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“Doing” and “Undoing” Gender: The Meaning and Division of Housework in Same-Sex Couples

Research on same-sex couples and housework can add nuance to our understanding of gender and housework. This analytic review highlights what can be gained from research on same-sex couples and housework. Specifically, this review reveals how same-sex couples both “do” and “undo” gender through housework. It illustrates how partners in same-sex couples are influenced by heteronormative meaning systems surrounding housework, yet it also points to ways housework can be redefined in the context of same-sex couples. For example, same-sex couples who enact arrangements with more specialized divisions of labor tend to reject the notion that their labor arrangements are imitative or derivative of those of heterosexual couples. Instead, they interpret their arrangements as pragmatic and chosen, as well as uniquely defined by the fact that they are enacted in a same-sex relational context. This review also underscores the need to attend to the social and temporal contexts that shape how same-sex couples give meaning to and enact housework. Finally, this review challenges us to think beyond simplistic classification systems of housework as feminine or masculine, or as gendered or nongendered, and, likewise, to move beyond characterizations of same-sex couples as either “doing” or “undoing” gender.

In this article, I draw from the empirical research on housework in same-sex couples to show how the gendered nature of housework is both illuminated and eclipsed in the context of same-sex couples. Studying housework in same-sex couples illuminates the deeply institutionalized nature of gender as it is reflected and maintained through housework (i.e., how couples “do gender” through housework). At the same time, studying housework in the context of same-sex couples points to possibilities for (re)imagining and (re)visioning the meaning of housework (i.e., it points to ways in which couples may “undo” gender through their interpretations and enactment of housework; Goldberg, 2009). Thus, a primary goal of this review is to illustrate how such research provides insights into both the “doing” and the “undoing” of gender through housework (Risman, 2004; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Studying housework in same-sex couples also adds nuance to our understanding of how relational, social, and temporal contexts shape the enactment and meaning of housework. Thus, a secondary goal of this review is to illustrate how both the division of housework and gendered meanings associated with housework are influenced by couples’ relational context (same-sex, opposite-sex), in combination with education, income, culture, and developmental stage. Another goal is to underscore the need for future research on both same- and different-sex couples to attend more carefully to the contexts in which housework is perceived and enacted.

Finally, studying housework in same-sex couples challenges dichotomizations of housework

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as gendered or nongendered, equal or unequal, feminine or masculine; in the same-sex couple context, the meaning and relevance of such dichotomies are upended. Thus, a third purpose of this review is to shed light on the challenges associated with (and thus the need to move beyond) binary conceptualizations of the division of housework.

Before examining the research on housework among same-sex couples, I briefly review the empirical research on the division of housework in heterosexual couples and the theories that have been used to explain the division, as this work highlights the potential utility of examining housework in same-sex couples.

THE UNEQUAL AND GENDERED DIVISION OF HOUSEWORK IN HETEROSEXUAL COUPLES

Despite the continued rise in women's employment, men's contributions to housework have stalled (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010), and the division of housework remains highly gendered (Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010). Unequal divisions of housework have consequences for family functioning; for example, performing a disproportionate share of the housework (Glass & Fujimoto, 1994; Goldberg & Perry-Jenkins, 2004) and perceiving inequity in the division (Glass & Fujimoto, 1994; Lennon & Rosenfield, 1994) have been linked to lower well-being among women in particular. A variety of theoretical frameworks have been used to explain the persistence of gendered and unequal divisions of housework. According to the time-availability hypothesis, the person with more time should be the one to perform more domestic labor (Davis & Greenstein, 2004). Because women typically work fewer hours in paid work, they are typically the ones to perform more housework (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010). The relative economic resource model suggests that the partner with fewer resources (i.e., less power in terms of income, education, and occupational status) should be the one to perform more housework (Bittman, England, Folbre, Sayer, & Matheson, 2003). Again, because women tend to earn less money than men (Cohen & Huffman, 2003) and to be employed in less prestigious occupations (Magnusson, 2009), they tend to do more housework than their husbands.

Yet some research has found that even when wives' and husbands' work hours are relatively equal, wives still perform a greater proportion

of the housework (Bartley, Blanton, & Gilliard, 2005). Furthermore, although some studies have found that wives' housework contributions decline somewhat in response to their own increased earnings (Gupta, 2006), wives tend to retain primary responsibility for housework regardless of their proportional contribution to the family's income (Gupta, 2006; Kroska, 2004). In fact, some studies have found that when wives make more money than their husbands, husbands restrict their contributions to housework (Bittman et al., 2003; Brines, 1994).

Given that time availability and resources alone do not explain the persistent gender gap in housework contributions, other theoretical models have been proposed. The "doing gender" approach (Brines, 1994; West & Zimmerman, 1987) suggests that housework is one avenue through which individuals continually construct gender in their daily lives. This perspective advances that housework is a site for gender construction; thus, even when wives' and husbands' contributions to paid work and income are similar, women may do more housework because doing housework represents a way of expressing femininity (i.e., through domesticity)—or, limiting time in housework allows men to assert their masculinity. Bittman et al. (2003) found that breadwinner wives engaged in "gender deviance neutralization," whereby they performed high levels of housework to neutralize or compensate for their higher earnings. Thus, gender theory suggests that women may do most of the housework if they hold traditional ideologies or if they feel that their femininity is challenged (e.g., because they are the primary earners). Likewise, men may eschew doing housework if they have traditional gender ideologies or if they feel that their masculinity is challenged in other domains (e.g., their wives are the primary earners) (Greenstein, 2000). However, social class may shape the degree to which men can choose to reject housework. For example, men who work opposite shifts from their wives as a child-care strategy may have less choice in whether they do family work (Deutsch, 1999; Usdansky, 2011).

Studies by Brines (1994), Bittman et al. (2003), and others (e.g., Evertsson & Nermo, 2004; Greenstein, 2000) have found evidence to support the "doing gender" approach. Yet some scholars, such as O. Sullivan (2011), have critiqued these studies and argued that evidence

of “doing gender” or “gender deviance neutralization” appears to apply only to the behavior of a very small group (e.g., long-term unemployed men, very high-earning women). O. Sullivan (2011) and others (e.g., England, 2011) suggested that perhaps too much has been made of the doing-gender approach as it applies to housework. Yet at the same time, these scholars recognize that theories and hypotheses pertaining to doing gender have been formulated in relation to heterosexual couples. They concur that “the intriguing question of gender deviance neutralization in the performance of housework among same-sex couples remains to be addressed” (O. Sullivan, 2011, p. 11).

In this article, I take up Sullivan’s suggestion that the doing-gender approach has not been fully explored in the context of same-sex couples. I argue that applying the doing-gender approach to same-sex couples can enhance our existing knowledge related to gender and housework. The persistence of gender differences in housework contributions in heterosexual couples raises questions about how men and women in same-sex couples perceive, negotiate, and enact housework. Same-sex couples enact housework in the context of a same-sex relationship—yet they do so within a larger (heteronormative) societal context that has historically assigned a gendered valence to various household tasks (e.g., washing dishes and making beds are “feminine”; taking out the garbage and mowing the lawn are “masculine”).

