

Gay Men and Lesbian's Experiences Regarding the Division of Household Labor  
When Going from a Heterosexual Cohabiting Relationship to Their First Same-  
Sex Cohabiting Relationship

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**Abstract**

This qualitative study sought to examine gay men and lesbians' experiences of dividing household labor when going from a cohabiting heterosexual relationship to their first cohabiting same-sex relationship. Criterion sampling and snowball sampling were used to recruit participants across the United States. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six participants: two men and four women. The data was analyzed using Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology and codes were organized into themes. The data suggested four categories that described participants' experiences of division of household labor when going from a heterosexual relationship to a same-sex relationship: Heterosexual Relationship, Adjustment, Same-Sex Relationship and Benefits and Challenges. Participants described how division of household labor was decided in both relationships, any adjustment regarding division of household labor when going from a heterosexual cohabiting relationship to their first same-sex relationship, how division of household labor was decided in their same-sex relationship, and any benefits and challenges faced from this experience. Overall, participants reported certain expectations regarding who should do the majority of tasks in their heterosexual relationship that were not present in their same-sex relationship. Any adjustment was attributed to getting used to having more help with household tasks in their same-sex relationship. Even though most participants reported no challenges faced from their experience, some participants

felt the biggest benefit was having more help with household tasks in their same-sex relationship. Limitations, clinical implications, and future directions for research are discussed.

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## **Chapter I: Introduction**

### **The Problem and its Setting**

Same-sex marriage became a public matter in the United States in 1993 when the Hawaii Supreme Court ruled that state law prohibiting same-sex marriage violated the state constitution (NCSL, 2014). Before 1993, seven states explicitly characterized marriage as a relationship between a man and a woman. After the Hawaii Supreme Court decision, 32 state legislatures implemented “statutory language” that defined marriage as a relationship between a man and a woman (NCSL, 2014). Congress then passed the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) in 1996. This act gave states the power to refuse recognition of same-sex marriage licensed in other states (Cherlin, 2004). By the end of 2000, 40 states either had implemented “statutory language” and/or made constitutional stipulations that limited marriage to only a man and a woman. In the early 2000’s, however, state Supreme Courts started to overturn state law that limited marriage to heterosexual couples. Same-sex marriage has continued to be nationally and internationally recognized. There are currently 37 states and the District of Columbia and 18 countries that recognize same-sex marriage (NCSL, 2015). The continuing increase in the number of states and countries legalizing same-sex marriage may give more same-sex couples an incentive to cohabitate and eventually marry; and thus more information on gay and lesbian cohabitating couples is needed.

The most reliable LGBT population estimates are derived from a variety of surveys and data briefs due to a lack of consistent questions, methods, and sampling strategies regarding sexual orientation (Gates, 2011). According to the Williams Institute research brief based on national population-based surveys, in 2011 there were about nine

million American LGBTs in the United States, a number that is relatively close to the population of New Jersey (Gates, 2011). About 1,400,000 adults identified as lesbian and about 2,500,000 identified as gay males. Following social and political “liberation movements” such as the Human Rights Campaign and a growing number of states legalizing same-sex marriage, more and more individuals have disclosed their sexual orientation (Buxton, 2004).

The Williams Institute data brief also reports that the number of same-sex couple households has increased by more than 80% from 358,390 in 2000 to 646,464 in 2010 compared to about a 40% increase in different-sex unmarried couple households and about a 4% increase in different-sex married couple households (Gates, 2010). The number of same-sex households has continued to increase from 2010 to 2013. According to the 2013 American Community Survey, there is a total of 726,600 same-sex couple households. Of these same-sex couple households, a total of 352,624 are male-male couples and 373,976 are female-female couples. This increase may be due to the “socio/political movement” of same-sex marriage equality that has gained more momentum since the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Buxton, 2004), thus justifying why it is important to learn more about those who are going from a different-sex household to a same-sex household. Based on the increase in same-sex households, many individuals who identify as gay or lesbian and are now in same-sex relationships may have previously been involved in a heterosexual relationship. Buxton (2001) reports that in nearly two million marriages in the United States, one of the partners, current or former, of the couple is bisexual, gay, or lesbian.

With more individuals disclosing their sexual orientation and increasing numbers

of same-sex relationships in the United States, there has been a growing interest in understanding same-sex relationships. This understanding often comes from a “heteronormative frame of interest” (Peplau, Veniegas, & Campbell, 1996). For example, these “heteronormative perceptions” result in individuals distinguishing who is more “masculine” or “feminine” in same-sex partnerships. A common question such as “who wears the pants in your relationship?” or a false understanding that one partner is more masculine while the other more feminine are indicative of individuals applying societal norms about traditional gender roles to same-sex relationships (McWhirter & Mattison, 1984).

The ethnic/racial distribution of same-sex and different-sex married couples is similar. It is estimated that about 81% of the householders are White and 12% of the householders are Hispanic for both same-sex married couples and different-sex married couples. Same-sex couples are just as likely as different-sex married couples to include a racial or ethnic minority. About 49% of total same-sex householders have at least a bachelor’s degree while about 30% of both partners have at least a bachelor’s degree compared to married opposite-sex couples where about 37% of the total married different-sex householders have at least a bachelor’s degree and 23% of both partners have at least a bachelor’s degree. In terms of total same-sex couples income, about 40% make \$100,000 or more, about 15% make between \$75,000 and \$99,999, about 18% make between \$50,000 and \$74,999, about 10% make between \$35,000 and \$49,999, and about 15% make less than \$35,000. These percentages are similar compared to married opposite-sex couples (“Same Sex Couples,” 2013). Due to similarities to heterosexual couples and the increasing “visibility of same-sex couples”, more research is needed to

illuminate whether there are differences in going from a heterosexual to a gay or lesbian relationship (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007).

Prior to understanding and disclosing their sexual orientation, many gay men and lesbian women reported feeling confused, different, shamed, and under pressure to deny what they were experiencing during their teenage and young adulthood stages (Bridges & Croteau, 1994; Strickland, 1995). Researchers have explored reasons why men and women enter heterosexual relationships prior to disclosing their sexual orientation (Higgins, 2004; Ross, 1978; 1979; 1983; Thompson, Forsyth, and Langley 2009). Gay men and lesbian women who were previously married or still are in an opposite-sex marriage reported that getting married seemed natural, they wanted a stable relationship, and they wanted to be loved and approved of, which may be partially due to the fact that gay men and lesbian women have been so entangled in a “heteronormative” society where there is an emphasis on children and family (Thompson, Forsyth, & Langley, 2009). Other reasons reported were due to societal expectations, that getting married would cause the homosexuality to go away, concerns regarding homophobia, and pressure from their family (Ross 1978; 1979). Though this data was collected in the 1970’s, the reasons for heterosexual marriage were similar to findings in present-day studies. Thus, men and women entered marriage either unaware of their same-gender attraction or were too uncomfortable to disclose because of the gendered culture (Thompson et al., 2009). Consequently, because of the gendered culture with “heteronormative” expectations placed on individuals, it may be difficult to go from a different-sex household to a same-sex household.

One dilemma in any cohabitating couple’s life is figuring out how household

tasks will be divided. Living together involves upkeep of the home. Researchers have focused on how couples divide housework since perceived inequality regarding the division of household labor is linked to “negative marital outcomes” (Grote & Clark, 2001). Nevertheless, a fairly consistent conceptualization of household labor has emerged in the literature. Housework most often refers to “unpaid work done to maintain family members and/or a home” (Shelton & John, 1996, p. 300).

While childcare has been included as part of household labor in some studies (i.e. Badr & Acitelli, 2008; Hook 2006), the majority of recent studies have excluded childcare as part of the division of household labor (Bartley et al., 2005; Fuwa & Cohen, 2007; Knudson & Waerness 2008). Some have argued that childcare should be distinct from household labor because its “nature and predictors differ” (Mannino & Deutsch, 2007, p. 311). Some studies suggest that the love of a child is more rewarding than housework and that both women and men increase in their involvement in childcare compared to housework. Therefore, in order to understand changes in the division of household labor, housework and childcare should be measured as distinct activities (Mannino & Deutsch, 2007).

Some lesbians and gay men, perhaps the current majority, had children in a previous heterosexual relationship (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007). There have been questions regarding whether the egalitarian division of household labor among gay and lesbian couples without children holds true for those couples with children (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007). Though research in this area is limited, it has been indicated that parenthood does not change the overall pattern of shared household tasks for same-sex couples (Parks, 1998) but the division of childcare responsibilities, on the other hand, is

“less clear-cut” (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007). Due to lesbians and gay men potentially having children in their heterosexual relationships and the ambiguity of childcare responsibilities impact on division of household labor within same-sex couples, the current study will focus on partners without full custody of their children from their heterosexual relationship.

