respondent's mother worked at least part time when the respondent was a child,⁶² household size (number of people including respondent and co-residents), and the presence of a child under age six in the household. Preliminary analyses including a dummy variable for “academic recruitment”

demonstrated that having been recruited via the academic snowball sampling was not significant. This control was not included in the final models; its removal did not affect the significance of any independent variable.

Including a control for the biological sex of the respondent would change the meaning of the results for gender display. With the addition of a biological sex measure, the measures of femininity and masculinity would become measures of the difference between one's biological sex and one's femininity and/or masculinity. That is, in cases where one's biological sex and gender-stereotypical traits align, that effect would no longer be captured in femininity and masculinity measures. As the theory being tested is "sex-blind," it is not useful to remove the effect of biological sex from the analysis when it overlaps with the measures of gender display.

Results

Sample Characteristics

The number of respondents totaled 244 people in same-sex, co-residential relationships from across the United States, with an oversampling of Massachusetts residents. Descriptive statistics appear in Table 1. Co-residential relationships included cohabitations ($n = 175$), civil unions and registered domestic partnerships ($n = 29$), and marriages ($n = 40$). Respondents scored higher on femininity (scale of 1-7; $M = 5.39$) than on masculinity (scale of 1-7, $M = 4.68$) and reported contributing a smaller share of household income relative to spouse/partner ($M = 42.47\%$) but a greater share of paid work hours ($M = 52.10\%$). Respondents claimed a greater share of housework relative to spouse/partner (scale of 1-5; $M = 3.18$), with routine housework (scale of 1-5; $M = 3.20$) distributed more unevenly than discretionary housework (scale of 1-5; $M = 3.14$).

Table 1: *Descriptive Statistics for Co-Residential Lesbians and Gay Men (n = 244)*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Relative Housework (1-5)	3.18	0.46	Black	0.01	0.11
Relative Routine Housework (1-5)	3.20	0.61	Hispanic	0.05	0.22
Relative Discretionary Housework (1-5)	3.14	0.74	Other ethnicity	0.04	0.19
Femininity (1-7)	5.39	0.89	Age	42.76	12.14
Masculinity (1-7)	4.68	0.88	Over age 60	0.09	0.29
Weekly Work Hours	35.38	18.37	Under age 25	0.03	0.18
Work Hours Proportion (%)	52.10	25.64	Education (years)	16.94	2.48
Annual Income	58660.00	62784.74	Mother Worked When R Was Child	0.68	0.47
Income Proportion (%)	42.47	30.22	Household Size	2.18	0.56
Female	0.48	0.50	Presence of Children Age 1-5	0.05	0.23
White	0.90	0.30			

The majority (90 percent) was Non-Hispanic Whites; Hispanics were the second largest ethnic group (5 percent). The sample was fairly evenly split by sex (48 percent female), and sex did not correlate with femininity (*Pearson's r* = 0.05) or masculinity (*Pearson's r* = -0.01). The mean age was about 43 years, with respondents ranging from 18 to 77 years of age. People in the sample had higher annual incomes than the nation at large (*M* = \$58,660). This is partially explained by the greater-than-average educational level of the sample. On average, respondents

had almost 17 years of education, or, about one year of schooling past college graduation. In part, the higher income can also be attributed to the fact that over two thirds of the sample resided in urban areas with populations greater than 300,000. The higher costs of living in urban areas translate into higher salaries, relative to people performing the same job in suburban and rural areas.

Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression results appear in Table 2. The analyses yielded mixed support for the gender explanation. The validity of gender as predictive of housework was found solely in the effects of femininity. Femininity was associated with greater proportions of total and routine housework, supporting Hypothesis 1; however, femininity was not related to discretionary housework, lending no support to Hypothesis 2. The effect of femininity on housework was small. For example, if we were to double the femininity score of a person with a femininity score of 3 (on a seven-point scale), routine housework would increase by only 0.27 (on a five-point scale), or, say, from 4 (*I do most*) to 4.27 (still closer to *I do most* than to *I do all*). Masculinity was not related to any of the housework measures; Hypotheses 3 and 4 were not supported.

Table 2: *OLS Regression of Gender, Time Availability, and Relative Resources on Housework (HW) Measures (n = 244)*

Variable	Total HW		Routine HW		Discretionary HW	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Femininity	0.06 [†]	0.03	0.08*	0.05	0.007	0.06
Masculinity	-0.02	0.04	-0.02	0.04	-0.03	0.06
Work hour proportion	-0.003*	0.001	-0.006**	0.002	0.002	0.002
Income proportion	0.00	0.001	-0.001	0.002	0.002	0.002
Black	0.20	0.27	0.33	0.35	0.02	0.44
Hispanic	0.16	0.14	0.03	0.18	0.36 [†]	0.22
Other ethnicity	-0.09	0.16	0.12	0.21	-0.49*	0.26
Age	-0.005*	0.003	-0.007*	0.003	0.00	0.004
Education	-0.006	0.01	0.005	0.02	-0.02	0.02
R's mother worked	0.07	0.07	0.02	0.09	0.17 [†]	0.11
Household size	0.03	0.07	-0.003	0.09	0.07	0.11
Preschool child in household	-0.19	0.17	-0.15	0.23	-0.25	0.28
<i>R</i> ²	0.07 [†]		0.11**		0.05	