Thus, they are, like heterosexual couples, inevitably aware of heteronormative discourses and gendered “scripts” regarding who does what, as well as with the association of femininity with certain types of work and masculinity with other types of work. And yet, because they enact their relationships outside of the heterosexual context, they cannot, by definition, divide up tasks according to gender difference. This raises the following question: To what extent, how, and under what conditions do members of same-sex couples seek to do gender or avoid doing gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987) through their performance or avoidance of housework? Indeed, studying housework in the context of same-sex couples provides insights into both the doing and the undoing of gender through housework (Risman, 2004; West & Zimmerman, 1987) inasmuch as the meaning and enactment of housework are transformed in the same-sex couple context.

In addition to drawing from the doing-gender approach, I also draw from queer theory (Oswald, Blume, & Marks, 2005; Oswald, Kivalanka, Bloom, & Berkowitz, 2009), which conceptualizes the world as “composed of falsely bounded categories that give the impression of fixity and permanence where none ‘naturally’ exists” (Crawley & Broad, 2008, p. 551). Thus, queer theory interrogates and deconstructs the binaries of male versus female, homosexual versus heterosexual, feminine versus masculine, and so on. Furthermore, it pushes us to “examine gender, sexuality, and family as interdependent binaries to be negotiated through human agency in the face of heteronormative power” (Oswald et al., 2009, p. 45). Thus, studying housework in the context of same-sex couples may reveal insight into how and under which conditions same-sex couples “queer” housework—that is, resist, destabilize, and transform accepted (heteronormative) meaning systems surrounding housework—which can possibly be applied to all couples. It may also reveal how and under what conditions same-sex couples do not queer housework (i.e., they accept and abide by dominant meanings of housework). Both doing gender and queer theoretical frameworks push us to consider how same-sex couples may be reconfiguring the meaning of housework and, thus, how housework may be a site for undoing gender (Deutsch, 2007; Risman, 2004).

Next, I discuss empirical work on the division of housework among same-sex couples. I draw on this research to illustrate how same-sex couples both do and undo gender through housework, to highlight the factors that may serve to deconstruct gender, to underscore the contextually embedded nature of gendered meanings surrounding housework, and to probe the complexities associated with dualistic frames associated with housework divisions (e.g., feminine-masculine, equal-unequal).

DOING GENDER? HOUSEWORK IN SAME-SEX COUPLES

There is a modest body of research that examines the division of housework in lesbian, gay, and heterosexual couples. This literature is consistent in suggesting that same-sex couples divide housework more equally than heterosexual couples (Goldberg, Smith, & Perry-Jenkins, 2012; Kurdek, 1993, 2007; Perlesz et al., 2010; Solomon, Rothblum, & Balsam, 2005). Women

in heterosexual relationships do more housework and particularly more of the so-called feminine chores (e.g., the repetitive, time-consuming, “low control” chores; Bartley et al., 2005; Kroska, 2003), whereas lesbians and gay men split up housework more equally. For instance, in same-sex relationships, it is less likely that one partner does a disproportionate share of the housework (Goldberg & Perry-Jenkins, 2007; Patterson, Sutphin, & Fulcher, 2004). When differences in proportional contributions to housework occur in same-sex couples, the partner with less job prestige (Carrington, 1999), less income (Goldberg et al., 2012; Sutphin, 2010), or greater job flexibility (Carrington, 1999; Sutphin, 2010) tends to perform a greater proportion of unpaid work. Thus, even though, on average, same-sex couples divide up housework more equally than heterosexual couples, differences in time availability and resources between partners may ultimately be influential in shaping who does what, thus challenging the notion that same-sex couples are not influenced by status and power differences (Goldberg, 2009).

Scholars have often explained the finding that same-sex couples divide up housework more equally than heterosexual couples by drawing on empirical findings that lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) people have more flexible gender identities (see Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986; Lippa, 2008) and arguing that they should therefore be more flexible in their approach to the division of labor (Julien, Arellano, & Turgeon, 1997). Scholars have also invoked empirical findings that same-sex couples may be more attentive and sensitive to issues of equality and inequality in their relationships (see Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Patterson, 1995) to argue that such sensitivity should theoretically predispose same-sex couples toward greater sharing of housework (Dunne, 2000a, 2000b; Julien et al., 1997). The emphasis on equal sharing among same-sex couples, or what some scholars have referred to as the “egalitarian ethic” (Downing & Goldberg, 2011; Gabb, 2005), has gone so far as to imply that the labor arrangements of same-sex couples are “empty of gendering processes and practices,” whereas divisions of labor in heterosexual couples are constructed as “gender-full” (see Oerton, 1997, p. 421).

An extension of this argument is that same-sex couples are relatively unaffected by the traditionally gendered nature of housework and paid work, and that housework in the same-sex

couple context is therefore devoid of gendered meaning or value. Echoing this notion, some lesbian and gay study participants explicitly assert that their same-sex relationships are free from the types of expectations regarding “who does what” that govern heterosexual relationships and maintain that they divide up housework according to “preferences” and “strengths” (Jonathan, 2009; Perlesz et al., 2010; Rawsthorne & Costello, 2010; M. Sullivan, 1996). Thus, to these participants, personal preferences for the divisions of labor are not influenced by gender norms and practices. Notably, research on equally sharing heterosexual couples has found that such couples also tend to emphasize their commitment to equality in explaining their equal division of housework and to state that they rely on interests and strengths as opposed to gender norms in dividing up tasks (Deutsch, 1999; Risman, 1998).

Although these data seem to suggest that a commitment to egalitarianism may be sufficient to essentially “degender” (and therefore enable equal sharing of) housework, some scholars have argued that it is inappropriate to construct any couple—including same-sex couples—as gender-free or as uninfluenced by dominant (hetero)gendered meaning systems surrounding housework and paid work (see Oerton, 1997). Rather, we should assume that regardless of how equally they share housework, all couples—including same-sex couples—are aware of, and actively navigate, gendered meanings associated with paid work and unpaid work (Downing & Goldberg, 2011; Gabb, 2005; Goldberg, 2009). Furthermore, some scholars have emphasized that conclusions about an egalitarian ethic among same-sex couples are oversimplified and serve to obscure the diversity inherent in same-sex families (Gabb, 2005; Goldberg, 2009).

Gabb (2005) drew from her own data to illustrate the salience of (hetero)gendered meaning systems surrounding housework for same-sex couples and to challenge the assumption that all female same-sex couples abide by an egalitarian ethic. In her study of 18 lesbian mothers and their children in the United Kingdom, Gabb found that women often expressed awareness of the gendered valence of different types of work. Furthermore, some women noted that they and their partners divided up paid and unpaid labor in a way that could be “read” as

mirroring traditional gender roles; for example, one of them specialized in the domestic sphere, and one of them specialized in the paid sphere. In turn, some of them expressed discomfort with the notion that they might be viewed as embodying a heteronormative division of labor. Thus, far from being impervious to the deeply institutionalized nature of gender in the division of labor, these women constructed and reflected on their own labor divisions with awareness of how they might be evaluated against the heterosexual “template.”