Two basic principles that traditional heterosexual marriages are organized around are that the division of household labor is based on gender and that there is a norm of superior male power (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007). Both principles are consistent with the gender role ideology and relative resources perspectives that have been used to study heterosexual and same-sex relationships. The gender role ideology perspective suggests the idea that individuals are socialized into male and female gender roles while the relative resources perspective is centered on the idea that decision-making power is based on a partner’s outside resources such as income and education (Mannino & Deutsch, 2007). Recent studies have shown that even though women in heterosexual relationships have made gains in paid labor and educational achievement outside of the home, there is still inequality in household labor (Fuwa, 2004; Fuwa & Cohen, 2007; Lincoln, 2008) and that gender has been generally recognized as the “strongest determinant” in division of household labor among heterosexual couples (Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010). Researchers have found that there are more egalitarian views in lesbians and gay men regarding household labor compared to heterosexual couples (Kurdek, 1993, 2006; Oerton, 1997; Patterson, 2000) and that “same-sex couples are likely to divide chores fairly equitably” (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007). Patterson (2000) found that most couples in same-sex relationships do not assign gender roles. The tasks between partners are flexible

and often interchangeable and found to be divided by time, ability, and consideration. Kurdek (2005) also supported this notion and found that while members of gay and lesbian couples do not perfectly divide household labor, they are more likely to divide tasks based on interest and schedules compared to individuals in heterosexual relationships.

Despite more progressive viewpoints currently trending in American society, the division of household labor still shows some traces of traditional gender role views among heterosexual couples but egalitarian gender role views among same-sex couples. Therefore, the lived experience of someone who was once in a heterosexual relationship (married or cohabitating) and is now in a committed same-sex relationship (married or cohabitating) for the first time is important to understand. Would there be potential adjustment in going from a different-sex to a same-sex relationship since research shows that men in heterosexual relationships often do less housework than their wives, while gay and lesbian couples tend to be more egalitarian in regard to housework? Would they experience any differences in the division of household labor when comparing their previous heterosexual relationship and their current same-sex relationship? Would there be any changes and would they be satisfied with those changes? Would they experience any benefits or challenges related to adjustment or adaptation relative to the division of household labor when going from a heterosexual relationship to a same-sex relationship? Would there be any differences between men and women? Consequently, the main goal of the current study was to explore gay men and lesbian's experiences regarding the division of household labor when going from a heterosexual cohabiting relationship to their first same-sex cohabiting relationship.

## **Significance**

The number of same-sex households is increasing and therefore more information on same-sex relationships and division of household labor is needed. The majority of research focuses primarily on how heterosexual and same-sex couples negotiate division of household labor. Gay men and lesbian couples have different life experiences and outcomes compared to heterosexual couples. Their gender is questioned based on society's heteronormative gender beliefs and because of this their perspective is unique and necessary in order to fully understand the experience of allocating household labor, a historically gendered task in relationships, when going from a heterosexual relationship to a same-sex relationship. Disseminating findings about gay men and lesbians' experiences could normalize their experience and answer questions regarding the stigmatization behind gender roles among a population of the same gender.

Furthermore, this study has the potential to assist mental health clinicians in gaining a better understanding on gay men and lesbian couples and also help therapists to assist clients in adjusting when at least one partner was previously married or cohabitating with an opposite-sex partner and whether that impacts their current relationship and division of household labor. Due to more states legalizing same-sex marriage and the increasing numbers of same-sex households, mental health professionals could potentially see an increase in LGBT clientele. Findings from this study could better inform clinicians on how gay men and lesbian couples function for treatment purposes and help therapists become more culturally competent and understanding towards this stereotyped and marginalized population.

## **Rationale for Methodology**

This qualitative study implemented in-depth, semi-structured interviews to explore and understand gay men and lesbian's experiences regarding allocating household labor when going from a heterosexual relationship (cohabitating or married) to their first committed same-sex relationship (cohabitating or married). Using a qualitative framework allowed for the participants to share as much or as little detail about their experiences as they found satisfying. Due to increasing numbers of same-sex households, a more thorough understanding on how same-sex couples allocate household labor is needed. Rich descriptions regarding division of household labor in both types of relationships will further the literature with detailed accounts of how same-sex couples divide housework when going from a heterosexual relationship to a same-sex relationship. Collecting in-depth accounts of gay men and lesbians sharing their experiences of dividing housework has shed light on the unique issues, challenges, and benefits they face, as well as provided a greater understanding of their experiences of the allocation of household labor. In addition, in-depth, semi-structured interviews permitted more conversation between the researcher and participants, which allowed for more thorough responses and was more comfortable than quantitative measures.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The guiding theoretical framework employed in this study was Moustakas' Transcendental Phenomenology approach. According to Creswell (2012), this framework focuses on a shared meaning for several individuals who experience a phenomenon; it is focused less on the interpretations of the researcher and more on a description of the experiences of participants. Because this framework is based on the participant's lived

experiences, the researcher develops textural and structural descriptions of the lived experiences (what the participants experienced and how they experienced it in context). By combining the textural and structural descriptions, the researcher conveyed the overall “essence” of the lived experiences (Creswell).

Due to the growing phenomenon of states legalizing same-sex marriage and increasing numbers of same-sex couples, this approach seemed fitting for exploring division of household labor relative to the experience of going from a heterosexual relationship to a same-sex relationship and allowed the researcher to thoroughly examine the participants’ lived experiences (what they experienced when they went from a heterosexual relationship to a same-sex relationship in regards to allocating division of household labor and the benefits and challenges surrounding these experiences in regards to allocating division of household labor) without preconceptions from the researcher influencing the course of the study.

### **Purpose of the Current Study**

This study explored gay men and lesbian’s experiences regarding the division of household labor when going from a heterosexual relationship (married or cohabitating) to their first committed same-sex relationship (married or cohabitating) and explored the following research question: What do gay men and lesbians experience regarding the division of household labor when going from a heterosexual cohabiting relationship to their first same-sex cohabiting relationship? Specifically, this study investigated men and women who are 25-years or older and who were in their heterosexual relationship for at least one year and have been in their first same-sex relationship for at least one year. Researchers have reported more traditional gender roles in heterosexual couples and

more egalitarian roles in same-sex couples in regards to the division of household labor but it still remained unclear how gay man and lesbian couples allocate division of household, specifically when they were previously in a heterosexual relationship and are now in their first same-sex relationship, as well as what challenges and benefits they faced from their experiences.

One intention of conducting this study was to inform other researchers about same-sex couples and give a voice to a marginalized population by allowing them to speak for themselves on this topic. The researcher also intended to contribute to the body of literature on understanding gay men and lesbian relationships relative to the division of household labor. As of now, there have been no studies that have included gay men and lesbian's experiences of allocation of household labor when going from a heterosexual relationship to their first cohabitating same-sex relationship. Exploring this understudied population was expected to help address a current and relevant issue in today's society and create a preliminary study for future studies to build upon. This study aimed to close the gap in this literature by learning more about the experiences previously mentioned.

#### Research Question

Due to the little research on going from a heterosexual relationship to a same-sex relationship in relation to division of household labor, this study intends to answer the following research question:

1. What do gay men and lesbians experience regarding the division of household labor when going from a heterosexual cohabiting relationship to their first same-sex cohabiting relationship?
2. What are the challenges and benefits of allocating household labor when

going from a heterosexual relationship to a same-sex relationship?

## **Chapter II: Literature Review**

A review of the literature will assist in understanding the scope of what is known from previous research and reviewing gaps in research concerning this topic. The literature reviewed includes how household labor has been defined in previous studies and why it is important to explore, theories used to explain division of household labor, differences among the division of household labor between heterosexual, gay, and lesbian couples, and coming-out in heterosexual relationships. These reviewed topics will help illuminate how division of household labor is decided in both types of relationships as well as what contributes to how they divide housework.

### **What is Household Labor and Why is it Important?**

Household labor is a significant aspect in relationships. The total amount of time spent on unpaid family work is equal to the time spent in paid labor, according to fairly recent estimates (Robinson & Godbey, 1997). Coltrane (2000) indicates that in most studies household labor is seldom clearly defined, except for explaining how variables are measured and whether childcare is included in the definition. Shelton and John (1996) conceptualize housework as “unpaid work done to maintain family members and/or a home” (p. 300). Tasks that have been included in this conceptualization of household labor are general housecleaning, meal planning, cooking, dishwashing, cleaning up after meals, grocery shopping, laundry (washing and ironing), caring for sick family members, yard work, car maintenance, taking out the trash, paying bills, and transporting family members (Badr & Acitelli, 2008; Cunningham, 2007; Lincoln 2008). Research has found that men in “traditional relationships” usually complete tasks “outside” the house (e.g. lawn care, home repairs, car repairs) while women typically manage tasks within the

home (e.g. cooking, cleaning, child care) (Coltrane, 2000; Deutsch, Roksa, & Meeske, 2003). According to numerous large-sample national surveys conducted in the United States, preparing meals or cooking, housecleaning, shopping for groceries and household goods, washing dishes or cleaning up after meals, and washing and ironing clothes are the five most time-consuming household tasks (Blair & Lichter, 1991; Robinson & Godbey, 1997). These household tasks are considered to be the most time-consuming and least likely to be delayed compared to other household tasks such as gardening or house repairs (Coltrane, 2000).