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

The strongest support was for the time availability explanation. Proportional work hours had a significant effect on both total housework and routine housework, supporting Hypothesis 5. However, the effect on total housework was small. For each percent increase in the

respondent's proportion of the couples' work hours, that respondent's relative housework contribution decreased by 0.003 points on a five-point scale. For example, consider a hypothetical respondent who reported performing 30 percent of couple's work hours and a score of 3.5 points on the five-point total housework scale (between *I do most* and *We share equally*). If that respondent increased the work hour proportion to 70 percent total housework contribution would be expected to drop to 3.38 points (closer to *Spouse/partner does most* than to *We share equally*). The effect on routine housework was twice as large. Consider a similar example. For a respondent who contributed 30 percent of the couple's work hours and had a routine housework score of 3.5 points, a 40 percent increase in work hour proportion would result in a predicted routine housework score of 3.16 (nearly equal sharing). Time availability did not affect discretionary housework; Hypothesis 6 was not supported. Hypotheses 7 and 8, testing relative resources, were also not supported, as one's proportion of the household income was not a predictor of one's relative contributions on any housework measure.

Discussion

Gender Display

Although proportional work hours were the strongest predictor of housework, it was not the only explanation to which the data lent support. Femininity, net of the effect of proportional work hours, had a marginally significant, positive effect on total housework, an effect driven mainly by a significant impact on routine housework. Again, the effects were small, although one would expect to find larger effects with a more precise measure of housework. This finding suggests that gender has some role in the way couples divvy up household tasks, with more feminine individuals taking on a greater share of routine tasks. However, when looking at the

size of the effect of femininity on routine housework, it becomes apparent that a large change in femininity is associated with a small change in routine housework.

On the contrary, masculinity did not explain the division of household labor by any of the three measures. This finding begs a comparison of the relative significance of femininity and masculinity in determining gendered behaviors. Although women have successfully moved into the labor force in greater and greater proportions, especially since the 1970s,⁶³ the converse has not happened to same extent.⁶⁴ Men participate in domestic labor to a lesser extent than women participate in paid labor. Perhaps this unilateral shift has impacted the relative degree to which masculinity and femininity are useful concepts for discerning “who does what.” Women’s representation in the “masculine domain” of the paid labor force may have blurred the prescriptive nature of masculinity in determining what a masculine person does. However, because men as yet have not moved into the domestic sphere to such a substantial degree, femininity is still a good indicator of who does how much in the home. Both in the past and today, femininity meant household labor, and today it also means paid labor; the prescriptive nature of femininity has increased. From the male perspective however, the formerly prescribed pinnacle of masculinity (career success) is now also prescribed by femininity. Thus, masculinity may have become less meaningful and may therefore be less real in its consequences.

Time Availability

That time availability proved to be the strongest predictor indicates that same-sex couples approach household labor in a pragmatic manner. For both total and routine household labor, people who had more time to do housework, relative to their spouse/partner, did a greater share, though effect sizes were small. The small effects were likely due at least in part to the coarse

nature of the housework measures. The 5-point Likert-type scale was likely not suited to detecting nuances in the division of household labor. For example, respondents who are responsible for 65 percent of the laundry may have responded *We divide the work equally*, because they did not feel that they do “most” of the laundry, which was the next available response. Because of these characteristics of the housework measures, one could expect these effects to be amplified in future studies utilizing more precise measures.

Although a person overburdened with housework may get some relief when his spouse/partner makes a token contribution, housework is often thankless, with few rewards⁶⁵ other than a sense of accomplishment; there is no pay, no “employee of the month” award, no performance-based bonuses, and no coworkers offering thanks or congratulations on a job well done. Members of same-sex couples, being more egalitarian on average than others, may be more aware of this than most couples. Perhaps the person who contributes more paid labor is not buying his way out of unpaid labor, as the theory of relative resources would suggest, but rather contributes enough housework tasks to provide some reprieve to his partner. By reducing the number of domestic tasks that his spouse/partner is responsible for, the partner receives more than just the intrinsic reward of a clean and organized living space. The partner can cross a few tasks off his to-do list each week; even if they are quick tasks, the positive impact may be disproportionately larger.

Relative Resources

Relative resources, net of work hour proportion, had no effect on total housework contributions, routine housework, or discretionary housework. These findings suggest that same-sex couples do not use their control of financial resources to buy their way out of performing

housework. Whereas the relative resources theory portrays high-earning spouses as translating their income into power and wielding the power to push a larger share of household labor onto their spouse/partner, there was no evidence of this among the same-sex couples in the current sample.