Similarly, Downing and Goldberg (2011) drew on data from a sample of 30 lesbian couples (60 women) with toddler-age children in the United States and found that the majority of couples (22 of 30) divided paid labor unequally (e.g., one partner worked full-time and one partner worked part-time), which often led to inequalities in the division of unpaid labor. Like the participants in Gabb’s (2005) study, some of these couples were uncomfortable with the possibility that their paid-unpaid labor arrangements could be read as mirroring heteronormative arrangements. Importantly, though, a few couples perceived their differentiated roles as unproblematic, and even expressed comfort with embodying traditional gendered behaviors. As one woman, Delores, said:

Our friends tease us and say we are like the most heterosexual couple in the world. We live the typical straight lifestyle. Faye is like the guy that goes to work and makes money, and I take care of the kids. People don’t even look at us like we’re gay. (p. 112)

Her partner, Faye, shared a similar perspective: “She’s definitely the mom, I’m kinda the dad. It’s not a bad thing, it’s just what it is” (p. 112).

These examples highlight how same-sex couples navigate their housework divisions with awareness of how such divisions may be viewed as accommodating or conforming to (hetero)gendered norms (Goldberg, 2012; Oswald et al., 2009). Delores’s statement that “people don’t even look at us like we’re gay” further suggests that some same-sex couples may experience their accommodation to a familiar (i.e., gendered) template as rendering them more acceptable (i.e., normative) to the (heterosexual) people in their community.

Ethnographic research by sociologist Christopher Carrington (1999) also suggests that

same-sex couples are often aware of, and actively navigate, the gendered meaning associated with domestic labor. Carrington conducted in-depth interviews and observational fieldwork with 52 gay and lesbian couples in California. Similar to studies of heterosexual couples (Deutsch, 1999; Risman, 1998), Carrington found that the couples often described the division of housework as more equal than he observed it to be. Most participants, when asked to speak in general terms about how they divided up housework, described it as very egalitarian (e.g., “It’s pretty even,” and “I would say it’s 50–50 around here”); p. 177). Yet Carrington’s observations of these couples sometimes ran contrary to their narrative accounts. In explaining the discrepancy between participants’ portrayal of the division of labor and what he observed, Carrington suggested that some of the couples that he studied seemed to be engaging in “gender identity work.” For example, in an interview with Shelley Haddock in which he summarized many of his findings, he stated:

The gender identity of gay men who engaged in domesticity was protected by the creation of gender myths. The gay men themselves and their partner, friends and relatives would conceal the kinds of domestic labor that these men did to protect them from stigma. The opposite was true for lesbian couples. The partner who did more domestic labor would emphasize the few domestic contributions that her less-domestically-inclined partner contributed to the house. (Haddock, 2002, p. 69)

Thus, in contrast to their narrative depictions of their housework divisions as relatively equal and as arising directly from their personal preferences and strengths, some same-sex couples were observed to be enacting a fairly segregated, or specialized, division of labor, whereby one partner concentrated more of his or her energies in domestic work and one partner was more heavily involved in the paid employment sphere. Further, these couples were, according to Carrington (1999), more aware of the gendered implications of their unequal contributions to housework than they let on, as demonstrated by their narrative efforts to “do gender” by minimizing (in the case of gay couples) or exaggerating (in the case of lesbian couples) one partner’s housework contributions. Carrington concluded that such efforts to hide or exaggerate one partner’s domestic work,

otherwise “drap[ing] the door with the ideological veneer of egalitarianism” (p. 182), in part reflected couples’ wish to avoid the stigma associated with violating gender expectations. Thus, they appeared to engage in gender deviance neutralization as a means of deflecting attacks on their own and their partners’ gender identities.

Carrington (1999) argued that participants’ efforts to hide or exaggerate one partner’s domestic work also reflected participants’ desire to “avoid conflicts and preserve relationships existing in a broader socioeconomic context that does not enable families to actually produce much equality” (p. 182). In other words, the couples found it very hard to enact egalitarianism, given the time and financial constraints imposed by their current realities. But they were aware of the intra- and interpersonal strain that might arise should they admit to falling short of this ideal, and thus they sought to portray their current arrangements as more equal than they were. As do heterosexual couples who consider themselves as egalitarian, these couples experience internal and external pressures to portray themselves as equal sharers (Deutsch, 1999; Risman, 1998). Yet such pressures are arguably exacerbated in same-sex couples, who struggle with the reality that any arrangement that deviates from the egalitarian ideal (or seems to mirror traditional gendered roles) may be read as evidence that they are “just like” heterosexual couples—or trying to be. Same-sex couples may also feel pressured to (re)present their families as egalitarian inasmuch as this is the model that is most frequently associated with the LGB community, and they may be fearful of (re)presenting themselves in ways that suggest that they are “(unwitting) traditionalists or unworthy lesbians” (Gabb, 2004, p. 174). In other words, they may be concerned not only with being seen as accommodating to heteronormativity but also with failing to live up to the prevailing norms of the LGB community (i.e., violating homonormativity; Goldberg, 2012).

Carrington’s (1999) research—and other studies of same-sex couples—shed light on the structural, relational, and temporal contexts that shape how, and the degree to which, gender is “done” through housework. Carrington observed that certain aspects of couples’ socioeconomic context seemed to constrain or facilitate the enactment of egalitarianism. For example, sharing domestic labor was more common in couples in which both partners

had flexible schedules. Sharing was also facilitated by financial resources, whereby the affluent couples in Carrington’s sample shared housework more equally than those with fewer resources—echoing Risman’s (1998) study of equal-sharing heterosexual couples, which found that most couples who divided housework equitably employed paid help. Paying a housekeeper to perform routine cleaning may alleviate discussion or even conflict related to “who does what,” as well as render the equal sharing of the remaining tasks more manageable. It may also minimize the degree to which couples ultimately engage in the types of narrative reconstructions of the division of labor described earlier. Male same-sex couples may be at a particular advantage here, in that they tend to make more money than female same-sex couples, on average (Badgett, 1997; Gates & Ost, 2004) and may thus be able to afford more outside help. Paying a (typically female) housekeeper may in turn help preserve both partners’ (masculine) gender identities so that neither partner feels disempowered or even feminized as a function of taking on more of the (routine, repetitive, female-associated) housework. This may be particularly important to male same-sex couples, who may wish to “protect their partners and themselves from getting stuck in a feminine role” (Khor, 2007, p. 69).

Carrington (1999) also observed that the length of couples’ relationships was associated with the degree to which partners shared housework. According to Carrington, couples who had been together for longer tended to have more specialized divisions of labor, in which one partner specialized in paid work and one partner specialized in unpaid work. This finding underscores the importance of examining the division of housework in the temporal context as well; that is, studying housework divisions in same-sex couples over time enables analysis of how, when, and why couples’ division of labor undergoes change. Some couples may trend toward increased segregation after months, years, or even decades of negotiation and conflict before finally giving up on achieving egalitarianism. Some couples may struggle to achieve egalitarianism early on in their relationships, before determining that such an arrangement is not necessarily functional, practical, or mutually satisfying. In turn, some couples may come to prefer, and enact, a more specialized division of labor. This dynamic may

be particularly likely to occur when couples become parents (and suddenly face a dramatic increase in unpaid labor); that is, specialization may emerge as a more efficient strategy for dividing labor than trying to share both paid and unpaid labor equally (Downing & Goldberg, 2011). Still other couples may finally achieve a relatively egalitarian division of labor only after years of discussion and negotiation—and, possibly, prolonged periods of specialization (e.g., during the transition to parenthood). Assessing housework divisions at one point in time, via a questionnaire, may obscure the day-to-day, relational “work” that has gone into—or continues to go into—maintaining the current division of labor. Even if same-sex couples do share relatively equally, this does not mean that such sharing comes easily; the division of housework may in fact be a source of intrapersonal or interpersonal conflict, in part because of the gendered valence that it carries.

