

Gender, Power, and Parenthood: Predictors of Relationship Satisfaction Among Women Partnered With Women vs. Men

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Abstract

Women in different-gender relationships do more household labor than their partners, which is linked with lower relationship satisfaction. These dynamics are influenced by parental status, with mothers doing more household labor than women without children, and partner gender, such that unequal labor division arrangements is more negatively related to satisfaction for women partnered men than women partnered with women. A sample of cisgender women ($N = 227$) in long-term romantic relationships with women ($n = 102$) or men ($n = 125$) were surveyed on their division of household labor, their degree of couple decision-making power, and their relationship satisfaction. Findings revealed that mothers in different-gender couples bear a significantly greater household labor burden compared to any other group in our sample, including mothers partnered with women and women without children. Group path analysis revealed that this labor division imbalance negatively related to women's relationship satisfaction. Moreover, decision-making power was a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction for all groups, except mothers partnered with men. Findings shed light on the manifestation of gender roles in relationships when considering both partner gender and parental status.

Keywords

gender roles, relationship quality, parents, LGBTQIA+, labor division

Women partnered with men in the United States continue to be responsible for the bulk of domestic labor, such as cooking and cleaning (Sanchez et al., 2012), even when both members are employed full-time (Ervin et al., 2022). Moreover, men's share of unpaid labor in the household has increased at a much slower rate than women's engagement in paid labor outside of the household (England et al., 2020). This unequal labor division is stable over time and across relationships—women in partnerships with men consistently do more of the household chores across all of their romantic relationships in their lifetime (Ophir, 2022). Despite younger generations striving for more egalitarian relationships, emerging adult women partnered with men typically do more household chores and perceive the division of labor in their relationship to be unfair (Charbonneau et al., 2021). These differences in the roles people adopt at home are influenced by heteronormative gender roles in which men place greater importance on their professional careers while women are left to juggle both unpaid and paid labor demands (Coltrane & Shih, 2010).

The disproportionate share of unpaid labor carried by women compared to men can be understood as a performance of gender enacted by both partners. The “doing gender” lens argues that gender is performed through the

behaviors people adopt and their identification with binary gender roles (West & Zimmerman, 1987). In essence, romantic partners “do gender” in their relationship by dividing unpaid and paid labor among themselves based on what members of a gender “ought” to do, reinforcing each partner's femininity and masculinity through household behaviors (Christopher, 2024). For instance, women may reinforce their identity by “doing” socially constructed “feminine” tasks, such as cooking and cleaning, more than their men counterparts (Cerrato & Cifre, 2018). Using a gender performance lens, this study considers household labor division as a manifestation of gender roles and examines how these labor patterns are related to decision-making power and relationship quality. We specifically investigated how these relations may differ among women partnered with women or men.

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Traditional gender norms have also been found to affect people in same-gender unions, as individuals of all gender identities enact their gender through the behaviors they adopt in romantic relationships (Goldberg, 2013). For example, men in same-gender couples divide labor differently than women in same-gender partnerships, suggesting differences in adopted labor norms based on gender identity (van der Vleuten et al., 2021). Specifically, although same-gender couples generally divide unpaid labor more equally than different-gender couples, women in same-gender couples typically have more equal labor arrangements than men in same-gender couples (van der Vleuten et al., 2021). Importantly, this does not necessarily translate to a stereotypical heteronormative framework in same-gender couples with one “feminine” partner and one “masculine” partner (Downing & Goldberg, 2011). Rather, same-gender couples navigate labor division in unique ways that is at times influenced by gender norms, but that often transcends heteronormative and traditional scripts to queer household tasks (Downing & Goldberg, 2011).

These findings suggest mixed patterns of decision-making and negotiation related to how paid and unpaid labor is divided. When it comes to gendered domesticity, same- and different-gender couples discuss and perform these tasks differently, with varied impact on relationship quality (Goldberg, 2013). In the following section, we outline the ways in which research has assessed the specific conditions and effects of unpaid labor division for same- and different-gender couples. Although the present study investigates differences between women partnered with women and women partnered with men, we also cite and draw from literature focused specifically on sexual orientation (e.g., lesbian women). We recognize that the present research sample and goals related to partner gender (i.e., woman vs. man) overlap with, but are distinct from, research on sexual identity.

Same- and Different-Gender Couples and Household Labor Division

Inequalities in unpaid household labor are linked with relationship challenges and lowered satisfaction—particularly for women partnered with men (Waddell et al., 2021). Although many couples of women and men recognize that their labor arrangements are unfair to women, household labor inequalities continue to exist, with detrimental links to relationship quality. When women coupled with men do the lion’s share of the unpaid labor, they tend to feel less satisfied and view greater problems in their relationship (Waddell et al., 2021). Unequal labor division arrangements for women partnered with men are also linked with poorer mental health—likely due to the cognitive load that ensues from taking on the bulk of domestic labor, often in addition to full-time employment (Piovani & Aydiner-Avsar, 2021).

Although unequal distributions of labor contribute directly to satisfaction, research has also suggested that perceptions and attitudes related to labor division are important to consider

when predicting satisfaction for women partnered with men. Among younger people in different-gender relationships, unequal division of unpaid labor influenced women’s reduced perceptions of fairness, in turn increasing frustration with men romantic partners (Charbonneau et al., 2021). For instance, women experienced more relationship conflict when their men partners viewed household labor as an expected and natural component of a woman’s role in relationships (Trübner, 2022). This suggests that the negative relation between unequal division of household tasks and relationship quality among women partnered with men is influenced by the pressure and expectations they experience to perform certain labor-intensive roles at home.

Outside of different-gender unions, research suggests same-gender couples are more egalitarian, as unpaid labor tends to be more equally distributed among partners (Smart et al., 2017). Women in same-gender relationships note that their division of unpaid labor evolves and changes depending on partners’ availability and needs, rather than remaining fixed based on gendered expectations (Kelly & Hauck, 2015). These unpaid labor arrangements are thus discussed frequently, with same-gender partners making decisions together about how best to divide housework (Esmail, 2010). Although perceptions of labor division tend to be different depending on partners’ gender, dividing unpaid and paid labor remains a heteronormative and gendered enactment rooted in cultural ideas about what men and women “ought” to do (Goldberg, 2013). For instance, same-gender couples in countries with greater gender equality tend to divide household labor more equally than couples in countries that have more traditional gender norms—suggesting the impact of culture on gendered behaviors in the couple (van der Vleuten et al., 2021).

Unlike couples comprised of women and men, when there is an unequal division of labor within a same-gender relationship, this is not necessarily linked to lowered relationship satisfaction (Van der Vleuten et al., 2021). Specifically, women in romantic relationships with women tend to perceive their partnership as fairer than women partnered with men (Brewster, 2017), irrespective of actual labor division (Van der Vleuten et al., 2021), while also being more satisfied (Savage & Barringer, 2023). A potential explanation for this difference in relationship satisfaction may be explained by the degree to which women are constrained to perform certain domestic roles and engage in household labor in gendered ways (Downing & Goldberg, 2011; Esmail, 2010).