Conclusion

This report constitutes the first full test of three competing theories for the division of household labor among same-sex couples: gender display, time availability, and relative resources. This paper explores interactions between femininity and relationship characteristics and between proportional work hours and relationship characteristics. Findings revealed that, in fact, inequities existed in the division of housework in same-sex couples. Greater femininity was associated with performing a greater share of total housework and routine housework, demonstrating an inequity, supporting a gender display explanation, in which people perform more housework to enact a feminine identity. Effect sizes were small, but one must remember that this was a quite conservative test of gender construction. Masculinity and femininity were measured as stereotypical concepts, which many would consider inaccurate in today's society. That such outdated notions of gender were still somewhat predictive of housework is quite telling. The importance of "traditional" gendered behaviors in structuring the relationship between same-sex partners should be a priority for future studies on housework and other family-related topics.

Working more hours at a paid job, relative to one's partner, was associated with performing a smaller share of total housework and routine housework, supporting a time availability explanation. It seems that although the more practical, logical division of time availability has a role in the distribution of housework, gender is still an important factor.

This study did not hypothesize an effect of age, but, age was a significant predictor of proportional housework contribution,⁶⁶ with older respondents doing a smaller share of the total housework and routine housework in their relationships compared to younger respondents' shares in their own relationships. This could be explained by the increased likelihood of older respondents to outsource tasks, such as cleaning and meal preparation.

One must emphasize that the survey respondents are a non-representative sample. The sample is not representative of same-sex attracted individuals on a larger geographic or demographic level, and one cannot say whether the sample is representative of same-sex-attracted internet users, urban residents, or the well-educated middle class. Although this study controlled for education and income, it is possible that these processes operate differently for those at the lower ends of these variables, and this variation was not captured. The sample is likely more representative than the criticized samples in past research using magazine ad solicitations or a single-point snowball sampling approach. I addressed critiques of past studies⁶⁷ by combining multiple sampling strategies and snowball sampling from more than a dozen contacts nationwide. Still, the exploratory nature of the project is important to bear in mind, as is utility of accumulating research with nonprobability samples in the absence of more practicable strategies.⁶⁸

Two measures that are lacking from the dataset are a measure of "outness," the degree to which others are aware of the respondent's same-sex sexual interest and an indication of whether the respondent was transgendered. Measures of these characteristics would have allowed a better assessment the context within which the respondents experience their relationship and to capture greater nuances in the operation of gender in their relationships. The dataset did include information about children and the labor of child care, but there were too few members of co-

residential couples with children to conduct meaningful quantitative analyses on the distribution of childcare-related labor. Analyses of childcare are another important component of understanding the role of gender in the distribution household labor of same-sex couples and should be pursued in future studies.

Despite imperfections, criticisms of past research outlined by Christopher and Sprecher and Andersson and his co-authors⁶⁹ were mitigated in the current analysis by the use of sampling strategies that improved upon past work, which has main been based on convenience samples or snowball samples that began with a single point of contact. This study took into consideration the intricacies and likely pitfalls of crafting survey questions on sex, normative gender, relationship status, and sexual attraction. The design of this study heeds Davis' call to conduct sex-blind research,⁷⁰ focusing on the characteristics of *people*, rather than using sex as a proxy for gender and thereby assuming characteristics of men and characteristics of women to be necessarily dissimilar and individually homogeneous. Although a sex-blind test of the effects of gender is a good place to start, future analyses should go on to test whether there is an interaction between biological sex and gender display. These interactions were outside the scope of the current report, but will be an important topic for follow-up research.

Although queer studies and LGBT family studies are important areas within the discipline and bridging disciplines, it is also important to test the robustness of extant family theories by checking their applicability to sexually diverse families and integrating these families into these theories when applicable. The starting point of the research was to test the applicability of extant theories to same-sex couples. The results herein demonstrate that, much as in early tests of the theories among different-sex couples, the division of housework in members of same-sex couples is linked to gender display and the relative available time of each

partner. Greater femininity was associated with performing a greater share of total housework and routine housework, supporting a gender display explanation in which individuals perform more housework to enact a feminine identity, and time availability was also significantly, inversely related to relative housework contributions. Unlike studies that have found income to be inversely related to housework in different-sex couples, relative resources were not significantly related to the breakdown of household labor among this sample of members of same-sex couples, failing to support the applicability of the relative resources theory among this subsample of the population.

This study represents a step toward more inclusive family theories. Inclusiveness is a difficult task in quantitative research, as same-sex couples are “invisible” in many national samples, especially those that include information on day-to-day life, such as housework and income. It is important that family researchers include sexually diverse populations whenever possible in research within general family sociology, rather than considering sexual minorities to be solely within the purview of gay and lesbian studies. Inclusive survey studies are an important catalyst for bringing research on sexual minorities into mutually beneficial, broader discussions on nearly universal issues permeating family life.

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see Charlotte J. Patterson, “Family Relationships of Lesbians and Gay Men” *Journal of
Marriage and the Family* 62 (2000): 1052-69.

⁶⁸ See Christopher and Sprecher.

⁶⁹ Christopher and Sprecher; Andersson et al.

⁷⁰ Davis.