For example, consider the following quotes from an ongoing, longitudinal study of lesbian, gay, and heterosexual adoptive parent couples. Two years after they had adopted a child, both partners in the study were interviewed separately about the division of household labor. Data collection and analysis for this study are ongoing, but initial analyses suggest that, although the same-sex couples share housework more equally than the heterosexual couples, such sharing does not always come easily—and, further, there is great variability in the degree of sharing.¹ Rather, in the context of same-sex couples, housework is actively negotiated and sometimes a source of conflict, despite being shared more equally. In some cases, such negotiations are instrumental to the ongoing or eventual sharing of housework. As one lesbian woman, Marsha, explained, when asked whether the division of labor was a source of tension or conflict between her and her partner, Diane:

I think it has been somewhat . . . in terms of food. In terms of, I don't want all of this responsibility sitting on me . . . [but] she just gets overwhelmed with it. And so we strategize and make a better menu, and she's much better if she has a plan. . . . She's not a quick thinker in terms of food. So that's been one of the biggest areas of challenge.

Thus, Marsha described certain aspects of housework—namely, shopping, cooking, and meal preparation—as a source of tension over the past few years, as she wanted Diane to assume greater responsibility for these things. Marsha described them as working together to “strategize and make a better menu” so that Diane was not without a “plan” when it came to meal preparation. Such negotiations, in turn, presumably led to a more equal division of labor; indeed, both Marsha and Diane described their current division of housework as relatively equal, including the food-related chores specifically.

In this example, the gendered nature of food preparation (DeVault, 1991) is not explicitly referred to, and thus the gendered valence of this work does not appear, at least explicitly, to be a source of conflict. In other cases, however, the gendered nature of the work is explicitly identified as a source of internal tension. For example, Shayna, a lesbian, described herself as currently responsible for approximately 80% of the housework, which she experienced as overwhelming, unfair, and unsettlingly gendered. Indeed, both she and her partner Elle were employed—but Shayna worked 40 hours a week, from home, and Elle worked 60 hours a week, an hour away from home. About the current division of labor, Shayna said:

I do resent it sometimes. You know, when I'm . . . cleaning the house and remembering birthdays and all that kind of stuff, I'm like, “Oh my God, I'm running this house by myself.” . . . I'll never forget it actually when we got the first set of questionnaires [about the division of housework] from you, like way back in the day before Mimi was even born, we were like, “What the hell?” when we realized who was doing what. I was like, “There is no way this is right and there's no way it's going to keep happening after we have a baby!” You know, and we were both like, “Well, what are we going to do?” Because Elle is literally not here. And it's just—and we can't afford a housekeeper. . . . It was just kind of a matter of coming to terms with it and being like, “It's not forever and it's not based on”—this is where I sometimes get caught—“It's not based on that I'm the girly one or you know, something like that.”

Shayna's account differs from the earlier quote by Marsha in that Shayna described the division of housework as decidedly unequal, with Shayna performing the majority of tasks. Shayna also indicated that she had been vocally dissatisfied about the division of labor over

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the past few years—but she asserted that structural factors (e.g., Elle's long hours at work) have precluded much change in the division. Finally, Shayna also appears sensitive to the possibility that their division of labor might be read as arising from, or reflecting, female and masculine gender identities—and therefore as imitative or derivative of traditional male/female roles. Her description, as a whole, highlights the importance of attending to temporal dynamics in the division of housework, the salience of gender (identity) to perceptions of and feelings about the division, and the potential for (continued) inequality in spite of ongoing negotiations about the division of labor. Taken together, these data—as well as Carrington's (1999) data—suggest that research on the doing (and undoing) of gender through housework in same-sex couples must consider the structural conditions (e.g., job flexibility, income) that make sharing more likely; the daily, interactional nature of housework (i.e., the interpersonal and intrapersonal negotiations surrounding housework); and the patterning (e.g., change and stability) of housework divisions over time (as well as life events, such as the transition to parenthood, which prompt changes or discontinuities in the division of housework). Thus, it is essential that research on housework in same-sex couples—and all couples for that matter—consider the role of structural, relational, and temporal contexts, to understand how these contexts may shape how, and the degree to which, gender is “done” through housework.

UNDOING GENDER? HOUSEWORK IN SAME-SEX COUPLES

The discussion here suggests that arguments that same-sex couples exist outside of and are “free” from heteronormative expectations about roles and relationships are overly simplistic (Dunne, 2000a, 2000b). As we have seen, same-sex couples are not impervious to gendered norms about domestic and paid labor; indeed, the deeply institutionalized character of gender as a productive mechanism of inequality cannot be overlooked (M. Sullivan, 1996). By extension, the expectation that all same-sex couples should enact a perfectly egalitarian division of labor because of their “freedom” from heteronorms is unwarranted. A more appropriate assumption is that same-sex couples should enact a wide range of domestic arrangements, including both

egalitarian and more specialized patterns, as well as arrangements that we likely have yet to imagine, conceptualize, or understand. Furthermore, we need to consider the possibility that while a particular (e.g., specialized) arrangement may appear “gendered” through a traditional (heteronormative) lens, same-sex couples themselves may not necessarily experience it or interpret it in this way. Thus, the structural arrangement may appear gendered, but couples may conceptualize it in such a way that challenges or defies (i.e., queers) gender (Oswald et al., 2005).

Indeed, Lev (2008) pointed out the lack of scholarly focus on “butch-femme” female same-sex couples, particularly in the context of family building and the division of labor, perhaps in part because a discussion of butch-femme roles and dynamics does not “fit” with the broader emphasis on egalitarianism and “sameness” in same-sex partners.² When butch-femme roles are examined, they are assumed to directly mirror heterosexual relationships—an assumption that, Lev argued, reveals a heteronormative lens. Lev contended that femmes have played a unique role in the cultivating of their homes and the nurturing of families, a role that might appear to mirror the traditional role of heterosexual housewives on the outside, but “*it looks different from the inside*” (p. 138; emphasis added). Gender, Lev asserted, functions differently in same-sex couples, as female same-sex couples may perhaps enact gender in ways that are neither traditional (i.e., based on heteronormativity) nor hierarchical (i.e., power-based). The tendency to attach or ascribe a power differential to the gender expression of partners may therefore obscure important insights into the complex ways in which gender functions in female same-sex relationships.