Doing gender by engaging in household chores may be particularly salient for women in partnerships with men (vs. women) who often align their roles more closely with traditional norms (Bauer, 2016). For instance, one study found that, from their first dates, heterosexual individuals often adhered to traditional sexual scripts, as both parties expected women and men to take on different roles (Eaton & Rose, 2011); however, these traditional gender roles are often rejected in same-gender courtship (Lamont, 2017).

This type of gender complementarity transpires throughout different-gender relationships, as women and men continue to behave based on gendered norms (Kornrich et al., 2013). Specifically, when different-gender couples adhere to the gendered norm of men being the main financial contributor of their household, women engage in more household labor—but the reverse is not true (Lazarus & Mandel, 2023). That is, when women in different-gender relationships are the “breadwinner” of their couple, they still do more household labor than men partners (Mandel et al., 2021). Hence, women partnered with men may engage in more household labor to reinforce feminine norms, while men may avoid this same labor to reinforce masculine norms, even when they have more time availability than their woman partner (Mandel et al., 2021; West & Zimmerman, 1987). In same-gender relationships, however, the relation between paid and unpaid labor remains linear, as partners share paid and unpaid labor more equally (Lazarus & Mandel, 2023). Parental status may also influence inequalities in household labor division, which we discuss below in conjunction with partner gender.

Parenting in Same- and Different-Gender Relationships

The presence of children can exacerbate inequalities in different-gender relationships. In general, relationship quality tends to wane when heterosexual romantic partners become parents (Mitnick et al., 2009). This is partly due to conflicts related to childcare and household labor division (Waddell et al., 2021) which, among other things, can increase the occurrence of intimate partner aggression (Wong et al., 2021). In addition to doing more childcare than their partners, mothers coupled with men also tend to do a greater share of household chores than their counterparts who do not have children (Frank & Frenette, 2021). This greater household burden comes with consequences for relationship quality for mothers partnered with men—including lowered relationship quality (Carlson et al., 2016) and reduced sexual desire (Harris et al., 2022).

Parenting and expectations related to childcare are negotiated differently by same- and different-gender couples (Downing & Goldberg, 2011; Goldberg & Perry-Jenkins, 2007). In terms of household labor, couples with two mothers continue to divide tasks equally across the transition to parenthood and often actively challenge gender norms by engaging in a variety of childcare and household tasks that may not be gender-congruent (Goldberg & Perry-Jenkins, 2007). On the other hand, different-gender partners often “do” gender by prioritizing housework and childcare for women, and professional work for men (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Taken together, cultural expectations of what mothers and fathers ought to do at home may create fixed roles for different-gender partners. This is particularly true for women, who hold less dominance over such roles and who

experience lowered relationship quality (Carlson et al., 2016; Croft et al., 2019; Frank & Frenette, 2021). In a longitudinal study of couples transitioning to parenthood, mothers partnered with women experienced greater congruence between expected and realized childcare labor division, whereas mothers partnered with men engaged in more childcare than expected (Ascigil et al., 2021). In addition, mothers partnered with men experienced less relationship satisfaction in response to this incongruence, while women partnered with women had no detectable difference in relationship satisfaction when they did more baby care than expected (Ascigil et al., 2021). This once again reiterates the pattern that is found related to household labor division: Unequal childcare is detrimental for different-gender partners, but that is not always the case for women in same-gender unions (Brewster, 2017). We argue that such differences in relationship quality may be due to the differences in decision-making between same- and different-gender couples.

Decision-Making in Same- and Different-Gender Couples

Traditional heteronormative norms about gender in different-gender relationships not only dictate men’s roles outside of the home and women’s role inside the home, men are also expected to (and often do) hold greater dominance and power in the relationship (Eaton & Rose, 2011). For instance, when both partners work remotely, a father’s working hours and office space are respected, whereas mothers’ work/life boundaries become blurry—with partners prioritizing women’s caregiver role and men’s professional career (Parry, 2025). Additionally, under marital power theory, one way that power manifests in romantic relationship occurs via invisible power—when partners in a couple implicitly agree that power imbalances between men and women are inevitable or inherent (Komter, 1989; Lamont, 2020). In other words, partners in different-gender relationships may have unspoken beliefs that gendered roles at home, particularly involving women doing the bulk of the housework, is an unavoidable part of relationships between women and men (Lamont, 2020; Wong & Daminger, 2024).

Informed by this invisible power, decisions related to household labor thus tend to be inferred from traditional gender norms with little room for negotiation (Walters & Whitehouse, 2012). Challenging traditional gender roles can thus be particularly difficult for women partnered with men due to gendered expectations of who holds power and agency. For instance, married mothers of young children partnered with men must counter gendered norms of submissiveness and engage in assertiveness to convince their husbands to more equally share household tasks (Mannino & Deutsch, 2007). Cultural acceptance of these unbalanced roles may also contribute to their fixedness, as women in different-gender couples who challenge traditional norms

often encounter backlash (Vandello et al., 2013; Vink et al., 2023). Similarly, women in relationships with men tend to be more open about challenging gender roles and acting as a main financial contributor in their family when they believe that prioritize caretaking is a value held by most men (Croft et al., 2019).

Decisions about household labor and gender roles tend to be negotiated differently by same- and different-gender couples. Women in same-gender partnerships tend to have open discussions about labor division, while different-gender couples often rely on implicit gendered expectations (Esmail, 2010; Goldberg & Perry-Jenkins, 2007). Importantly, discussions about gender roles particularly relate to same-gender partners' perceptions of relationship fairness and satisfaction (Brewster, 2017). For those in same-gender partnerships, relying solely on gender norms to divide household chores is impossible, making discussion of household labor and engagement in gender incongruent tasks more common (Goldberg, 2013). Particularly, although some women in same-gender couples share each task equally, it is also common for each same-gender partner to specialize in certain tasks (Brewster, 2017). This specialization is frequently the result of negotiations and discussions based on partners' time availability and skills, often challenging gendered expectations by queering the process of doing gender at home (Kelly & Hauck, 2015). Women in same-gender couples thus challenge heteronormative expectations of gender roles and uneven power dynamics in couples (Napier et al., 2023; Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007), although these unspoken beliefs tend to be the norm in different-gender couples.

Current Study

The current study aimed to investigate how the division of unpaid labor and perceptions of decision-making power contribute to relationship satisfaction among women partnered with women vs. women partnered with men. First, in line with previous research (Bauer, 2016; Brewster, 2017; Goldberg et al., 2012; Lazarus & Mandel, 2023), we expected that women partnered with men would engage in more unpaid labor compared to women partnered with women.

H1: Women partnered with men would do more household labor than women partnered with women.