Division of household labor has been investigated when studying relationships because it has been linked to relationship stability and marital satisfaction among heterosexual couples (Wesshaar, 2014). In terms of relationship equality, the division of household labor and perceptions of fairness influence marital satisfaction. If partners differ on gender expectations of who is responsible for household tasks, this can increase stress and dissatisfaction in a heterosexual marriage, especially if both partners are working (Hochschild, 2003). Kurdek (2004) found that equality is also related to relationship commitment for same-sex couples. If equality is not established the power imbalance can lead to a breakup (Kurdek, 2004).

### **Theories Used to Explain the Division of Household Labor**

Even though gender ideology is the major determinant used to explain allocation of household labor, it is one of three main “heteronormative” theoretical perspectives that have guided recent literature concerning the division of household labor between couples. Gender ideology is affected by education and employment (Fan & Marini, 2000) and therefore, could account for the predictive power for the perspectives mentioned below

(Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010).

**Time Availability Perspective.** The time availability perspective suggests that the amount of time worked outside of the home has an influence on how much housework is completed. Thus, partners divide household labor according to the amount of time each one has available (Davis et al., 2007). Given that, those partners that spend more time in paid work outside of the home have less time to spend on household labor (Artis & Pavalko, 2003). Since the rates of women working outside of the home have increased, research has explored partners reallocating household labor (Robinson & Hunter, 2008). Time spent in paid work outside of the home has a huge impact on division of household labor compared to just employment status (i.e. employed or unemployed) (Cunningham, 2007). The more hours a woman works, the fewer tasks she performs in household labor (Mannino & Deutsch, 2007; Pinto & Coltrane, 2009), and furthermore, the more her spouse is involved in the household labor (Cunningham, 2007). Also, men with jobs that do not require long hours are more likely to contribute to household labor compared to those with jobs that require longer hours (Hook, 2006; Pinto & Coltrane, 2009). However, despite the support for the time availability theory, empirical findings show that women assume the larger portion of household tasks even when both partners hold a job (Bartley et al., 2005).

**Relative Resources Perspective.** This perspective is centered on the idea that decision-making power is based on a partner's outside resources such as income and education (Mannino & Deutsch, 2007). An underlying assumption of this perspective is that the more resources one has, the more power one has, thus making it easier to bargain out of housework, which is viewed as unpleasant (Knudsen & Waerness, 2008). Wives'

contribution to family income is related to the division of household labor (Bianchi et al., 2000; Mannino & Deutsch, 2007; Pinto & Coltrane, 2009). Parkman's (2004) findings indicated that partners' earning ratios are related to the time they spend on housework, thereby supporting the relative resources perspective. Partners with higher incomes tended to complete less housework than those with lower incomes. Bianchi and colleagues (2000) found that there are smaller gender gaps in the amount of household tasks undertaken by women who have a higher education compared to men. Findings have also shown that men with higher levels of education contribute higher proportions of household labor than those with lower levels of education (Gershuny & Sullivan, 2003). Income is also related to socioeconomic status and Cha and Thebaud (2009) have found that couples with a higher socioeconomic status have a less traditional gender role ideology, which could explain why these couples divide the household tasks more equally.

**Gender Role Ideology.** The gender role ideology perspective has been based in socialization theories and suggests the idea that individuals are socialized into male and female gender roles. Research has continuously shown that there are unwavering views regarding how men and women are expected to act (Cunningham 2001). People's gender role ideologies range from traditional gender ideologies (i.e. strict male/breadwinner and female/homemaker) to egalitarian gender ideologies (i.e. both partners are equal and share their roles equally) (Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010).

Gender roles have been defined as behaviors and attitudes assigned to males and females based on gender in society (Beavers, 1982). Traditional gender roles are those in which men are viewed as responsible as the financial support of the family and women

are viewed as the family caretakers. Given that, “men hold power in the outside world, and women hold power in the home, and are primarily responsible for the home and its work, the children, and relationship maintenance” (Beavers, 1982). Men are viewed as responsible for financial support of the family, and therefore develop the more “valued resources of earning power and prestige; this power, combined with their traditional patriarchal position of final authority”, allows for exclusion from many of the responsibilities of family and home (Scanzoni, 1982; Steil 1997).

### **Heterosexual Division of Household Labor**

Among heterosexual families, gender has been consistently shown as the primary means of the division of household labor (Esmail, 2010). The major finding from the research on housework division in heterosexual families is that regardless of employment status, wives bear more of the household labor (Coltrane, 2000). The findings are more mixed for lesbian and gay families (Khor, 2007). Extant research regarding heterosexual married relationships has found that most tasks are based on enacting gender roles. Blair and Lichter’s (1991) cross-sectional national sample identified tasks that husbands and wives typically do in “traditional” relationships, which include cooking, washing the dishes, vacuuming the floors, making beds, childcare, household upkeep, and lawn and garden maintenance. Additionally, research has found that men in these relationships usually complete the outside tasks, which include lawn care, home repairs, and car maintenance, while women typically manage and complete tasks within the home, which includes cooking, cleaning, and childcare, while both partners may share certain “non-gendered” tasks such as bill paying or driving (Atkinson & Huston, 1984; Barnett & Baruch, 1987; Coltrane, 2000; Deutsch, Roksa, & Meeske, 2003). Atkinson and Huston

(1984) identified specific tasks that have suggested masculinity (i.e. common tasks completed by men). These tasks include taking out the garbage, household repairs, gardening, mowing the lawn, automobile repair, washing or waxing automobiles, and home improvement. Tasks commonly associated with a more feminine gender role (i.e. common tasks completed by women) include grocery shopping, buying household supplies, buying clothing, making the bed(s), organizing the house, cleaning, doing laundry, decorating the house, preparing and cooking meals, doing dishes, and baking (p. 334).

Solomon and Rothblum (2004) and Solomon et al. (2005) compared role division between heterosexual couples and gay and lesbian couples. The studies found that the heterosexual couples had more “traditional gendered division of finances, household tasks, and relationship maintenance behaviors” compared to gay and lesbian couples.

Kurdek’s (1993) qualitative study found that even in highly educated couples and in couples without children household labor was more likely to be performed by wives than husbands. Due to gender being a major organizing feature of household labor, research has explored the differences in men and women’s task performance and how their experiences of housework tend to deviate. In general, women have felt obligated to do housework while men have assumed that domestic work is mostly the responsibility of mothers, wives, and daughters. In contrast, men’s participation in housework has “appeared optional, with most couples – even those sharing substantial amounts of family work – characterizing men’s contributions as “helping” their wives or partners” (Coltrane, 1996).

Paid work outside the home has also been historically divided according to

gender, where men have been breadwinners who worked for salary and women have been homemakers who worked at home, hence the expression “gendered allocation of labor” (Sayer et al. 2004). Research suggests that, in spite of women’s increased commitment to the labor force and their “associated political and social achievements”, their advances have not been paralleled in the household (Arrighi & Maume 2000). Recent studies have shown that the advances in the labor force women have made outside the home have not transformed directly into an egalitarian allocation of household labor (Fuwa 2004; Fuwa & Cohen 2007; Gershuny 2000; Knudsen & Wærness 2008; Lincoln 2008).

Deutsch, Roksa, and Meeske (2003) discovered that gender does matter when it comes to income. In their quantitative study it was found that men and women have different feelings in regards to their earnings. Consistent with previous research, “men’s identities and sense of self-worth” are tied to how much they earn, which may reflect how successful they are to provide for their families (Deutsch, 1999).

Berk (1985) found little difference in the actual allocation of household tasks and perceptions of fairness regarding that distribution. Even when wives were employed outside the home, they still did the majority of household and childcare tasks. Furthermore, this was seen as a fair arrangement both wives and husbands. Berk argues that gender in the home is supported due to current actions found for the domestic division of labor. Even though this finding is from the 1980’s, Greenstein (1996) validated that the interaction between the husband’s and the wife’s gender beliefs had an impact on the division of household labor. He found that husbands did little household labor unless they and their wives were somewhat egalitarian in attitudes (Khor, 2007).

Researchers have also found that men who earn roughly the same income as their

spouses perform more housework than men who are the main breadwinners (Thébaud, 2010). However, when men are reliant on their wives, they do not perform more housework than men who are not reliant on their wives. In a small number of cases where men are particularly reliant on their wives, American men have been found to do less housework than they otherwise would (Brines 1994; Greenstein 2000). Although men who are dual-earners do more housework than they would if they were the sole breadwinners, they do not increase the amount of housework enough to create egalitarianism or to undo a traditional gender in division of household labor. Women still do the majority of the housework, regardless of the amount of income inequality between men and women (Thébaud, 2010).