A key point that we can take from Lev (2008) is that same-sex couples' work-family roles cannot be easily mapped onto the heterosexual “template,” in which economic providing and domestic activities are presumed to have identical meanings and dynamics as

²*Butch* is a term usually used to describe lesbian or queer women who reject feminine ways of dressing and acting, and *femme* usually is used to describe lesbian or queer women whose self-presentation aligns more closely with stereotypically female ways of dressing and acting (see Faderman, 1991; Levitt & Home, 2002).

in heterosexual couples. Furthermore, women's gender expression (e.g., femme, butch) may not even necessarily correspond to or match up with more feminine- or masculine-typed labor respectively; whereas some femme-identified women perform more of the household labor and child care-taking than their butch-identified partners, others report a more balanced division of labor (Levitt, Gerrish, & Hiestand, 2003). Even when women's gender identities do correlate with the division of unpaid and paid labor, the meaning and interpretations of these domains may be uniquely shaped by their female same-sex relational context. Indeed, instances in which same-sex couples do not embody the egalitarian ethic should not necessarily be read as "traditional" or as mirroring heterosexual norms (Downing & Goldberg, 2011; Gabb, 2005; Rawsthorne & Costello, 2010). Specialized labor arrangements (i.e., one partner specializes in paid work and the other specializes in domestic work) may in fact be "read" as equal (or, more precisely, equitable), in that both partners may view themselves as contributing to the optimal functioning of the household. For example, the women who performed the majority of household labor in Rawsthorne and Costello's (2010) research felt that both they and their female partners acknowledged domestic labor as "important work." This mutual appreciation for domestic labor—which may have been facilitated by both women's gender socialization as female, and thus their awareness of the historically devalued nature of housework (Kurdek, 1993, 2007)—helped take the "heat" out of performing household tasks. As Rawsthorne and Costello (2010) noted, "The drudgery of household tasks was reduced or diminished through recognition of their value" (p. 12).

Research by Kamano (2009) on lesbian couples in Japan also reveals how lesbian couples re(constructed) the meaning of housework against the backdrop of strong cultural norms that associate *housewife* and *housework* with women. The frequency and level of involvement in housework is more intense in Japan than in other comparable countries because of a lack of "outsourcing" (e.g., hiring domestic helpers); it is also extremely skewed by gender, with women performing the majority of cooking, cleaning, and laundry (Wunderink & Niehoff, 1997). At the same time, housework tends to be

seen as meaningful and creative work in Japan. For example, a survey of Japanese and Swedish women found that 90% of Japanese women believed that "housework is meaningful," compared to 57% of Swedish women (Yoshizumi, 2004, as cited in Kamano, 2009). Thus, lesbian women in Japan are situated in a cultural context in which *housewife* and *housework* are strongly associated with women, and yet housework is also valued. Kamano (2009) found that the 21 lesbians whom she interviewed had somewhat reconfigured the meaning of housework and housewife, wherein they considered it important to do housework but regarded housework as a nongendered form of care that should be expected of all adults. In fact, Kamano observed that in almost all of the couples she interviewed, both partners felt a personal responsibility for performing housework. That is, they were motivated to do housework out of a desire to "take care of themselves and maintain equality in their relationship" (Kamano, 2009, p. 138). But at the same time, they distanced themselves from the category of "housewife," which implied that it was their job to do housework and to take care of everybody in the household. Thus, the fact that they were partnered with other women enabled them to feel that they were performing a form of labor that was mutually respected and valued—and that they were performing housework by choice, and not because they had to.

Other qualitative research also points to ways in which the meaning of housework may be redefined or reinterpreted in the female same-sex couple context. In line with the findings presented here, some studies suggest that primary responsibility for housework may carry with it a certain power—perhaps because both partners in the relationship appreciate and respect the time-consuming nature of domestic work (Downing & Goldberg, 2011; Moore, 2008). Moore (2008) studied Black lesbian stepfamilies in the United States and found that Black lesbian biological mothers performed more housework than lesbian stepmothers, particularly the time-consuming and stereotypically female household tasks. Although these biological mothers sometimes expressed frustration with the division of labor, Moore observed that this frustration was often accompanied by a "certain acceptance[,] . . . which biological mothers usually follow with a modest boasting of their superior cleaning and organizational skills—a superiority that

gives them the final say over the way they run their households” (p. 346). Further, Moore found that having control over housework gave these women a stronger say—and sometimes the deciding vote—in other areas of family life, such as money management and child rearing. According to Moore, biological mothers accepted their greater responsibility for various aspects of household maintenance not because they liked washing dishes or cleaning floors, but because having control over those areas gave them greater power in other key aspects of household management. Doing housework, in other words, was a trade-off for control over household finances, household decisions, and parenting.

Moore’s (2008) findings highlight how household labor is (re)constructed as a form of relationship power in lesbian couples—which, she argues, is facilitated by the absence of the “gendered structure of explicit male privilege or the material advantage of high income” (p. 353). They also, like Kamano’s (2009) findings, illustrate the importance of conducting studies of same-sex couples that go beyond the White, American, middle-class context; indeed, Moore’s findings reveal that Black lesbian couples’ values and ideologies related to the division of labor are rooted more in Black cultural norms than in the “typical” (White) lesbian experience. As Moore (2010) explained, “Women and mothers have an authoritative status in the organization of African American family life[, which is] partially due to the higher rates of single parenthood and greater responsibilities for child rearing among Black women but certain aspects of African American culture also emphasize motherhood as a revered status” (p. 156).

In Moore’s (2010) study, the partner who held primary responsibility for the domestic realm also tended to play a particularly powerful role where household matters in general were concerned. Thus, the power that primary household managers enjoyed extended beyond the day-to-day details to the financial sphere, as well as to major household decisions. These findings are similar to data on heterosexual couples, in which wives (who are typically performing the majority of housework) also tend to view themselves as the primary decision makers where day-to-day details of family life and the household are concerned. However, in heterosexual couples, husbands

still tend to have the “final say” where major household decisions are concerned, such as those concerning money or career choices and changes (Bartley et al., 2005). Thus, Moore’s findings provide insight into how household work in all types of couples can be constructed as a form of power. Yet they also illustrate that the meaning of housework, and the “returns” associated with doing more housework (e.g., a greater say over how money should be allocated), may be more pronounced in certain relational and cultural contexts, such as in Black lesbian stepfamilies.

Quantitative research also provides some evidence to support the notion that the meaning of housework may be defined or constructed differently in the same-sex couple context. Kurdek (1993) studied lesbian, gay, and heterosexual couples in the United States and found that the performance of housework was positively related to the severity of psychological distress for heterosexual wives, such that wives who did more housework were more depressed. Yet no relationship between housework and psychiatric symptoms was present for gay men, and among lesbians, the performance of housework was *negatively* related to the severity of psychological symptoms; that is, lesbians who did more housework were less likely to be depressed. These contrasting findings for heterosexual and lesbian women suggest that housework is experienced and interpreted differently for these two groups of women, likely in part as a result of their different relational contexts. Kurdek (1993) acknowledged that “it is unlikely that lesbian partners actually enjoy household labor more than wives”; rather, he argued, lesbian partners may simply experience a greater sense of choice surrounding housework than wives, who perform housework because they feel “resigned” to do it (p. 138). Lesbians who do more housework may also feel more empowered in other domains (Moore, 2008), thus accounting for their greater well-being. A limitation of Kurdek’s study is that he did not assess participants’ subjective evaluations of the division of housework (e.g., perceived fairness, satisfaction). Lesbians may have been more satisfied with the division of labor—perhaps in part because they felt more appreciated and valued for their housework contributions than heterosexual women—which might in turn help explain their greater well-being.