Secondly, we argue that one potential explanation for this phenomenon is that women partnered with women are able to "do gender" with more latitude than women partnered with men through discussion of roles (Brewster, 2017; Goldberg, 2013). Specifically, women in same-gender couples tend to hold greater agency than women in different-gender couples (Hsu et al., 2021) and have more frequent and evolving discussions about dividing unpaid labor (Esmail, 2010; Mannino & Deutsch, 2007; Waismel-Manor et al., 2021). Hence, we

expected that women in same-gender couples would experience greater decision-making power in their relationship than women in different-gender relationships.

H2: Women partnered with men would experience less decision-making power than women partnered with women.

Also found in previous research (Brewster, 2017; Savage & Barringer, 2023), we expected women partnered with women would be more satisfied in their relationship than women partnered with men.

H3: Relationship satisfaction would differ across partner gender, such that women partnered with men would report lower satisfaction than women partnered with women.

In terms of factors associated with relationship satisfaction, we expected that the ways in which partners divide household labor in their relationship would be associated with relationship satisfaction. Specifically, previous research consistently demonstrates that women who engage in more labor than their partners often feel less satisfied in their relationships than women in partnerships with more equitable labor division (Carlson, 2022; Cerrato & Cifre, 2018; Waddell et al., 2021). Although household labor division is important to all couples, sharing tasks equally may be particularly valuable among different-gender couples. Specifically, partners in same-gender unions tend to understand the dynamic nature of household tasks and experience less relationship dissatisfaction when labor division is unequal as they continue to view their relationship as fair (Ascigil et al., 2021; van der Vleuten et al., 2021). Thus, we expected partner gender to moderate the relation between household labor division and relationship satisfaction.

H4: Labor division would be related to relationship satisfaction, such that women who engaged in more household labor than their partners would have lower relationship satisfaction.

H5: The relation between labor division and relationship satisfaction would vary by partner gender, such that the association between labor equality and relationship satisfaction would be stronger for women partnered with men than women partnered with women.

We also expected that relationship decision-making power would be positively related to relationship satisfaction, as couples who share relational power often tend to be more satisfied than couples with uneven power dynamics (Brick et al., 2022). In terms of partner gender, women tend to discuss and revisit household labor tasks with their women partners (Goldberg, 2013), although these roles are more fixed when partnered with men (Lamont, 2020). In line

with the egalitarian power-sharing patterns that characterize same-gender couples (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007), decision-making power may be more salient for women in same-gender couples than for women partnered with men.

H6: Decision-making power would be positively related to relationship satisfaction, such that women with more decision-making power in their partnership would report greater relationship satisfaction.

H7: The relation between decision-making power and relationship satisfaction would vary by partner gender, such that the association between decision-making power and relationship satisfaction would be stronger for women partnered with women than women partnered with men.

In light of the exacerbated patterns of unequal labor division that occur when children are present in the household (Mitnick et al., 2009; Wong et al., 2021), we also explored whether having children interacts with partner gender to impact these relations, as mothers may take on more of the household labor than women without children.

RQ1: In what ways does parental status relate to household labor division, decision-making power, and relationship satisfaction, and do these associations vary by partner gender?

Method

Data Collection and Participant Demographics

A total of 230 participants were surveyed between May and June, 2023 using the crowdsourcing platform Prolific. Inclusion criteria for this study included the following: 18 years of age or older, living in the US, a cisgender woman, in a long-term relationship for at least one year, and living with their current romantic partner. Given recommendations for structural equation modeling analyses (Kyriazos, 2018), we aimed to recruit at least 200 participants for reliable estimates in our group path analyses. We purposefully oversampled same-gender partners so that about half of women participants were partnered with a woman ($n = 102$) and the other half reported that their partner was a man ($n = 128$). Multivariate outliers were screened using Mahalanobis distance at a cutoff of $p < .001$ across the variables of interest. We found three cases exceeding this limit. Inspections of these cases revealed unusual response patterns suggesting inattention, and they were thus subsequently removed. After outlier removal, our final sample ($N = 227$) was about equally distributed between parents (53%, $n = 120$) and non-parents (47%, $n = 107$).

Participants were asked about their sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, their own and their partner's gender, their own

and their partner's employment status, and their own and their partner's income. In terms of relationship-level variables, we asked participants about their relationship status, relationship length, and the number of children they had. Most of the sample was married ($n = 151$), and the average relationship length was about 12.1 years. In terms of race, over two-thirds of participants identified as white ($n = 163$), 5.7% identified as Asian ($n = 13$), 22% identified as Black or African American ($n = 22$), 1.3% identified as Native American, Indigenous, or Alaska native ($n = 3$); and 3% identified as native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, or another race ($n = 7$). A small portion of participants ($n = 19$) did not report their racial background, and some ($n = 5$) did not report their ethnicity. Most of the sample was not Hispanic, Latine, or of Spanish origin ($n = 196$). Among women partnered with women, 74.5% ($n = 76$) identified as lesbian, 18.6% ($n = 19$) identified as bisexual, and 6.8% ($n = 7$) identified as another sexual orientation. For women partnered with men, 84% ($n = 105$) identified as heterosexual, 15.2% ($n = 19$) identified as bisexual, and one participant identified as another sexual orientation. Additional demographic information can be found in Table 1.

Measures

Relationship Satisfaction. To measure relationship satisfaction, participants completed the short Couples Satisfaction Index ($\alpha = 0.94$; Funk & Rogge, 2007). This short survey consists of four items, including: "Please indicate the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship." Items were rated on a 0 = *extremely unhappy* to 5 = *extremely happy* scale. Other items (e.g., "How rewarding is your relationship with your partner?") were rated on a 0 = *not at all* to 5 = *completely* scale. Items were summed, ranging from 0 to 20, with higher scores suggesting greater relationship satisfaction. This assessment of relationship satisfaction has been found to highly correlate with other relationship measures, supporting its convergent validity, while also being more precise than longer relationship satisfaction scales (Funk & Rogge, 2007). Item responses demonstrated excellent internal consistency, $\alpha = 0.94$.

Household Labor Division. To assess how participants divided household labor, we asked participants to rate who usually does the following tasks in their relationship: grocery shopping, cleaning, doing the laundry, cooking, and cleaning up after dinner/doing dishes. The selected tasks were adapted from several previous studies that used similar measures of household labor division (Shechory & Ziv, 2007; van der Vleuten et al., 2021). We specifically selected tasks that are core components of household labor in terms of time and routine (Coltrane, 2000), as these tasks have the greatest potential for being linked to relationship satisfaction (Waddell et al., 2021; Whillans et al., 2025). Secondly, these tasks map onto traditionally scripted

Table 1. Demographic Information of the Sample ($n = 227$).