Sullivan (2000) reviewed and reassessed quantitative studies on division of household labor in heterosexual couples and stated that couples within higher socioeconomic groups have reached a position of near-equality. However, Van Hooff (2011) found hardly any support to encourage Sullivan's assertion. He studied heterosexual couples between the ages of 20 and 35. His reason for pursuing younger married couples was that "they are the population that has the resources to capitalize on modern opportunities for gender equality in heterosexual relationships". His study found that younger men and women's roles within their relationships are specialized according to gender, regardless of ascribing to a belief of egalitarianism (van Hooff, 2011). Even when gender is controlled for in the absence of women it appears to be an important factor in the division of household labor. Natalier (2003) lead a qualitative study of men living together as housemates and found that gender continues to be "an important organizing principle of domestic labor outside of wedded homes". She found that in 6 out

of 11 households, at least one person was doing at least twice as many tasks as another person in the same household. She accredited this difference to power imbalances.

### **Same-Sex Division of Household Labor**

There has been much debate as to whether using gender to assign roles applies to gay and lesbian couples because each partner is the same gender. Studies have found that most lesbian and gay couples reported being egalitarian and sharing household tasks (Dunne, 2003; Patterson, 2000). Shechory and Ziv (2007) examined relationships between gender role attitudes, role division, and perception of equity among gay, lesbian, and heterosexual couples. Findings suggested more liberal attitudes concerning gender roles in same-sex couples than in heterosexual couples. Khor (2007) included 31 lesbians and 24 gay men in her quantitative study and found that both gay men and lesbians are committed to working hard towards egalitarianism in division of household labor. Comments reported from gay and lesbian couples in her study suggest that there is more fluidity (also noted in Kamano's 2009 study) when negotiating division of household tasks. She also noted that the flexibility and modification in division of housework does not mean that gender is not important. Lesbians and gay men are "doing gender" but not conforming to gender expectations as much as constructing new norms for themselves while also being aware of gender norms (p. 68). Though there is a general consensus of egalitarianism among gay and lesbian couples, there are differences between them regarding the division of household labor.

**Lesbians and Household Labor.** Studies of same-sex couples and role division have mainly compared lesbian couples and heterosexual couples. Findings have shown more egalitarian role division among lesbian couples (Parke, 2004; Patterson, 2000;

Roberts et al., 2003). Esmail (2010) studied the meanings of fairness in the division of household labor for dual-earner lesbian couples. She found that rationalizations, such as “one partner having a higher standard of cleanliness, greater time availability, and their partner's emotional and physical condition,” had a tendency to lead partners towards a perception a fairness in the division of household labor even when both partners were cognizant of the other performing more household labor. Making comparisons (also found by Dunne (2003)) was another important factor in partners’ perceptions of what constitutes as fair division of household labor. In order to determine whether their current division of household labor was perceived as fair or unfair, partners tended to compare their situation to other homosexual couples, heterosexual couples, and also to their parents, friends, coworkers, and even to their previous heterosexual and same-sex relationships. Partners who grew up in households with an equal division of labor accepted these as suitable examples for their current situation compared to those who grew up in traditional households where gender determined division of household labor (Esmail, 2010).

Oerton (1997) described that “many lesbians reject the role of housewife and engage in less housework overall.” Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) also found this to be true. They reported that lesbians often negotiated the divided housework based on preference and capability, and rejected the “housewife” role. Lesbians often want to reject the concept of being dependent on their partner as well as the stereotypical role of the “helpless female”. They do not see themselves as breadwinners for their partners, but as equal workers in their relationships.

**Gay Men and Household Labor.** McPherson (1994) studied 28 gay and 27

heterosexual couples and measured division of household labor and satisfaction of division of household labor. Gay couples reported a more equitable division of household labor and maintenance compared to heterosexual couples. Kurdek (2007) conducted a quantitative study comparing how 43 gay and 36 lesbian couples allocated household labor. His findings suggested that gay partners are more likely to specialize in particular tasks than lesbian partners. This was consistent with McWhirter and Mattinson's (1984) qualitative study where they found that the longer the couple had been together, the more likely each partner had fixed, specialized household tasks.

In regard to gay and lesbian families, some studies have found that partners with more resources had more power. Money, however, was found to be a resource for gay male couples as well as heterosexual married or cohabiting couples but not lesbian couples. For lesbian couples, the more educated but less involved partner was found to have more power (Patterson, 2000).

Lesbians may have more practice doing household labor in their relationships than gay men do, and gay men may regard "homemaker roles" as threats to their masculinity (Carrington, 1999). A few other studies (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Harry, 1984) found that, consistent with social exchange theory and power-dependence theory, salary determined power inequalities in gay male couples. Some gay men related being part of the "housework role as losing their masculinity", which was not satisfying (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) and Carrington's (1999) findings are consistent with these two theories. They suggested that the partner who completed fewer tasks also worked more hours in paid labor outside of the home. Oerton's (1997) findings were also consistent with social exchange theory in that the total

“household income, personal income differences, and the length of cohabitation created discrimination on household tasks.”

Though there are differences between lesbians and gay men regarding the division of household labor in same-sex couples, research suggests there are still overall egalitarian gender views regarding household labor in same-sex couples. Therefore, more research is needed to close the gap and explore how gay men and lesbians allocate household labor when one partner was once in a heterosexual relationship, where there are traditional gender views on household labor.

**“Coming-Out” In a Heterosexual Relationship.** The above-mentioned literature reviews a comparison between heterosexual relationships and same-sex relationships in regards to the division of household labor. There is limited research on experiences of going from a heterosexual relationship to a same-sex relationship, though there is literature on coming-out in a heterosexual relationship. Thompson, Forsyth, and Langley (2009) conducted a qualitative study of 39 women who were in a previous heterosexual marital relationship when they disclosed their lesbian identity. The focus was on how women navigated through heterosexual and lesbian “social worlds”. The women interviewed also shared feelings of fear of rejection from spouses, children, parents, and friends. Their study revealed that most marriages ended in divorce and though the majority of husbands showed some form of support, others were unsupportive and still do not get along with their ex-husbands. Some of their children were accepting while other became more accepting as adults (Thompson, Forsyth, & Langley, 2009).

Buxton (2004) looked at strategies and supports in marriages of 47 lesbian wives, 27 heterosexual husbands of bisexual women, and 22 husbands of lesbian women. Her

study found that helpful strategies common to all samples included honest communication between spouses, caring for their children, finding counseling, and being friends with one another all while dealing with disclosure issues. These findings echo those of bisexual and gay husbands and heterosexual wives of bisexual or gay men (Buxton, 2004).

### **Coming-out of a Heterosexual Relationship into a Same-Sex Relationship.**

Boon and Alderson (2009) examined the experiences of women who were currently in same-sex relationships but had been previously married to men in Canada. Themes that emerged from the in-depth interviews were similarities and differences between their same-sex and opposite-sex relationships, challenges and benefits of their same-sex and opposite sex-relationships, relationship satisfaction across the types of couples, and managing sexual identity after disclosure. Both couple types experienced universal couple issues such as communication but major hurdles that women in same-sex relationships faced were homophobia and heterosexism. A benefit of an opposite-sex marriage that was reported was that there was more social support for and more celebration of heterosexual partnerships. A benefit of same-sex relationships mentioned was “freedom from gender roles created autonomy, freedom, and equity in their relationships with other women” compared to their heterosexual relationship (p. 163). Participants also reported open communication and negotiation in their same-sex relationships compared to their previous heterosexual relationships and attributed this to a more equal power balance in their same-sex relationships. These differences indicate that there may also be differences for the division of household labor, especially when one partner goes from a heterosexual relationship to a same-sex relationship.

## Conclusion

The existing studies have examined several theories used to make sense of the differences of division of household labor among heterosexual, gay male, and lesbian couples. Gender, income and education, and time availability have all influenced how heterosexual and same-sex couples allocate household labor. Despite more progressive viewpoints currently trending in American society, the division of household labor still shows some traces of traditional gender role views among heterosexual couples and egalitarian gender role views among same-sex couples. Furthermore, studies that have examined same-sex couples have not considered how coming from a heterosexual relationship could impact the division of household labor in a same-sex relationship. Gay men and lesbians may have different experiences that need to be better understood and the current study attempted to close this gap in the existing literature.

## Research Question

Due to the little research on switching from a heterosexual relationship to a same-sex relationship in relation to the division of household labor, this study intends to answer the following research question:

1. What do gay men and lesbians experience regarding the division of household labor when going from a heterosexual cohabiting relationship to their first same-sex cohabiting relationship?
2. What are the challenges and benefits of allocating household labor when going from a heterosexual relationship to a same-sex relationship?

## **Chapter III: Methods**

### **Design**

In order to explore the research question and gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of the participants, this study used a qualitative, phenomenological design to obtain personal insight of what gay men and lesbians experience regarding the division of household labor when going from a heterosexual cohabitating relationship to their first same-sex cohabitating relationship. Creswell (2012) states that qualitative research “empowers individuals to share their stories and hear their voices” when more understanding on a complex issue is needed (p. 48). In-depth, semi-structured interviews allowed participants to share the depth of their lived experiences and provide rich, thorough descriptions about their experiences. A qualitative interview was also the most efficient and thorough way to obtain data within the contexts of the participants’ lives.