Another quantitative study, by Goldberg et al. (2012), also provides insight into the (re)defining

of housework in same-sex couples. In an effort to “control for” biological factors (e.g., pregnancy, breast-feeding) that may influence the division of labor (Earle, 2000), Goldberg and colleagues examined the division of labor in lesbian, gay, and heterosexual couples who had recently become parents through adoption. The authors found that heterosexual adoptive couples were more likely to demonstrate a specialized division of labor than same-sex adoptive couples, such that heterosexual husbands were performing more of the paid work and heterosexual wives were performing more of the child care and housework. Further, child care and housework were far more interconnected in heterosexual couples than same-sex couples, such that in heterosexual couples, the primary household manager—the wife, in the vast majority of cases—was often also the primary child care giver, whereas this was not the case for same-sex couples. Thus, same-sex couples enacted a division of labor that resisted, or “queered,” dominant assumptions about the division of paid and unpaid work, whereby *housewife* conflates responsibilities for housekeeping and child care.

A final finding that clearly underscores how the meaning of housework may be transformed (and gender “undone”) in the same-sex couple context also came from Goldberg et al.’s (2012) study of lesbian, gay, and heterosexual adoptive-parent couples. The authors used the Who Does What housework scale (Atkinson & Huston, 1984) to assess participants’ perceived contributions to housework. In line with prior research, they used these items to construct a subscale of feminine-typed tasks (8 items) and a subscale of masculine-typed tasks (4 items). As stated, they found that same-sex couples divided up tasks more equally than heterosexual couples, but further, although there was a tendency for these two domains to be complementary or “opposite” in heterosexual couples (with women performing more feminine tasks and men performing more masculine tasks; Kroska, 2004), no such pattern was present for same-sex couples. That is, there was no indication that one partner tended to “specialize” in feminine tasks and the other in masculine tasks. By extension, the reliability coefficients, or alphas, for these two housework scales (which provide an indication of how well these items “hang together”) were lower for same-sex couples—particularly gay male couples—than

for heterosexual couples. Namely, alphas for the feminine scale were .87, .76, and .61 for heterosexual, lesbian, and gay individuals, respectively; and alphas for the masculine scale were .87, .60, and .30 for heterosexual, lesbian, and gay individuals, respectively. Thus, the so-called masculine task items did not hold together well for gay men in particular. Gay men violate certain standards of masculinity by virtue of their sexuality, and they may have less gender-typed attitudes (Goldberg, 2010; Lippa, 2008); thus, the so-called masculine tasks may have a different meaning for gay men.

These findings challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about the gendered nature of certain household tasks and suggest that future work should examine same-sex partners’ (and possibly heterosexual partners’) contributions to each individual task, as opposed to simply grouping tasks in terms of their traditionally feminine and masculine associations. At the very least, a factor analysis should be conducted to determine which items or tasks tend to “load” together. The findings also point to the need to examine the reliability of so-called feminine and masculine housework scales based on factors other than gender—including sexual orientation, social class, race/ethnicity, family structure, and gender ideology. Finally, from a queer theoretical perspective (Oswald et al., 2005; Oswald et al., 2009), these findings should push us to acknowledge the possibility that such classification schemes (dividing up tasks as “feminine” and “masculine” on the basis of who has historically performed such tasks) merely serve to reify and perpetuate gendered meanings associated with housework, as well as binary conceptualizations of gender and heteronormativity more broadly.

SUMMARY

As we have seen, same-sex couples can be viewed as simultaneously doing and undoing gender through housework. More precisely, we have seen how same-sex couples may draw from and be influenced by heteronormative meaning systems surrounding housework and the division of labor—but we have also seen how their same-sex relational context offers opportunities to resist, undo, or “queer” such meaning systems (Goldberg, 2012; Oswald et al., 2005). To the extent that same-sex couples do not contend with the gender (and thus power)

differential that operates in heterosexual couples, they can theoretically more easily select roles and responsibilities that match their strengths and interests. Yet as we have seen, partners in same-sex couples are aware of, and sometimes wrestle intrapersonally and interpersonally with, the traditionally gendered meaning systems surrounding housework. Furthermore, even in the absence of gender (difference), within-couple differences in educational and financial resources ultimately play a role in who does what (Carrington, 1999; Goldberg et al., 2012).

Yet at the same time, both qualitative research and quantitative research point to ways in which housework may be redefined and reinterpreted in the same-sex context (Kurdek, 1993; Moore, 2008). For example, housework may be constructed as a site of power, enabling decision making over other elements of the domestic realm (Moore, 2008). In households in which one partner performs the majority of unpaid work and one partner performs the majority of paid work, such specialized arrangements are interpreted in a range of different ways, thus underscoring the need to look within and among same-sex couples to understand how such arrangements are viewed from the “inside” (Lev, 2008). That is, it is inappropriate to assume that same-sex couples interpret the division of housework in ways that are identical to heterosexual husbands and wives; that arrangements in which one partner does a disproportionate share of housework are regarded as unfair; that the partner who does a disproportionate share of housework is the less empowered partner; and, even further, that equally sharing paid and unpaid labor is always regarded as the “ideal” in same-sex couples (Downing & Goldberg, 2011). What may appear to be “doing gender” from the outside may not be viewed in the same way by same-sex partners—and, for that matter, heterosexual partners—themselves.

Related to this point, scholars who study the division of housework in heterosexual couples have long emphasized the need to look not only at the “objective” division of tasks but also at how partners make meaning of and evaluate the division (e.g., do they perceive it as fair) (Glass & Fujimoto, 1994; Lennon & Rosenfield, 1994). So-called traditional divisions of labor (woman does the majority of housework, and man does the majority of paid work) may be perceived in a variety of ways, depending on both ideological

and structural factors (e.g., commitment to egalitarianism, work–family preferences) (Braun, Lewin-Epstein, Stier, & Baumgartner, 2008; Gager & Hohmann-Marriott, 2006; Goldberg & Perry-Jenkins, 2004). For instance, heterosexual women with traditional gender-role ideologies are more likely to view an arrangement in which they perform more housework than their husbands as fair and satisfying than are women with egalitarian gender-role ideologies (Braun et al., 2008; Perry-Jenkins & Crouter, 1990; Perry-Jenkins, Seery, & Crouter, 1992). In turn, these different assessments (fair, satisfying; unfair, unsatisfying) have implications for women’s well-being (Garrido & Acitelli, 1999; Goldberg & Perry-Jenkins, 2004).