	Partner = Woman ($n = 102$)	Partner = Man ($n = 125$)
Relationship Status		
Partnered	34 (33.3%)	24 (19.2%)
Engaged	13 (12.7%)	6 (4.8%)
Married	55 (53.9%)	95 (76.0%)
Sexual Orientation		
Heterosexual	0 (0.0%)	105 (84.0%)
Lesbian	76 (74.5%)	0 (0.0%)
Bisexual	19 (18.6%)	19 (15.2%)
Other	7 (6.8%)	1 (0.8%)
Ethnicity		
Hispanic, Latine, or Spanish Origin	16 (15.7%)	10 (8.0%)
Not Hispanic, Latine, or Spanish Origin	86 (84.3%)	110 (88.0%)
Race		
Black	5 (4.9%)	8 (6.4%)
Asian	10 (9.8%)	12 (9.6%)
Native American	2 (2.0%)	1 (0.8%)
Pacific Islander	1 (1.0%)	0 (0.0%)
White	75 (73.5%)	88 (70.4%)
Mixed/Other	3 (2.9%)	3 (2.4%)
Employment		
Employed Full-Time	8 (7.8%)	57 (45.6%)
Employed Part-Time	19 (18.6%)	26 (20.8%)
Unemployed or Retired	17 (16.6%)	36 (28.8%)
Income (Subject)		
Less than \$25,000	23 (22.5%)	48 (38.4%)
\$25,000–\$75,000	59 (57.8%)	47 (37.6%)
\$75,000–\$125,000	12 (11.8%)	8 (6.4%)
More than \$125,000	8 (7.8%)	14 (11.2%)
Income (Subject's Partner)		
Less than \$25,000	17 (16.7%)	15 (12.0%)
\$25,000–\$75,000	51 (50.0%)	53 (42.4%)
\$75,000–\$125,000	24 (23.5%)	27 (21.6%)
More than \$125,000	10 (9.8%)	22 (17.6%)
Children		
0	60 (58.8%)	47 (37.6%)
1	13 (12.7%)	24 (19.2%)
2	17 (16.7%)	32 (25.6%)
3+	11 (10.8%)	22 (17.6%)

Note. Some participants did not answer all demographic information, hence some percentage sums amount to less than 100%.

expectations of women's roles at home (Goldberg, 2013). These stereotypically feminine tasks particularly align with our theoretical claim that household labor tends to be divided more unequally among different-gender partnerships because the bulk of the household labor is culturally coded as feminine, supporting this scale's content validity (Lazarus & Mandel, 2023; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Participants responded to each of these five items on the following 5-point scale: $-2 = \text{almost always my partner}$, $-1 = \text{usually my partner}$, $0 = \text{about equal between me and my partner}$, $1 = \text{usually me}$, and $2 = \text{almost always me}$. Summed scores ranged from -10 to 10 , with negative scores indicating that the participant does less housework than their partners, zero scores indicating equal division of chores among each partner, and positive scores indicating the participant does more labor at home than their partner. We provided participants with the option of noting whether the specific household chore was typically conducted by someone other than the subject or the subject's partner (e.g., having a housekeeper cleaning one's house). If a participant selected this option, that item was removed from their final composite score. Internal consistency reliability (e.g., Cronbach's α) was not calculated for this measure because it functions as a summative index rather than a latent construct scale. The five items reflect distinct, concrete household tasks that need not be highly correlated to validly represent overall household labor division—similar to life events or daily hassles indexes (see Babbie, 2021; DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021). Therefore, the composite score represents the aggregate extent to which participants perform more or less of the household labor relative to their partner, rather than a single underlying dimension.

Decision-Making Power. We used the Decision-Dominance subscale of the Sexual Relationship Power scale (Pulerwitz et al., 2000) to assess the degree to which participants made decisions in their relationship. Specifically, participants were asked to rate who usually has more say about eight types of decisions, including “*whose friends to go out with*” and “*when you talk about serious things*.” Average scores were calculated from participants' answers on a 5-point rating scale which ranged from $1 = \text{almost always my partner}$ to $5 = \text{almost always me}$. Although the combined Sexual Relationship Scale measure was not used in full here, the individual use of the subscales from this assessment have been recommended based on their reliability (Pulerwitz et al., 2000).

We chose to use this entire subscale to capture decision-making power patterns among women partnered with women and women partnered with men. Although the present study is particularly focused on investigating how household chores are negotiated in the couple, using this full subscale provides a more holistic assessment of relationship power dynamics. Power in romantic relationships is often not domain specific, and partners may perceive power

as more or less salient depending on the domain, such as finances or household chores (Gray-Little & Burks, 1983; Kim et al., 2019). Therefore, using this decision-dominance subscale provides a more reliable measure of decision-making power in couples. We included a specific item on household chores to address particularly how housework is negotiated in the couple while insuring variability and reliability. Internal consistency of the original measure was acceptable, $\alpha = .77$, consistent with prior studies reporting alphas of .78 (Campbell et al., 2009) and .83 (Knudsen et al., 2008). Internal consistency in this study was similar with the additional household chore item, $\alpha = .77$.

Data Analysis

T-tests were used to assess the differences in mean household labor division (H1) and decision-making power (H2) among women partnered with women and women partnered with men. We then ran a hierarchical regression model regressing relationship satisfaction (H3), labor division (H4), decision-making power (H6) on partner gender. We also examined how partner gender would interact with labor division (partner gender $\times$ labor division) and decision-making power (partner gender $\times$ decision) to affect relationship satisfaction (H5 and H7). RQ1 was tested using 2×2 factorial ANOVAs to assess division of labor differences by partner gender and parental status as well as group path analysis. We specifically analyzed the theorized model among parents and non-parents to assess how having children influenced relationship satisfaction predictors based on the factorial ANOVA results. We conducted further ANOVA analyses assessing how the four groups of women (mothers partnered with men, mothers partnered with women, non-mothers partnered with men, and non-mothers partnered with women) differed on a variety of variables related to gender norms and labor division to better explain our theoretical model findings.

Results

On average, women in this sample reported doing more household labor than their partner ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 3.79$, range = -10 to 10), were relatively satisfied in their relationships ($M = 15.83$, $SD = 4.19$, range = 0 to 20), and reported decision-making power to be about equal among partners ($M = 3.04$, $SD = 0.35$, range = 1 to 5). We further investigated how these variables interacted with partner gender and parental status to better understand how labor division and motherhood influenced satisfaction.

Differences by Partner Gender

Mean Differences. *T*-tests were conducted to assess differences in unpaid labor division and decision-making power

among women partnered with women and women partnered with men. A sensitivity analysis revealed the minimum effect size detectable for mean differences among partner gender groups was $d = 0.39$, a benchmark we used to test Hypotheses 1 and 2. Women partnered with women did significantly less unpaid labor ($M = 1.74$, $SD = 3.52$) than women partnered with men ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 3.80$), $t(225) = 3.90$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.52$, supporting Hypothesis 1 (Levene's test confirmed homogeneity of variance across groups, $F(1,225) = 1.78$, $p = .18$). Although partner gender did yield different scores in terms of decision-making power, the direction of this relation was in contrast to Hypothesis 2 (Levene's test confirmed homogeneity of variance across groups, $F(1,225) = 1.53$, $p = .22$): women partnered with men reported greater decision-making power ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 0.37$) than women partnered with women ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 0.30$), $t(225) = -3.75$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.50$.