### **Participants**

Participants in this study were men and women who self-identified as gay and lesbian and have previously lived (married or cohabitating) with an opposite-sex partner in a heterosexual relationship and are currently living (married or cohabitating) with a same-sex partner in a same-sex relationship. These same-sex relationships were the first cohabitating same-sex relationship since the heterosexual relationship. The current study excluded bisexuals and transgender individuals because bisexuals and transgender individuals may have different experiences than gay males and lesbians. Bisexuals also have more fluidity in their sexual orientation and the current study is exploring experiences of going from a different-sex to a same-sex relationship as a shift in state of mind regarding the division of household labor. Defining the transgender population can

also be challenging because they are considered a distinct group from gay men and lesbians and may have a different experience in going from a heterosexual relationship to a cohabitating same-sex relationship. There are also fewer numbers compared to gay men and lesbians in the United States (Gates, 2011).

Participant eligibility for this study required individuals to be at least 25 years or older, to be in their heterosexual relationship (married or cohabitating) for at least one year, and to currently be in their first cohabitating same-sex relationship (married or cohabitating) for at least one year. Participant eligibility included individuals married or cohabitating with their same-sex partners because at the time of this writing not all state's legislation had legalized same-sex marriage. ACS data also shows that the majority of same-sex householders are 25 years and older, which may be due to completed college degrees and having an income. There is also a general consensus that both cohabitation and marriage are more committed relationships statuses, compared to non-cohabitating couples (Cherlin, 2004). Being in a relationship for at least one year also gives couples a chance to adjust to their new lifestyle and assemble a routine of doing housework.

Since the majority of recent studies have excluded childcare as part of the division of household labor (Bartley et al. 2005; Fuwa & Cohen, 2007; Knudson & Waerness 2008), and since some studies have argued that childcare should be distinct from household labor (Mannino & Deutsch, 2007), partners with full custody and living with their children from their heterosexual relationship were excluded in the current study. Participants must have visitation rights every other week or weekend since primary custody would be considered childcare and could impact the division of household labor. Future research needs to include childcare as part of the division of household labor but

excluding it in the current study is a starting point in understanding the participants' lived experiences of allocating household labor when going from a heterosexual relationship to a same-sex relationship.

Criterion sampling was used as a means of recruiting participants. Participants who were eligible met the abovementioned criteria to participate in the current study. The researcher used a telephone screening, which will later be explained in greater detail, to ensure eligibility. Snowball sampling was also used as an additional method of recruiting participants. The researcher asked participants to contact other individuals they know that may meet the criteria to participate in the current study. Participants were recruited around the United States through flyers (Appendix A) that were posted in support groups, community centers, mental health clinics, emails (Appendix B) sent to listservs of advocacy groups, and via the Internet (e.g., websites, social media, and listservs) (Appendix C).

### **Procedures**

Prior to the recruitment process, the researcher obtained approval to begin the study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once IRB approval was obtained, the study was advertised through flyers, emails (e.g. listservs) and the Internet. Recruitment materials sought men and women over the age of 25, who self-identify as gay or lesbian, and who were previously in a heterosexual relationship (married or cohabitating) and are currently in the first same-sex relationship (married or cohabitating). Recruitment materials also stated that participation in this study includes a short telephone screening, a short demographic questionnaire, and an estimated one-hour interview. If the participants could not meet in-person, they were given the option for the interview to take place over

the telephone or through Skype.

All men and women who expressed interest in this study completed a telephone screening to determine eligibility based on the criteria mentioned above. During the telephone screening, potential participants were given a short overview of the current study and asked screening questions (Appendix D). Potential participants were asked if they are 25 years or older, if they identify as being a gay male or lesbian, if they were previously in a heterosexual relationship (married or cohabitating) for at least one year, and if they have currently been in their first same-sex relationship (married or cohabitating) for at least one year. Individuals that did not meet the mentioned criteria, were thanked for their support and were encouraged to refer any other gay men and lesbians they knew that may be appropriate for this study.

Those who were eligible based on the above criteria were informed that before the interview they would complete an informed consent form (Appendix E) and a demographic questionnaire (Appendix F). The consent form included the purpose and procedures of the study, the risks and benefits, confidentiality, and the ability to withdraw from the study at any time. The demographic questionnaire included questions regarding the participant's age, race/ethnicity, occupation, estimated annual income, whether they were married or cohabitating in their heterosexual relationship, number of years married or cohabitating in their heterosexual relationship, partner's occupation and estimated annual income, whether they are married or cohabitating in their same-sex relationship, how many years married or cohabitating in their same-sex relationship, partner's occupation and estimated annual income, whether their partner has any past experience in a cohabitating heterosexual and/or same-sex relationship, whether they have children

from their heterosexual relationship, and what their visitation of their children involves. None of the interviews were conducted until the participants completed the demographic questionnaires and signed the informed consent documents.

Once all of the informed consent forms were signed and the demographic questionnaires were completed and received by the researcher, the researcher then contacted all the participants to schedule interviews. One face-to face interview and five telephone interviews were conducted. In the face-to-face interview the participant chose a coffee shop due to convenience near his apartment. Before each interview began, all participants were asked if they had any questions regarding the study. All interviews lasted approximately one-hour and were audio recorded. Once the interviews were completed, the researcher listened to the audio-recorded interviews and transcribed them. All identifying information of each participant was removed from the transcripts and substituted with pseudonyms. Any other documents with participant's names, addresses, and telephone numbers were kept in a secure location in a laptop folder where only members of the research team were able to access this information. The audio-recorded interviews were then locked and stored in a safe location where only the researcher had access.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were implemented for this study. A semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to probe when necessary in order to ensure the open-ended questions were being thoroughly answered for the purpose of this study. Questions focused on the experience of allocating household labor when going from a heterosexual cohabitating relationship to a first time cohabitating same-sex relationship,

as well as the benefits and challenges faced from the participants' experiences.

Interviewees were told that questions regarding the division of household labor would focus on cooking and preparing meals, washing the dishes, laundry (i.e. washing, drying, ironing, and folding), taking out the trash and recycling, paying bills, car maintenance, and overall upkeep of the home. A basic outline of the interview guide is below.

Questions asked by the researcher deviated from the interview structure below when the researcher felt it was necessary. Questions were not strictly required to follow the following format:

Thank you for your participation and sharing your experiences of dividing household labor when going from a heterosexual relationship to a same-sex relationship. The following interview involves questions about how you divided household labor in your heterosexual relationship and how you divide household labor in your current same-sex relationship. For the purpose of this study, household labor is defined as “unpaid work done to maintain family members and/or a home” and will include tasks such as cooking and preparing meals, washing the dishes or loading the dishwasher, laundry (i.e. washing, drying, ironing, and folding), taking out the trash and recycling, paying bills, car maintenance, yard work, and overall upkeep of the home.

1. How was the division of household labor decided in your heterosexual relationship? (Probe: Name some specific tasks that you were responsible for and specific tasks your partner was responsible for i.e. cooking dinner, dishes, laundry, trash, finances, car maintenance, etc., how often did you do these tasks?)
2. How did this impact how satisfied you were in your relationship?
3. What were the factors that affected how household labor was divided between

- you and your partner in your heterosexual relationship? (Probe: Your beliefs growing up? Power differences in decision-making? Time availability? Gender roles? Preferences? Expectations?)
4. How was the division of household labor decided in your same-sex relationship? (Probe: Name some specific tasks that you were responsible for and specific tasks your partner was responsible for i.e. cooking dinner, dishes, laundry, trash, finances, car maintenance, etc. How often did you do these tasks?)
  5. How does this impact how satisfied you are in your relationship?
  6. What were the factors that affected how household labor was divided between you and your partner in your current same-sex relationship? (Probe: Your beliefs growing up? Power differences in decision-making? Time availability? Gender roles? Preferences? Expectations?)
  7. What was it like for you to go from a heterosexual relationship to a same-sex relationship regarding the division of household labor? (Probe: What were some emotions you felt? Any concerns about dividing household labor? Any expectations regarding the division of household labor?)
    - a) As a man, how did going from a heterosexual relationship to a same-sex relationship impact your view on the division of household labor and your role in both types of relationships?
    - b) As a man, how did you adjust to this change?
    - c) As a woman, how did going from a heterosexual relationship to a same-sex relationship impact your view on the division of household and your role in both types of relationships?

- d) As a woman, how did you adjust to this change?
8. What are the benefits in regards to the division of household labor when going from a heterosexual relationship to a same-sex relationship? (Probe: What were some emotions you felt?)
  9. What are the challenges relative to the division of household labor when going from a heterosexual relationship to a same-sex relationship? (Probe: What were some emotions you felt? What were your concerns?)
  10. What are the similarities between the division of household labor in your previous heterosexual relationship and your current same-sex relationship?
  11. What are the differences between the division of household labor in your previous heterosexual relationship and your current same-sex relationship?
  12. Upon reflection, is there anything else that you would like to add that would help me understand your experience of the division of household labor in switching from a heterosexual relationship to your first committed same-sex relationship?