Similarly, we must begin to attend more carefully to the perceptions of same-sex couples with regard to the division of labor, in an effort to determine how and under which conditions lesbians and gay men perceive the division as “fair” or “unfair.” For example, same-sex couples who evaluate their housework contributions against those of their heterosexual family members and friends may be more satisfied than those who compare their contributions to those of other same-sex couples (Esmail, 2010). Because heterosexual couples are characterized by greater inequality, on average (Patterson et al., 2004), same-sex couples who choose this comparison referent may ultimately be more satisfied with their arrangements. At the same time, partners in same-sex relationships may have high expectations for equality in their relationships—higher than heterosexual women, who often expect to do more of the housework, even when they espouse egalitarian views (Askari, Liss, Erchull, Staebell, & Axelson, 2010). In turn, a woman who feels that her same-sex partner is not as attentive to issues of equity in the relationship as she is might be even more distressed than a heterosexual woman in the same situation, who perhaps can more easily chalk her male partner’s inattentiveness up to “he’s such a guy” (i.e., because he’s a man, he is less conscious of what needs to be done, has lower standards, is not as competent as housework, and so on). In the latter case, the ability to invoke tried-and-true gender stereotypes may function to alleviate distress associated with doing more than one’s perceived share (see Strazdins & Broom, 2004; van Hoof, 2011). Alternatively, it may be that under certain conditions, a woman who feels that her female-sex partner is not as attentive to issues of

equity in the relationship as she is might be less distressed than a heterosexual woman in this situation. For example, a lesbian may feel less “oppressed” by her partner’s failure to clean the sink, by virtue of the fact that she is in a same-sex relationship. She may be less sensitive to the ways in which her partner’s failure to clean the sink reflects power differentials in the relationship.

It is also important to consider the values that partners associate with housework (i.e., do partners view housework as a valued form of labor, a means of communicating nurturance, or a creative pursuit) and to consider how these housework values may mediate the relationship between the division of labor and self-reports of fairness and satisfaction, and, more broadly, how they might deepen our understanding of how unpaid labor is perceived and enacted in a same-sex relational context. Furthermore, as Kamano’s (2009) findings suggest, the values associated with housework may be shaped by cultural context; thus, there is a need to evaluate how such values reflect and are perpetuated by the couples’ (or individual partners’) national and cultural context.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

This review suggests the utility of the doing-gender approach as applied to same-sex couples, but it also underscores the limitations of this theory—or, more accurately, the need to extend it to account for the fact that same-sex couples may wrestle with gender (and housework) in ways that are different from heterosexuals. Gendered norms regarding housework hold different meanings for lesbian and gay couples in that they are, by definition, partnered with someone of the same gender. Thus, they theoretically have more freedom to construct a division of labor that works for them personally, and that is uninfluenced by broader societal norms (in that they already live outside of these heteronorms). Yet at the same time, sexual minorities are aware of gendered norms. Further, and perhaps not surprisingly, there is variability among sexual minorities—including within same-sex couples—in the degree to which they are sensitive to, and respond to, those gendered norms. One question for future research is to determine how individuals’ personal values, identities, and personal characteristics affect responses to these gendered

norms. For example, how do individual actors’ gender identities play into their evaluation and construction of the division of housework? Do more feminine-identified women, such as Shayna, mentioned earlier, tend to evaluate or experience housework (or particular household tasks) differently than more masculine-identified women?

Also, it is clear that same-sex couples may be influenced not only by heteronorms but also by homonorms (Goldberg, 2012). That is, same-sex couples who enact more specialized divisions of labor, for example, may be sensitive not only to how they might be viewed as accommodating to heteronormativity but also how they may be seen as violating homonormativity (i.e., the egalitarian ideal). Future studies should evaluate the extent to which same-sex couples are aware of and sensitive to such evaluations; and, more broadly, studies should assess the relative salience of heteronorms and homonorms in LGB peoples’ daily lives.

Another theoretical issue that this review raises is the need to consider how structural and cultural factors influence the division of labor. Social class (e.g., income, job conditions, education) and cultural norms emerged as influential in determining the enactment of and meaning-making surrounding housework. These findings point to the potential utility of combining gender approaches with both ecological (Bronfenbrenner, 1988) and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) theories. Ecological theories emphasize the importance of considering the social contexts in which the individual (and couple) is embedded in understanding how developmental processes unfold. Intersectionality theories emphasize the need to consider how individuals’ various identities and social locations (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, social class, race/ethnicity, age) intersect, and how those intersections influence individuals’ experiences and identity. Both theories point to the need to probe more fully the role of social class in same-sex couples’ division and interpretation of housework. Recall Carington’s (1999) findings, which underscored the role that financial and educational resources may play in facilitating the sharing of domestic labor. Research on same-sex couples has tended to focus on middle-class couples, which may in part be responsible for the tendency to characterize same-sex couples as almost universally egalitarian (Goldberg, 2009). This myopic focus

has obscured the role of resources in the division of domestic labor. Research on working-class same-sex couples' experiences of dividing labor may more fully reveal how both structural and attitudinal factors associated with social class affect the negotiation and perception of housework. Working-class couples' less flexible work schedules and lower income may make equal sharing more difficult, yet working-class same-sex couples may also be less unsettled by inequality than middle-class couples, inasmuch as working-class same-sex couples may be less aligned with the values associated with liberal feminism (Taylor & Rupp, 1993). In turn, they may be less likely to engage in the kind of "gender identity work" or "gender deviance neutralization" related to housework that was observed in Carrington's (1999) study of same-sex couples. In contrast, under certain conditions, working-class same-sex couples may find equal sharing easier to enact than middle-class same-sex couples do. Their lower income may require that both partners work (possibly alternating shifts, to eliminate the need for paid child care), an arrangement that may ultimately translate into a high level of sharing in both employment and domestic spheres.

Scholars have historically employed the doing-gender approach to try to account for the fact that even when women and men have similar work hours, financial contributions, and time availability, women still perform more of the household labor (Bartley et al., 2005). In turn, the gender perspective posits that women may use housework as a means of asserting their femininity (e.g., their competence as a nurturer or household organizer) or that men may avoid housework as a means of asserting their masculinity (particularly if they feel they must compensate for a lack of masculinity in another domain) (Brines, 1994; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Applied to same-sex couples, this perspective encourages us to attend to ways in which housework may be used to do or avoid doing gender. As we have seen, same-sex couples do appear to engage in gender-deviance neutralization (Carrington, 1999), which provides one example of how they can be seen as "doing gender." But we also see many examples that are hard to easily label as "doing" or "undoing gender," which points to ways in which this conceptualization of housework behavior is overly simplistic and inadequately captures the experience of

same-sex couples and, perhaps, heterosexual couples as well. For example, the lesbian couples in Kamano's (2009) research endorsed traditional notions of housework as a form of care, yet they also defined housework as something that individuals should do regardless of gender, out of respect for themselves and their partner. Are these couples doing gender or undoing gender? This example illuminates the reality that it is sometimes difficult to label housework behavior in this way, particularly when the perspectives and interpretations of the actors themselves are not assessed. Thus, rather than asking whether couples do gender or undo gender through housework, perhaps we need to consider a much more complicated set of questions: How and in what ways can couples' housework behavior be seen as doing gender, by both outsiders and insiders (i.e., the partners themselves)? How and in what ways can their housework behavior be seen as undoing gender (i.e., "queering" gender and housework) by outsiders and insiders? And finally: How and in what ways does the couple's broader social context affect their "doing" and "undoing" of gender through housework, as well as their perceptions and interpretations of those processes?

Queer theory, combined with the doing-gender perspective, provided an effective lens for contemplating how housework may be a site for undoing or queering gender and for questioning the fixity, stability, and usefulness of various binaries, such as male versus female and masculine versus feminine. Application of a queer theoretical approach is useful not only in the study of lesbian and gay couples and families but also in the study of all types of families, if the researcher is interested in how individuals, couples, and families destabilize or challenge heteronormative binaries (e.g., male versus female; "normal" or "real" families versus "abnormal" or "pseudo" families). Future research should perhaps examine how other family structures that lie outside of the heterosexual nuclear model serve to challenge or undo gender through their enactment and construction of housework. How do heterosexual, long-term cohabiting couples, for example, challenge or queer the enactment of, or dominant assumptions surrounding, housework? Studying "atypical" couples, or couples "on the margins," may reveal new insights into the undoing or queering of gender and housework.

METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The importance of conducting both quantitative and qualitative research on the division of labor in same-sex couples in different cultural contexts is highlighted by those studies conducted in non-U.S. contexts (e.g., Gabb, 2005, in the United Kingdom; Kamano, 2009, in Japan; Rawsthorne & Costello, 2011, in Australia). Kamano (2009), for example, discussed how lesbian couples navigated and redefined the meaning of the concept of housewife—a culturally significant term in Japanese culture. Inasmuch as gender norms vary considerably across culture (Thebaud, 2010), as do attitudes about and legal recognition of same-sex couples (Goldberg, 2010; Jensen, Gambles, & Olsen, 1988), studies that examine the division of labor within and across cultural contexts are needed to more fully elucidate the ways in which culture shapes the doing and undoing of gender through housework. Of interest, for example, is whether and how same-sex couples' enactment of and meaning-making surrounding housework varies cross-culturally, depending on broad indices of gender (inequality (e.g., the Gender Equality Index), as well as societal attitudes and legislation surrounding gay rights.

Carrington's (1999) work, as well as prior research with heterosexual couples, demonstrated how reliance on self-reports of the division of labor may limit our insights into the self-conscious production of gender through such reports. We clearly need more studies that incorporate observational methods or ethnographic methods, as well as daily diary methods, to gain a more holistic portrait of the division of housework and the meaning of housework in same-sex couples. At the very least, we need greater acknowledgment of and attention to how concerns about self-presentation—and gender identity—may influence same-sex couples' subjective reports of the division of labor.

We should study housework division and negotiation in same-sex couples over time and at different stages of life, in light of research on heterosexual couples that demonstrates that the overall amount of housework and partners' contributions to housework change across the life course (Baxter, Hewitt, & Haynes, 2008; Bianchi & Mattingly, 2004). For example, a large body of research indicates that the absolute load of housework increases when children enter the picture; in turn, the transition to parenthood is often associated with an increasingly traditional

or specialized division of labor, whereby wives take on the lion's share of domestic work and men spend more time in paid work (Baxter et al., 2008; Kluwer, Heesink, & van de Vliert, 2002). The limited research on same-sex couples' transition to parenthood suggests a similar shift toward specialization (Goldberg & Perry-Jenkins, 2007; Goldberg, Downing, & Sauck, 2008; Reimann, 1997), although it appears to be more temporary and less extreme than for heterosexual couples (Goldberg et al., 2008; Goldberg et al., 2012; Johnson & O'Connor, 2004; Patterson et al., 2004). Much needed are long-term longitudinal studies that follow same-sex couples over time and across various life transitions and stages (e.g., parenthood, the empty nest, retirement), to ascertain how, when, and under which conditions housework load and division change. As VanEvery (1997) asserted, "We should develop methods of addressing the changing abilities of members of the household with age, illness, etc., examining how these are incorporated into the division of labour" (p. 419).

Existing studies of housework in same-sex couples do not consider the possibility of other household members, such as siblings, roommates, or even other intimate partners. Our goal of understanding how housework is negotiated in same-sex couples, and how meaning-making processes surrounding housework occur in same-sex couples, could certainly be expanded by considering the role of key "others" in these negotiations. For example, same-sex couples in open relationships (e.g., polyamorous couples; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2010) may enact labor arrangements that further disrupt and complicate gendered meaning systems attached to paid and unpaid labor. What is the meaning of housework when it is being divided up among three or more individuals? How does the meaning and negotiation of housework vary depending on whether the intimate relationship system is made up of members of just one gender or both genders—or members who identify as neither male nor female, but as transgender or gender queer?

We also know almost nothing about the experiences of bisexual individuals, who may have experience in relationships with people of both genders, with regard to housework. Of interest is how bisexual individuals experience the negotiation and division of housework differently in same-sex versus heterosexual

relationships. For example, do they experience or perceive their own gender and gender identity differently in these two relational contexts? What types of challenges do they experience in dividing or performing housework in the two contexts? These are fascinating questions ripe for investigation.

Finally, although some of the studies of same-sex couples' division of labor do include gay male couples (Carrington, 1999; Goldberg et al., 2012; Kurdek, 1993, 2007), most of the research in this area has focused solely on lesbian couples. Much more research is needed to enhance our understanding of how housework functions and is negotiated in male same-sex couples. A study by Natalier (2003) of male roommates (not couples) found a tendency for the men to "do gender" in the absence of women, whereby they rejected responsibility for housework and defined housework as marginal to their daily lives. As Natalier observed, "They rarely feel that it is . . . up to them to ensure their home is tidy and food is on the table. These men behave as though they are husbands even in the absence of women who might act as wives" (p. 265). Although the existing data on gay male couples do not suggest that they reject responsibility for housework (Carrington, 1999), they may nevertheless struggle more than their female counterparts with certain aspects of housework, particularly if they grew up in fairly traditional households in which their heterosexual fathers strongly rejected housework as feminine. Perhaps gay male couples are more likely than lesbian couples to seek out outside help with housework (e.g., a housekeeper, cleaning services) not only because they make more money than lesbian couples, on average (Badgett, 1997; Gates & Ost, 2004), but precisely because this outsourcing enables them to neutralize or altogether avoid negative or uncomfortable feelings surrounding the performance of feminine-typed housework. Alternatively, (some) gay men may be less likely than lesbian couples to struggle with the division of housework, as it may feel less "loaded" with meaning—that is, its symbolism as a devalued form of labor is not as personally meaningful for them, given their (male, privileged) position in the gender system. In summary, we need research that explores, in depth, the meaning and negotiation of housework in male same-sex couples specifically.

CONCLUSION

The gendered nature of housework is both illuminated and eclipsed in the context of same-sex couples. By studying same-sex couples' enactment of and perspectives on housework, we gain a more nuanced understanding of how housework is defined and redefined in different relational contexts. We can see more clearly the deeply institutionalized nature of gender, as it is reflected and maintained through housework—but we can also glimpse possibilities for (re)imagining and (re)visioning the meaning of housework (Goldberg, 2009). Furthermore, we gain insight not only into how gender is done and undone via housework but also into the relational, social, and temporal conditions under which such "doing" and "undoing" are more likely. Finally, we can see firsthand the impossibility of dichotomizing housework as gendered or nongendered, as equal or unequal, as feminine or masculine. In the same-sex couple context, the meaning and relevance of such dichotomies are upended. Indeed, as Gabb (2005) argued, "the undoing and redefining of gender is not conjoined to a feminist ethic of egalitarian parenting, although it may coexist in this form in some households" (p. 590). In other words, egalitarianism is not the equivalent of undoing gender, and nor is a segregated division of labor necessarily the equivalent of inequality. Thus, the study of housework in same-sex couples does little to simplify our understanding of housework, but it does much to illuminate the complexities and contradictions inherent within this area of study.

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