The Moderating Role of Partner Gender. Hierarchical linear regression was used to examine predictors of relationship satisfaction. We specifically entered all focal predictors in the first step: partner gender (H3), unpaid labor division (H4), and decision-making power (H6). The second model included the interaction term for gender and unpaid labor division (H5), while the last step added the interaction term for partner gender and decision-making power (H7). We made the decision to introduce interactions separately to assess whether each interaction term significantly explained more variance in relationship satisfaction. Decision-making power was centered for interpretability while labor division remained in its original scale to better interpret directionality. Partner gender was dummy coded such that 0 = partnered with a man and 1 = partnered with a woman. A sensitivity analysis revealed that the smallest R^2 detectable for five predictors for this sample was 0.05 and results from these analyses remained unchanged when controlling for relationship length, marital status, each partner's work hours, and number of children. All model parameters can be found in Table 2.

The first step of the model, which only included the three focal predictors without any interactions, explained about 13% of the variance in relationship satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.13$, $F[3,223] = 10.67$, $p < .001$). The second step of the model, which included the interaction between partner gender and labor division, did not significantly explain more variance in relationship satisfaction ($\Delta R^2 < .001$, $\Delta F[1, 122] = 0.12$, $p = .73$). However, the final model, including the interaction between decision-making power and partner gender, did explain about 3% more variance in satisfaction, for a total of 16% explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = .03$, $\Delta F[1, 221] = 8.28$, $p < .001$). We thus interpreted this final model, see Figure 1 ($R^2 = .16$, $F[5, 221] = 8.27$, $p < .001$).

Contrary to Hypothesis 5, partner gender did not moderate the relation between labor division and relationship satisfaction ($B = 0.02$, $SE = 0.14$, $\beta = -0.01$, $p = .88$). Although

Table 2. Regression Model Comparisons Predicting Relationship Satisfaction.

	<i>B</i>	95% CI		<i>SE</i>	β	R^2	ΔR^2
		Lower	Upper				
Model 1						0.13***	
Intercept	16.41***	0.44	15.54	17.28			
Unpaid Labor Division	−.29***	0.07	0.15	.43	−0.27		
Decision-Making Power	2.99***	0.77	1.47	4.51	0.25		
Partner Gender	.54	0.56	−0.56	1.64	0.06		
Model 2						0.13***	<0.001
Intercept	16.49***	0.5	15.51		16.49		
Unpaid Labor Division	−0.31***	0.09	0.13	0.28	−0.31		
Decision-Making Power	2.97***	0.78	1.45	0.25	2.97		
Partner Gender (PG)	0.41	0.67	−0.92	0.05	0.41		
PG × Labor Division	0.05	0.15	−0.34	−0.03	0.05		
Model 3						0.16***	0.03**
Intercept	16.62***	0.49	15.65	17.58			
Unpaid Labor Division	−.32***	0.09	0.14	.5	−0.29		
Decision-making power	1.42	0.94	−0.42	3.26	0.12		
Partner Gender (PG)	0.62	0.67	−0.69	1.94	0.07		
PG × Labor Division	.02	0.14	−0.31	.26	0.01		
PG × Decision-making power	4.65**	1.62	1.46	7.83	0.23		

Note. Partner gender is dummy coded, 0 = partnered with man, 1 = partnered with woman. Standard errors are based on unstandardized estimates.

Hypothesis 6 was not supported, as decision-making power did not directly relate to relationship satisfaction ($B = 1.42$, $SE = 0.94$, $\beta = 0.12$, $p = .13$), partner gender did significantly moderate the association between decision-making power and satisfaction, supporting Hypothesis 7 ($B = 4.65$, $SE = 1.62$, $\beta = 0.23$, $p < .001$). Taking a closer look at the moderating effect of partner gender, we tested the relation between decision-making power and relationship satisfaction at both levels of partner gender. Supporting Hypothesis 7, no effect of decision-making power was found on relationship satisfaction for women partnered with men ($B = 1.42$, $SE = 0.94$, $\beta = 0.23$, $p = .13$). Decision-making power was positively related to relationship satisfaction for women partnered with women, supporting Hypothesis 7, ($B = 6.07$, $SE = 1.32$, $\beta = 0.35$, $p < .001$). In sum, we found that having greater agency in one's romantic relationship, particularly in terms of having the power to make decisions in one's relationship, was related to the relationship quality of women partnered with women, but not women partnered with men.

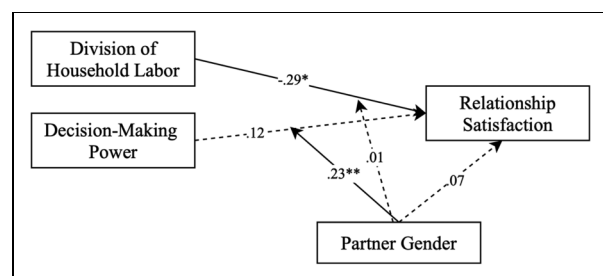
Considering Parental Status

Mean Differences in Labor Division. Due to the ways in which children may affect the enactment of gender roles and labor division (Frank & Frenette, 2021), we further investigated the interaction between partner gender and parental status on variables of interest related to household labor (RQ8). ANOVAS revealed both simple effects of partner gender ($F[1, 223] = 10.27, p = .002, \eta^2 = 0.04$) and

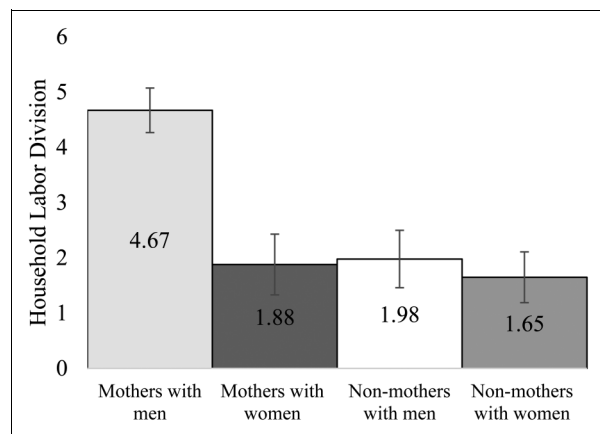
parental status, ($F[1, 223]=9.02, p=.003, \eta^2=0.04$) on unpaid labor division, as well as an interaction effect ($F[1, 223]=6.39, p=.01, \eta^2=0.03$; Levene's test confirmed homogeneity of variance across groups, ($F[3,223]=1.30, p=.27$). Specifically, despite partner gender not being a significant predictor in the above regression models, estimated marginal means suggested that women partnered with men reported doing significantly more unpaid labor ($M=3.32, SE=0.33$) than women partnered with women ($M=1.77, SE=0.36$), $t(223)=3.20, p=.002, d=0.44$. Similarly, women with children had significantly higher labor division estimated marginal means ($M=3.27, SE=0.34$) than women without children ($M=1.81, SE=0.35$), $t(223)=-3.00, p=.003, d=-0.41$.

In terms of the interaction effect, simple effects revealed that, among mothers, women partnered with men had significantly

Figure 1. Model for Overall Sample.