### **Data Analysis**

Phenomenology is more about a description on the participants' experiences and less about interpretations made by the researcher (Creswell, 2012). It requires the researcher to bracket his or her own experiences in order to take a new perspective towards the phenomenon examined. In order to establish validity and stay within Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach, the researcher set aside her experiences as much as possible in order to have a renewed outlook toward the phenomenon under examination. Thus, the researcher kept a journal of her biases and experiences. Some of the bracketing incorporated thoughts and assumptions on allocation

of household tasks in relationships due to a personal experience with friends and any personal feelings towards the population of interest.

The researcher became familiar with the data by listening to the audio-recorded interviews, constantly checking for accuracy by going through the transcripts three times. As each transcript was read, the researcher kept memos as initial codes were generated. Each individual transcript was broken down into significant statements and categorized into overarching themes that related to the overall story of the data. Throughout this process, the researcher maintained a journal of thoughts or questions regarding the data set. Memos and bracketing were useful during data analysis. To ensure intercoder reliability, an additional two peer coders also coded the data set and signed a confidentiality agreement. The researcher and peer coders met to discuss codes that they each found. The researcher and peer coders removed, modified, and organized codes into themes and subthemes within the broader themes created. Names were generated for each theme and subtheme. A research advisor also offered additional perspective on the coding process to ensure accuracy of the codes found and to inform the researcher of any codes missed. The researcher then reviewed the themes to ensure that each one fits and captures the essence of the data. Themes were defined to ensure clarity and distinction. Once themes were defined, the researcher ensured the themes related to each other in a meaningful way by re-reading the data excerpts. This ensured that the data was consistent and relative to each theme. The researcher then ensured that the themes made logical sense and built on one another for a coherent story.

## **Chapter IV: Results**

This study explored gay men and lesbian's experiences of dividing household labor when going from a heterosexual cohabitating relationship to their first same-sex cohabitating relationship. Six semi-structured, qualitative interviews were conducted. All six experiences varied in interesting and meaningful ways. The data were analyzed from a phenomenological lens throughout the coding process. In the following chapter, demographic information and brief descriptions of each participant are discussed. Brief summaries of each theme are then presented followed by detailed descriptions of the data.

### **Participant Demographics**

Six participants were interviewed for this study. Two men identified themselves as gay and four women identified themselves as lesbians. Participants' ages ranged from 29 to 48 years old. Four participants were married to their heterosexual partner and two participants were living with their heterosexual partner. Participants reported being in their opposite-sex relationship from one to 24 years. Only one participant had children in his heterosexual relationship and they were adults and not living with the participant and his same-sex partner at the time of the interview. Two participants knew they were gay or lesbian while in their heterosexual relationship. One participant was engaged to his same-sex partner, one participant was married to her same-sex partner, and four participants were living with their same-sex partner. Participants reported being in their same-sex relationship from one year to seven years. All participants identified as Caucasian. One participant identified as Caucasian and Native American. Five participants' identified their current partners as Caucasian and one participant identified her partner as Caucasian and Hispanic. Participants' opposite-sex relationship household income varied from no

income because of stay at home partner to \$200,000. Participants' same-sex partner's household income varied from \$36, 000 to \$200,000. Two participants resided in Virginia with their same-sex partners and other participants lived in Florida, Maryland, Texas, and Massachusetts with their same-sex partners. See Table 1.

<b>Pseudonym Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>State of Current Residency</b>	<b>Number of Years in Heterosexual Relationship</b>	<b>Relationship Status</b>	<b>Heterosexual Partner's Annual Household Income</b>	<b>Number of Years in Same-Sex Relationship</b>	<b>Relationship Status</b>	<b>Same-Sex Partner's Annual Household Income</b>
<b>Dan</b>	40	VA	1 year, 1 month	Cohabiting	\$45,000	6	Engaged, Cohabiting	Disability
<b>Nicole</b>	43	FL	5	Married	\$115,000	8	Married	\$200,000
<b>Zachary</b>	47	VA	5	Married	\$0	6	Cohabiting	\$70,000
<b>Patricia</b>	48	TX	24	Married	\$80,000	7	Cohabiting	\$36,000
<b>Leslie</b>	48	MA	22	Married	\$200,000	2	Cohabiting	\$30,000
<b>Blair</b>	29	MD	1 year, 2 months	Cohabiting	\$45,000	2	Cohabiting	\$50,000

### **Participant Backgrounds**

The following section gives short descriptions of each participant interviewed for the current study in order to give readers contextual information pertinent to the overall findings of the current study. Participant descriptions are organized chronologically based on the order in which the interviews were conducted: Dan identified as a Caucasian male in his late forties. He was living with his girlfriend for a little over a year before he realized his gay identity. He articulated that he was with his girlfriend because his family brought him up to believe that there were no options other than getting married and having children with a woman. He described a fairly equal division of household labor with his girlfriend but mentioned that she made more money than he did, which

contributed to power plays in their relationship. He reported dating his same-sex partner for five years before he proposed. They have been engaged for a little over a year. His same-sex partner is on disability and though he reported being frustrated at how that impacts division of household labor, he also reported being happy with his same-sex partner.

Nicole identified as a Caucasian female in her mid forties. She reported having an equal division of household labor in her heterosexual relationship and in her same-sex relationship. She reported that her mother was responsible for most of the household tasks when she was growing up and that influenced her to strive for equality. Nicole stated that she did not realize her lesbian identity until after her divorce from her husband. She also reported an equal division of household labor in her same-sex relationship. She and her same-sex partner dated for eight years and have been married for one.

Zachary identified as a Caucasian male in his late forties. He reported that he knew he was gay in his heterosexual relationship but married his wife out of moral obligation because she was pregnant. He also reported having a “traditional” marriage where he worked and his wife stayed home and took on the household chores. Once he got divorced, he described a feeling of freedom because he was finally no longer living a lie. He also reported that he does the majority of the household chores in his same-sex relationship because he is on disability.

Patricia identified as a Caucasian female in her late forties. She reported knowing she was a lesbian in her heterosexual relationship. She also reported wanting children and figured the best way to have children was to marry a man. She disclosed that they had a

volatile relationship and that she was happier when her husband was traveling for work. She met her same-sex partner while she was still married to her husband, however, they did not start dating or move in together until after her divorce. She reported a more equal division of household labor in her same-sex relationship.

Leslie identified as a Caucasian female in her late forties. She reported marrying her husband to “get out from under her mother’s thumb” and reported that she thought she loved her husband when they married. She reported that he was controlling based on his upbringing and felt a sense of freedom when they divorced. She also reported not realizing her lesbian identity until after her divorce. She explained that her ex-husband’s controlling nature impacted her in her same-sex relationship when it came to dividing household tasks but that it was more equal in her same-sex relationship.

Blair identified as a Caucasian female in her late twenties. She reported living with her boyfriend and felt unhappy because she was assumed to do the majority of the household responsibilities. She reported realizing her lesbian identity once she and her boyfriend broke up. She explained that even though she exemplified the feminine role in both relationships by taking on the inside chores, her same-sex partner contributed more than her ex-boyfriend.

### **Reflexivity**

The researcher, who conducted the interviews, is a Caucasian female who self-identifies as heterosexual. She supports equal rights for the LGBT community. Her closest friend self-identifies as a gay male and did not disclose his sexual identity until he was in college because of his religious family. The researcher is also currently living with two females in a relationship, one of whom self-identifies as a lesbian and the other who

does not self-identify as a lesbian even though she is dating a female. They divide housework evenly and because of this the researcher has seen an equal division of household labor in a same-sex relationship, which could have affected the analysis of the data. However, the researcher kept a journal of her reflections and bracketed her biases before and after every interview with the population of interest in order to externalize her own experiences to differentiate from participants' experiences. Biases of growing up in a household with a traditional division of household labor were described as well as any experiences being around the LGBT community and seeing equality in same-sex relationships. The researcher bracketed and memoed any thoughts or assumptions made about the population of interest when reading through every transcript in the coding process.

### **Findings**

Noteworthy themes and statements emerged from the data set and were organized into categories. The categories were organized into a chronological order and are: (a) Heterosexual Relationship; (b) Adjustment; (c) Same-Sex Relationship; (d) Benefits and Challenges. For Heterosexual Relationship, the themes found were Heterosexual Assumptions with a subtheme titled Upbringing/Family of Origin, Partner Availability, Dissatisfaction Due to Role Rigidity with subthemes titled Resentment and Controlling Partner, and "He who makes the gold, makes the rules". For Adjustment, the themes found were Adjustment in Being Supported with Division of Household Labor and No Adjustment Regarding the Division of Household Labor. For Same-Sex Relationship, the themes found were Continuous Communication, Task Preference, Equal Division of Household Labor with subthemes titled Satisfaction Due to Equal Division of Household

Labor and Taking the Initiative, “Picking Up the Slack” with a subtheme titled Disability/Disease, Co-Constructing Division of Household Labor, and Navigating Engrained Gender Roles with a subtheme titled Gay and Lesbian Gender Expression. For Benefits and Challenges, the themes found were Benefit of More Assistance with Household Tasks and No challenges.

### **Category 1: Heterosexual Relationship**

The category Heterosexual Relationship summarizes the participants’ reports of how division of household labor was decided in their heterosexual relationship along with what impacted how the division of household labor was decided. Five participants described their own feelings or their partner’s feelings of unhappiness with the “traditional” division of household labor due to assumptions made in the relationship because of societal views.