Note. Solid lines represent significant effects and dashed lines represent non-significant effects. Standardized model parameters from hierarchical regression analyses (model 4) are depicted. Partner gender is dummy coded, 0 =partnered with man, 1 =partnered with woman.

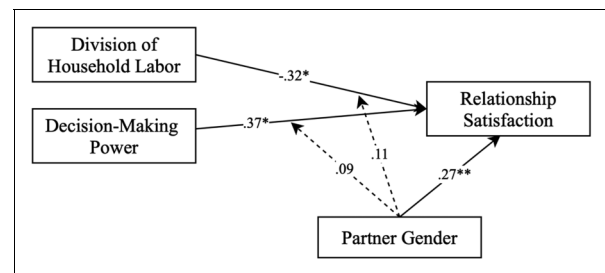
Figure 2. Labor Division Means By Partner Gender $\times$ Parental Status Groups.

Note. Only mothers partnered with men have significantly different means. Household labor division is scored such that higher scores indicate participant doing more labor in relation to their partners.

higher labor division scores ($M=4.67$, $SD=3.85$) than women partnered with women ($M=1.88$, $SD=3.63$), $t(118)=3.86$, $p<.001$, $d=0.73$ (Levene's test confirmed homogeneity of variance across groups, $F(1,118)=0.43$, $p=.41$). However, among women who did not have children, women partnered with men did not have significantly lower labor division scores ($M=1.98$, $SD=3.08$) than women partnered with women ($M=1.65$, $SD=3.46$), $t(105)=-0.51$, $p=.61$ (Levene's test confirmed homogeneity of variance across groups, $F(1,105)=0.85$, $p=.36$). This means that when considering the interaction between partner gender and parental status, only mothers partnered with men did significantly more unpaid labor than any other group of women in this sample (i.e., mothers partnered with women, women without children partnered with men, and women without children partnered with women). We must note that effects found in this 2×2 factorial ANOVA were below the detectable effect size ($\eta^2=0.05$) found in our sensitivity analysis; thus, findings must be interpreted cautiously.

In order to provide full contrast among these four groups of women, we conducted a one-way ANOVA grouping women by both partner gender and parental status, $F(3,223)=-11.00$, $p<.001$, $\eta^2=0.06$. Note that the sensitivity threshold for detectable effect for the smallest cell size, women with women who have children ($n=42$) was found to be $\eta^2=0.06$. Post hoc results revealed that only women who had children and were partnered with men had significantly different labor division scores than mothers partnered with women ($t[223]=4.09$, $p<.001$, $d=.78$), non-mothers partnered with men, ($t[223]=4.09$, $p<.001$, $d=.76$), and non-mothers partnered with women ($t[223]=4.93$, $p<.001$, $d=.85$), see Figure 2.

Theoretical Model by Parental Status. In light of the differences among these four groups of women, we decided to run

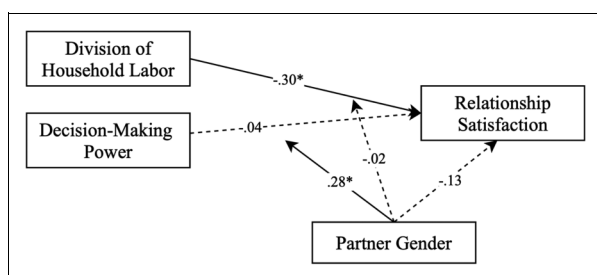
Figure 3. Model for Women without Children.

Note. Solid lines represent significant effects and dashed lines represent non-significant effects. Partner gender is dummy coded, 0 = partnered with man, 1 = partnered with woman.

our theoretical model as a group path analysis model to assess whether these paths were different when divided by parental status. The moderation model pictured in Figure 1 was assessed among women who have children and women who do not, using maximum likelihood and bootstrapping. A model in which regression paths and intercepts were free to vary by parental status fit significantly better than a model that constrained all parameters for both groups, ($\Delta\chi^2[7]=18.75$, $p=.005$). Results from these analyses were similar when controlling for relationship length, marital status, and work hours of each partner. This finding suggests that having children affects the way women view decision-making and labor division in their relationship, with important differences to note among women partnered with women and women partnered with men. Figures 3 and 4 depict standardized model parameters for women without children and women with children, respectively (see Table 3).

Among women who did not have children, partner gender was a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction such that being partnered with a woman was related to greater satisfaction than being partnered with a man ($B=2.01$, $\beta=0.27$, $SE=0.70$, $p=.004$). Decision-making power was the strongest predictor of satisfaction ($B=4.06$, $\beta=0.37$, $SE=1.74$, $p=.02$), but this relation was not moderated by partner gender ($B=1.52$, $\beta=0.09$, $SE=0.75$, $p=.53$). Labor division negatively related to relationship satisfaction, ($B=-0.36$, $\beta=-0.32$, $SE=0.16$, $p=.03$), and this relation did not differ across partner gender, ($B=0.15$, $\beta=0.11$, $SE=0.20$, $p=.45$). These results suggest that although relationship satisfaction is higher for women without children partnered with women, decision-making power functioned similarly for non-mothers partnered with men and non-mothers partnered with women.

For mothers, partner gender did not relate to relationship satisfaction ($B=-1.17$, $\beta=-0.13$, $SE=1.02$, $p=.25$). Labor division was the strongest predictor of relationship satisfaction, such that satisfaction was negatively related to a woman's share of household labor ($B=-0.33$, $\beta=-0.30$, $SE=0.15$, $p=.03$). This relation was not moderated by

Figure 4. Model for Women Who Have Children.

Note. Solid lines represent significant effects and dashed lines represent non-significant effects. Partner gender is dummy coded, 0 = partnered with man, 1 = partnered with woman.

partner gender for mothers ($B = -0.04$, $\beta = -0.02$, $SE = 0.29$, $p = .89$). Although no significant effect of decision-making power on relationship satisfaction was found for mothers ($B = -0.53$, $\beta = -0.04$, $SE = 1.93$, $p = .78$), partner gender was a significant moderator of this relation ($B = 6.78$, $\beta = 0.28$, $SE = 3.14$, $p = .03$). Subsequent simple slope tests revealed no significant relation between decision-making power and satisfaction for women partnered with men ($B = -0.53$, $SE = 1.32$, $p = .69$), but a significant positive slope for women partnered with women ($B = 6.24$, $SE = 2.18$, $p = .01$), see Figure 5. This suggests that, among women who have children, decision-making power is related to relationship quality when partnered with a woman, but not when partnered with a man.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which labor division and decision-making power relate to relationship satisfaction among women in long-term romantic relationships with women or men. We were particularly interested in assessing how parental status and partner gender relate to how women negotiate household labor division in their partnerships. Our findings supported known relations among partner gender, household labor division, and relationship satisfaction for women—while also providing novel findings related to decision-making power and parental status. Specifically, we found that the relation between decision-making power and relationship satisfaction were contingent on two factors: a woman's parental status and the gender of her partner.

Household Labor Division and Relationship Satisfaction

As supported by previous studies (Bauer, 2016), women partnered with men in this sample had more unequal household labor division arrangements than women partnered with women. Additionally, consistent with previous research (Waddell et al., 2021), inequitable household labor division was negatively related to relationship satisfaction. Specifically, women who took on a greater portion of household chores

(e.g., cooking, cleaning the house) than their partner were less satisfied in their relationships.

Although we expected equitable household labor division to be more robustly associated with relationship satisfaction among women partnered with women than women partnered with men, as demonstrated in previous research (Ascigil et al., 2021; Savage & Barringer, 2023; van der Vleuten et al., 2021), this was not the case for our sample. Partner gender did not moderate the relation between household labor division and relationship satisfaction, suggesting that household labor inequalities may relate similarly to women's relationship satisfaction regardless of partner gender. However, women partnered with women did share labor more equally than those partnered with men, suggesting that although unequal arrangements are detrimental to relationship satisfaction for all women, this inequality may be more likely to occur for women partnered with men. Across all analyses, the link between doing more unpaid labor and being less satisfied with one's relationship remained across partner genders—though some women may be more at risk of having unequal arrangements, specifically mothers partnered with men.

When considering parental status, findings revealed unique differences in household labor division *only* for women partnered with men who had children. Mothers partnered with men engaged in more household labor than any other group of women in our sample. This finding suggests that unequal household labor arrangements for women partnered with men often arise once children are present, as found in previous research (Frank & Frenette, 2021; Waddell et al., 2021). Considering the link between unequal labor division and lower relationship quality, mothers partnered with men may more often perceive their relationships negatively due to unpaid labor inequities in their relationships. This finding continues to demonstrate the effect of parental status on heightening unpaid labor inequalities, while also suggesting that this effect may be particularly present among different-gender parents (Brewster, 2017; Goldberg & Perry-Jenkins, 2007).

Decision-Making Power and Satisfaction

Although we expected decision-making to be more strongly associated with relationship satisfaction for women in same-gender couples compared to women in different-gender couples, our findings did not align with this prediction. We unexpectedly found that women partnered with men reported holding more decision-making power than women partnered with women. This pattern may suggest that women partnered with men are the default household manager who oversees children and partner needs, which results in them holding more relational power (Bareket et al., 2021). We must also note that decision-making power means for both groups hovered near the midpoint of this scale—suggesting that most women were in relationships in which decisions were made equally across partners. Previous research has found that many couples view decision-making power to be fairly distributed

Table 3. Relationship Satisfaction Predictors for Women Without and With Children.

	B	95% CI		SE	β
		Lower	Upper		
Group 1: Without children					
Unpaid Labor Division	−0.36*	−0.75	−0.07	0.17	−0.32
Decision-Making Power	4.06*	0.18	7.28	1.82	0.37
Partner Gender (PG)	2.01**	0.68	3.31	0.69	0.27
PG × Decision-Making Power	1.52	−3.13	6.76	2.42	0.09
PG × Labor Division	0.15	−0.25	0.59	0.21	0.11
Group 2: With children					
Unpaid Labor Division	−0.33*	−0.63	−0.07	0.15	−0.30
Decision-Making Power	−0.53	−4.03	2.91	1.82	−0.04
Partner Gender (PG)	−1.17	−3.31	0.76	1.02	−0.13
PG × Decision-Making Power	6.78*	1.7	12.89	2.85	0.28
PG × Labor Division	−0.04	−0.54	0.53	0.28	−0.02

Note. Partner gender is dummy coded, 0 = partnered with man, 1 = partnered with woman. These estimates represent a model in which paths were unconstrained based on parental status. Standard errors are based on bootstrapped unstandardized estimates. The constrained model, in which all paths were forced equal across groups, fit significantly worse than an unconstrained model by parental status ($\Delta\chi^2[7] = 18.75, p = .005$).

in their relationship, in accordance with our findings (Körner & Schütz, 2021).

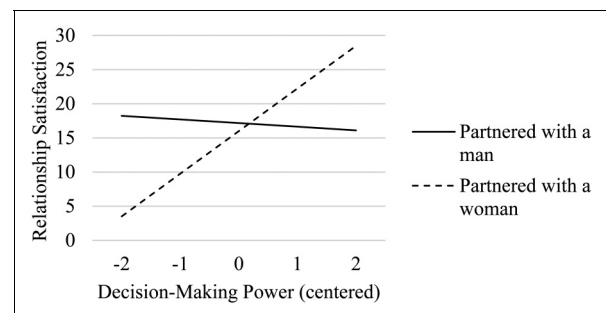
In terms of the relation between decision-making power and relationship satisfaction, findings consistently demonstrated a positive relation between these factors. As expected, women who held more decision-making power within their couples had higher satisfaction scores (Brick et al., 2022). However, analyses that accounted for parental status demonstrated unique differences across parental status and partner gender. For women who did not have children, having increased decision-making power predicted greater relationship satisfaction, regardless of partner gender. Similarly, mothers in same-gender relationships who held more decision-making power had higher satisfaction scores. For mothers partnered with men, however, this pattern did not emerge. That is, decision-making power contributed to relationship satisfaction for all women in our sample, *except* for mothers partnered with men.

Motherhood in Same- and Different-Gender Partnerships

Among mothers in this sample, women partnered with men did not have greater relationship satisfaction when they held more decision-making power, while a positive association between decision-making power and relationship satisfaction occurred for mothers partnered with women. The reasons for this finding are unclear, but it may be that mothers partnered with men carry an intense mental load resulting from heterosexual relationship dynamics. Beyond engaging in the physical acts of household tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and taking care of children—women also take on the bulk of cognitive labor (e.g., anticipating and planning household chores and children's schedules;

[Krstić et al., 2025]) and emotional labor (e.g., monitoring family member's emotional states; Dean et al., 2022). These invisible tasks are pervasive and mentally taxing, influencing the cognitive capacity and well-being of women in partnerships where household labor is unequally divided (Reich-Stiebert et al., 2023). Such mental load is particularly pronounced among mothers partnered with men, who continually manage the care of their partner and children (Callaghan et al., 2024). Therefore, mothers partnered with men may not desire decision-making power in their partnerships, as they are already overburdened with decision-making at the level of household work and childcare.

Additionally, mothers partnered with men may more readily assume a dominant role when it comes to decisions related to the household. In essence, mothers in different-gender partnerships are readily making everyday decisions related to childcare and household labor, and their partners may encourage this pattern by deferring to women for children and household decisions. This decision-making power (or burden) in the domestic sphere may thus leave little

Figure 5. Decision-Making Power Simple Slopes by Partner Gender for Women with Children.

cognitive bandwidth for other types of relationship decisions—such as what activities to do with their partner or when to talk about serious things (two items from the decision-making power scale). Under the assumption that women are better suited for caretaking roles, women partnered with men may hold domestic authority, while men may hold more influence in other aspects of couples' lives (Bareket et al., 2021).