**Heterosexual Assumptions.** Five of the six participants mentioned that there were traditional assumptions of how division of household labor was decided on the basis of gender. Five participants stated that the female partner was assumed to take on specific household chores. For example, Zachary stated, “I had a stay at home wife at the time...she stayed home and took care of the children and she took care of the cooking, and cleaning...ya know, typical 1950’s woman.” He also mentioned, “Traditionally. Ya know, that a woman was to stay at home and a man was to go to work. That’s the traditional American...that was the traditional American way.” Leslie also discussed her husband’s assumptions about who should do what around the household and stated, “He was old school. You do it because I’m the guy.”

*Upbringing/Family of Origin.* All six participants reported that their

upbringing and their partner's upbringing had an impact on how division of household labor was decided in their heterosexual relationship. Upbringing impacted perceptions, beliefs, and expectations regarding how each member in the partnership should contribute, whether it was modeled directly or learned through experiences. When asked about what contributed to how division of household labor was decided in his heterosexual relationship, Dan stated:

I thought it was going to evolve into that...that ya know what society deems us. Traditional. I have been molded my whole life that way so. It was almost a brainwashing of sorts. What I was doing was trying to live the dream that I was told by my family that there are no other options. So yeah, I mean I was definitely looking to gear it that way...a white picket fence, babies, ya know.”

He also discussed taking on a particular gender role because of his upbringing when describing both types of relationships:

They are based on gender roles and ideas that are kind of implanted in us from the get-go from your parents. Regardless of how I...who I am now...I see myself as the more masculine side because I was reared that way. You know, um, I had to be. You know, so there were no choices.

Blair described being in foster care and having different “models” of division of household labor but seeing her biological mother take on a particular role in household responsibilities influenced her the most. When asked how that impacted division of household labor with her same-sex partner, she explained, “My biological mom who I spent the first seven years of my life with and seeing her gender role in that relationship were she was responsible for everything. I want to say that influenced my hetero

partnership with division of labor.”

**Partner Availability.** All participants reported that whoever was available determined how the division of household labor would be assigned, especially in cases when one partner worked and the other was unemployed. For example, Blair reported, “There wasn’t a time in our relationship where I was working so it was kind of assumed, “Oh you’re home so you are responsible for everything.” Patricia also describes her husband being a trucker and once he went on the road she stated, “But it all still would’ve changed when he went on the road. Ya know everything would’ve fell back on me again.”

**Dissatisfaction Due to Role Rigidity.** Five of the six participants reported that whoever did the majority of tasks in their heterosexual relationship felt unhappy, whether it was the participant or their partner. Participants described no room for flexibility or conversation about dividing tasks. Leslie stated, “With [*heterosexual partner’s name*] you didn’t talk about anything. He just told you what you were going to do.” Similarly, when asked how the division of household labor impacted how satisfied she was in her relationship, Patricia also reported, “I can answer it two ways. I can answer that I was happy about it because he was gone, or I could complain because I had to do it all.” She also mentioned that she was not happy with how division of household labor was decided and explains, “I would’ve liked it if we sat down and talked about it.”

**Resentment.** Five of the six participants reported that the partner who perceived himself/herself taking on the majority of household tasks felt disgruntled and felt there was no room for leverage to negotiate the division of household tasks. Blair stated that she felt “overburdened and underappreciated, and disgruntled” while Leslie

reported feeling “miserable and salty” about doing the majority of the household labor. Blair also stated, “I was really frustrated because I felt like I did everything. I think it contributed to a lot of dissatisfaction and feeling like you’re sort of alone in a partnership.” Similarly, Zachary describes his wife’s feelings about staying home and doing the majority of the chores by explaining, “She was not satisfied in the relationship. I think she was sick of sitting at the house everyday doing the same thing that was monotonous.”

***Controlling Partner.*** Though only two participants reported having volatile relationships with their heterosexual partner, it was noteworthy to mention because it impacted division household labor. One participant had a controlling husband and the other was controlling of how tasks got done around the house. Leslie describes her husband stalking her at work and reprimanding her if something was not done a certain way. She explained:

If I left a cup and didn’t put it in the dishwasher, I mean I would literally...say I was at work, I would literally hyperventilate because I left it out there knowing what the repercussions of doing that would be.

Similarly, Patricia describes being abused all her life and having arguments with her husband. She stated, “We had a very volatile...everything was I mean he’d be in the house for two or three minutes and swearing would start. We were very passionate arguers.” She then explains that she and her husband would argue because she wanted chores or responsibilities around the house done her way:

Well whoever’s job it was, it was how that person wanted it done and it would get done. That is one thing I saw myself falling into was doing things my way. I was

finding myself getting upset with him because he wasn't doing it my way.

***“He who makes the gold, makes the rules”***. Three participants reported that whoever financially provided for the household was entitled to making the majority of the decisions regarding division of household labor. Leslie stated, “His favorite line was, “He who makes the gold, makes the rules” when discussing feeling powerless in her heterosexual relationship. When asked if she cooked and cleaned and did laundry because he made the money she responded swiftly, “Yep.” When describing her household responsibilities because her husband was the only one working, Patricia stated, “I did all the cleaning...all the cooking...I did it all.”

**Category 2: Adjustment to the Division of Household Labor.**

This category summarizes participants' adjustment in going from a heterosexual cohabitating relationship to their first same-sex cohabitating relationship in regards to the division of household labor. Participants' responses varied. Some participants described adjusting to having more support with household tasks from their same-sex partner and others described not having to adjust regarding help with the household tasks.

**Adjustment in Being Supported with Division of Household Labor.** A couple of participants reported having to adjust to having more help with the division of household labor in their same-sex relationship. Leslie described how her experiences with her ex-husband impacted her adjustment in her same-sex relationship. She reported having to adjust to her same-sex partner not being controlling about the household tasks like her ex-husband. Leslie explained:

I had this horrible habit of leaving the towel on the bed and it was always something that used to get me fried with him [*referring to heterosexual partner*]

and if I would leave the towel on the bed I felt like I needed to call and apologize...and now I'll do the, "Oh God, I didn't mean to leave it out." She'll [*same-sex partner*] just be like, "Who are you talking to? I am not him."

However, Leslie continued to describe not having to adjust when dividing household labor, "As far as household chores, I didn't really have to adjust for household crap. Other than getting used to the fact that I didn't have to do it all."

Similarly, Blair also described adjusting to having help with household tasks and explained:

Yeah I think there has been some adjustment but it's all been good. I guess when I think about adjustment I think about getting used to something that's challenging and I don't think that's been the case. But it's definitely different to feel supported and like you can work through any feelings of dissatisfaction around tasks.

**No Adjustment Regarding the Division of Household Labor.** Some participants reported not having to adjust. Nicole described why she felt there was no adjustment regarding dividing household chores when going from a heterosexual cohabitating relationship to her first same-sex cohabitating relationship and stated, "There was no preconceived expectations that one of us [*referring to her same-sex partner*] would do more than the other because we're both women." When asked about adjustment when going from one relationship to the other, Zachary stated that he did not feel there was any adjustment. He explained:

I don't really see much difference in the labor thing because I mean it's like I don't care if you're in a gay relationship or a heterosexual relationship. There has got to be some type of shared responsibilities around the house and in the

relationship period.

### **Category 3: Same-Sex Relationship**

The category Same-Sex Relationship summarizes participants' reports of how division of household tasks was decided in their same-sex relationship. Feelings of frustration and happiness are described and what contributed to those feelings of frustration and happiness are also discussed.

**Continuous Communication.** All six participants reported that they were frequently communicating with their same-sex partner about division of household labor. Participants felt that there was always room for conversation regarding household tasks. For example, Blair described the communication process with her partner and reported:

It's a fluid process and we can always talk about it you know like if some kind of chore starts to feel like, "I'm really tired of doing this and I'm only doing it by myself." It's very easy to bring that up and have a conversation.

Similarly, Patricia also described a fluid conversation process with her partner and stated, "If she wants something or doesn't want something, we talk about it. If it's something for the house, we talk about it and work it into the budget and we go get it." Dan also mentioned continuous communication regarding tasks around the home and stated, "We express openly like, "Okay, we gotta get the carpet cleaned" or ya know "we gotta get a new shower curtain because that one is disgusting."

**Task Preference.** Four of the six participants reported dividing household tasks based on whoever was comfortable doing certain tasks, or based on whoever was willing to do a certain tasks because the other partner was reluctant. For example, Patricia reported, "We talked about it and I just kind of pushed the cooking on her (*laughs*)

because I don't like the kitchen." Similarly, Blair mentioned, "I don't like the outside chores (*laughs*) so that's our bargain." Other participants reported not minding doing certain tasks because they enjoyed them or wanted them done a certain way. For example, Zachary reported, "I'm more of a yard person. I like being outside working on the yard, growing plants, vegetables, ya know, keeping the grass looking nice." Blair also mentioned, "I just generally will sort, and wash, and dry, and fold because I don't mind doing those things and I'm really particular about it."