The mothers in same-gender unions in our sample demonstrate that motherhood is not necessarily tied to reduced decision-making power and engagement in greater unpaid labor. This may be due to the less restrictive ways in which traditional gender roles influence queer women (Esmail, 2010; Kelly & Hauck, 2015). Research on lesbian mothers has highlighted the ways in which women in same-gender partnerships understand the link between division of labor and gender norms, consciously detaching their behaviors from traditional ideas of parental gender roles and embracing their own definitions of motherhood (Downing & Goldberg, 2011). Women partnered with men may not understand their parental roles as fluidly as women in same-gender unions, thus constraining them to more strict feminine expectations of how women's behaviors and priorities should change when they become mothers.

Women are often expected to put their parental status above and beyond all other social identities and achieve impossible societal ideals of motherhood—the good mother ideology (Williamson et al., 2023). Mothers, particularly ones partnered with men, are expected to attend to children's needs, plan for their future, and balance paid and unpaid labor, further constricting women who become parents to strict gender roles (Schmidt et al., 2023). Endorsing expectations of women as the inherently “better parent”, an essentialist belief couched within intensive mothering, is linked with women's parental guilt and burnout, as well as life dissatisfaction (C. N. Kim & Kerr, 2024; Rizzo et al., 2013). Although these unrealistic expectations for mothers can affect women in many different unions (Allen & Goldberg, 2020), mothers in same-gender relationships may have more tools to navigate these societal expectations.

Limitations and Future Studies

This study used a cross-sectional design and a convenience sample collected via an online crowdsourcing database, hence interpretations are limited and may not be generalizable to the broader population. Indeed, our sample was limited in terms of race, ethnicity, and age—as is often the case with participants sourced online (Weinberg et al., 2014). Despite differences in demographics with the general public, studies have demonstrated the similarities in response quality for surveys conducted using population-based sample and a sample recruited using a crowdsourcing platform (Weinberg et al., 2014). However, we encourage future studies to continue to research labor division and

relationship satisfaction among more diverse samples of participants. Specifically, the current study situated the concept of doing gender through household labor as a cultural norm within the US, which assumes that all participants conceptualize these gendered scripts similarly. Future studies could assess how cultural values around family and gender across ethnic and racial groups influence the ways in which couples negotiate household labor division.

Future studies should also further explore the theoretical framework of “doing gender” for understanding how household labor chores are negotiated in diverse relationships. Our study indicated that decision-making may work differently for mothers partnered with women vs. men. We argue that this difference may demonstrate potential distinctions in how women partnered with women and women partnered with men conceptualize and engage with gendered expectations of housework (Goldberg, 2013; West & Zimmerman, 1987). We specifically recommend that studies investigate decision-making power in conjunction with attitudes related to femininity and masculinity to further assess how the two may be interrelated. Additionally, more research is needed to assess how endorsement of traditional gender roles influences household labor division, beyond merely measuring partner gender, to better understand why decision-making power manifests differently for mothers partnered with women or men.

We also restricted our sample in terms of gender identity, selecting only women who identified as cisgender to assess how traditional gender norms affect individuals who have been raised as girls, and only partners who identified as men or women. However, future studies should assess how gender roles are navigated among people who identify outside of the gender binary and who are transgender. Due to the smaller size of this sample and the magnitude of the effect size, many effects were not significant in our analyses. However, a larger sample may be more representative of women at large and may thus reveal more links among labor division, partner gender, and decision-making power. We also recommend that future studies investigate how children's age may influence relationships among same- and different-gender couples, as we did not ask participants in our sample to report their children's age. Previous research demonstrates that children's age may be relevant to study, as women partnered with men who have young children tend to engage in greater shares of household labor than women who have older children—likely due to children's greater independence (Lam et al., 2012).

We must also note that the distinctions between sexual orientation and partner gender were not explored in this study. Specifically, several of the women partnered with men identified outside of heterosexuality—about 15% of this group. Although our analyses were framed in terms of partner gender, some interpretations—particularly around motherhood and gendered expectations—may have implicitly centered heterosexuality. However, bisexual and queer

women partnered with men may navigate the dynamics of motherhood and household labor differently than heterosexual mothers. Future studies should more explicitly investigate how our findings related to mothers partnered with men and heteronormative standards in different-gender couples are affected by sexual orientation.

Practical Implications

First, our findings hold implications for therapeutic practice, as household labor division and communication issues are common reasons why different-gender couples seek professional counseling (Doss et al., 2004). In fact, the relationship satisfaction of women partnered with men is more strongly linked with household labor division inequities than with how partners communicate and negotiate (Carlson et al., 2020). Although some studies have shown that couples therapy can promote more equal childcare division (Liekmeier et al., 2023), little research has focused on applying what is known about household labor division inequalities to practice. Our study suggests that therapists may want to encourage different-gender couples to discuss household labor division and negotiate household roles based on partners' skills and time availability rather than 'gender.

In addition, our findings highlight the need for assessment tools and interventions that make household labor visible and measurable in both research and practice. Because unequal labor division, particularly among mothers partnered with men, is linked to lower relationship satisfaction, practitioners and policymakers can benefit from standardized ways of auditing unpaid labor within families, couples therapy, and workplace flexibility programs. For example, clinicians, human resources professionals, and educators could incorporate household labor inventories, relationship assessments, premarital counseling, and work–family balance initiatives. By tracking who performs which domestic tasks and who holds decision-making power, these tools can prompt conversations about fairness, role expectations, and well-being.

Next, our study has implications for organizational and institutional policies related to parental leave and flexible work. For instance, the construct of the “ideal worker” is often at odds with women's parenting expectations, especially women in partnerships with men. These women are often viewed as less capable of catering to the demands of many workplaces, including long work hours outside the home and relocation, due to the expectation that they are (or should be) prioritizing their caretaking role (Hoobler et al., 2009). Flexible work hours may thus help women partnered with men navigate their workplace demands with their roles at home.

However, policies alone may not change what happens at home. Even when both different-gender partners work from home, partners will consistently prioritize women's role as caretakers by blurring work hours with caretaking duties, perpetuating unequal labor division arrangements (i.e., the

flexibility paradox, Parry, 2025). Hence, our study also has implications for broader challenges of societal expectations of different-gender partners in and outside of the home, as our findings demonstrate how traditional gender roles continue to shape family life. Policy makers and social change advocates should consider how traditional expectations for women and men perpetuate inequalities in the home, particularly for a certain group: mothers partnered with men.

Conclusion

Overall, our findings highlight the unique position of traditionally gendered motherhood when it comes to navigating household labor. Our findings demonstrated similarities between women who did not have children as well as mothers partnered with women, in contrast with the experiences of mothers partnered with men. Specifically, gendered norms and ideals of motherhood may particularly constrain mothers partnered with men as they engaged in the greatest amount of unpaid labor and were the only group for whom decision-making power was not related to relationship satisfaction. In sum, the way people divided unpaid and paid labor is a gendered phenomenon associated with relationship satisfaction, placing mothers in relationships with men at a unique risk of facing the negative consequences of traditional gender roles.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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