**Equal Division of Household Labor.** Half of the participants reported their relationship as an equal partnership. Participants also described a more equal division of household labor in their same-sex relationship than their heterosexual relationship. When asked about division of household labor in her same-sex relationship, Nicole stated, "Um, I would say it's kind of...the same as far as it being a little bit of 50/50." She also mentioned, "I think it's pretty split up." Similarly, Dan also describes equity in his same-sex relationship. He explained, "Quite frankly I feel like there's more equality between the two of us. A 50/50ness." Blair also described feeling equal in her same-sex relationship. She stated, "We're just in general viewed as more equals or view each other as more equals." She continues:

Going from a partnership where you feel alone and to one where you problem-solve together and have an equal share in things...we talk about an equity approach where it's not tit for tat. It's like, "You do one load of laundry and I'll do the next load of laundry." It makes us feel like we're equal in what we bring to the table."

***Satisfaction Due to Equal Division of Household Labor.*** All participants

reported feeling satisfied in their same-sex relationship due to an equal division of household labor. Participants felt there was fairness and appreciation between themselves and their partners. Blair stated, “I think it’s...um again that equity piece um, equal partnership idea that we both have an understanding that it’s important in order to be happy with each other.” Zachary reported, “We’re very happy with it” when referring to division of household labor in his same-sex relationship and also mentioned, “He’s very satisfied. I’m very satisfied and very happy. So I mean things are good.” Similarly, Leslie reported, “Oh it’s amazing. It’s wonderful. I have zero complaints about it. We’re both...I can honestly tell you we are both 100% satisfied with the way stuff goes at our apartment.” Nicole also mentioned, “I feel much more satisfied because it’s not all on me” when discussing household labor in her same-sex relationship.

***Taking the Initiative.*** Participants described the idea of “whoever sees it, does it” in regards to household tasks and described their partnership as teamwork. Participants described doing household tasks based on whoever sees a task needs to be done. For example, Patricia reported, “If it needs to be done ya know whoever sees it, does it” and also mentions, “Dishes...we both do it. She waits until there is enough to put in the dishwasher so whoever gets in there at that moment first...” Similarly, Leslie reported, “Ya know if we see that laundry needs to be done, whoever sees it, does it. “ She continued to explain about how the kitchen is cleaned and stated, “Um, whoever gets home first or sees it. Um, but whoever cooks, the other one cleans up.”

**“Picking up the slack”.** Some participants reported that one partner would help the other complete a household task, or one partner would take on more household tasks because the other partner was unavailable. For example, Nicole stated, “There were other

times...there are times when sometimes I do a little bit more or [*same-sex partner's name*] does a little bit more..." She goes on to elaborate, "You know with laundry, it's kind of like I'll start it and [*same-sex partner's name*] is great at getting it done and folding it up." Patricia also reported, "If I don't get the dishes put away or washed the night before, she'll do them in the morning while she's making coffee."

***Disease and Disability.*** Four of the six participants described either themselves or their partner being on disability or having a debilitating disease that impacted division of household labor. Two participants were on disability, one participant had lupus, and one participant's partner was on disability because of a car accident. When describing her back issues, Patricia explained:

She does the dishwasher. She does that because I don't like bending down. It hurts. Most of the time I do the laundry unless I'm really hurting. I'll ask if she can finish a load for me. Vacuuming and stuff I usually start it and with my back a lot of times she'll finish it.

She continues to describe how her back prevents her from being able to finish other tasks and describes trying to prepare the tasks for her partner in order to be helpful. She states:

I'll go get the vacuum cleaner ready and start it and she'll take over because she knows if I do it for too much longer I'll be crippled for three days. Um, the laundry, If I know I have to use my cane to help me stand I'll ask if she can finish the laundry.

Similarly, Dan describes his partner's disability and how that impact division of household tasks. He explains, "So I come home and he says all these things are going to be done and one out of seven are but at the same time I don't press too hard. There are

times when his body aches.”

**Co-Constructing Division of Household Labor.** Participants described deciding how to divide tasks based on however they and their partner saw fit. This was based on their perceptions, beliefs, expectations, experiences, and preferences. Leslie explained:

Um, nothing, nothing, nothing has ever been decided as far as who does what responsibility. We decided from the start that we were not going to have a relationship like we both had before. If we want to leave shit on the floor, that’s what we’re going to do.

Nicole also explained how she and her same-sex partner worked through deciding how tasks would be divided and reported, “As we got together it was just sort of figuring out what needs to get done and how to get it done. She later explained, “Um, we’re fortunate to be able to just make it work without any stereotypes or expectations” when referencing how they decided to divide household tasks.

**Navigating Engrained Gender Roles.** Most participants discussed gender roles based on past experiences and expectations. Participants described having to address gender roles in their same-sex relationship and decide how they wanted to divide household labor, whether based on gender roles or how they saw fit. Nicole explained:

Maybe looking at them and figuring out if you’re doing something because you want to or because you’re supposed to. And it’s not like there’s a male role and a female role, but sometimes in figuring out in the “what needs to get done” um letting go of kind of the stuff you see in television commercials and just figuring out who’s best to do what.

Nicole also explained how gender roles became more evident in her same-sex

relationship and described coming to the realization that she and her partner had to address them:

It was sort of funny to have this moment where we both kind of looked at each other and we're going, "Oh gosh, who kills things?" Who kills the spiders? Who handles the icky things like that and looking like, "Gosh we're both looking for the man in the house."

Blair described gender roles as a choice in her same-sex relationship because she reports feeling comfortable in the "female role":

Um, I think [*same-sex partner's name*] is...it's always funny to talk about this because people always say, "Who's the *man* in your relationship?" And we're both like, "Uh, well we're both not men." So...but I do think we sort of um, have kind of a clear definition of gender roles. She works on the car, she does the repairs, she does any kind of um...if the car needs to be inspected and that kind of thing. Sometimes we jokingly say like I do the girl chores and she does the boy chores.

Similarly, Dan also describes gender roles in his same-sex relationship and how they are interchangeable:

As far as his feminine role, he'll out of the blue be like, "I armerolled the tires." Like wow, did you voice get lower too? (*laughs*) Do you know what I mean? He like all of a sudden the butch [*same-sex partner's name*] comes out and I'm like, "This is a new twist" so there's still surprises there.

***Gay and Lesbian Gender Expression.*** Three participants reported not ascribing to gender roles in regards to dividing household tasks in their same-sex

relationship, however they still mentioned gender expression, ways that individuals express femininity and masculinity, when discussing their same-sex relationship. For example, Zachary reported, “Well I shouldn’t say it like that either because that’s...that would be stereotyping. I can’t say it like that” when asked about gender roles in his relationship. He also mentioned, “I consider him more in touch with his feminine side than I am. Um, he’s more flamboyant than I am. I’m more...I’m more reserved.” Similarly, Patricia reported, “We’re not butch/femme. There are a lot of couples that there’s definitely a more male type personality. We don’t have that. We didn’t want that.” Dan also described how gay men appreciate aesthetics in a home and explains:

I think definitely gay men do have more um, artistic and um, wanting to decorate and a want for cleanliness, a need for cleanliness...a desire to have things that are beautiful around them and a desire to make the world beautiful.

#### **Category 4: Benefits and Challenges**

This category summarizes the benefits and challenges reported by participants regarding division of household labor when going from a heterosexual relationship to a same-sex relationship. Most participants expressed having more help with household labor in their same-sex relationship. The majority of participants also reported not having any challenges from their experiences, one participant mentioned cleanliness as a challenge, and one participant reported navigating gender roles as a challenge.

**Benefit of More Assistance with Household Tasks.** Three female participants reported they had more help with household tasks in their same-sex relationship than in their heterosexual relationship. For example, Patricia explained, “I have help with chores now. Again, there’s no fighting. The tension is gone” when discussing the benefits of

dividing household labor when going from a heterosexual cohabitating relationship to her first same-sex cohabitating relationship. Similarly, Leslie reported, “ In my heterosexual relationship. I didn’t have any help and in this one [*referring to same-sex relationship*] I do. That’s pretty much cut and dry. I mean that’s the benefit.”

**No Challenges.** The majority of participants described not having any challenges regarding division household labor when going from a heterosexual cohabitating relationship to their first same-sex cohabitating relationship. Blair reported not having any challenges because of how her same-sex relationship worked out:

I don’t think there are any challenges in that area. I could imagine like maybe if I were with a woman who didn’t enjoy doing the yard work or car repairs and that kind of stuff. I foresee that it would be difficult because there would be a lot more tasks that no one wants to do. Um, but it just so happens that...it’s like a puzzle piece where she ends up liking all the tasks I hate doing so um, I don’t really have any challenges.

Zachary also described not having any challenges with his experience because he was used to having responsibilities. He explained, “There haven’t been any challenges for me. I just think it comes naturally for me. I grew up in a household where we all had certain things we had to do.” He continued to explain,

Put it this way, if I wasn’t in a relationship, whether hetero or homosexual, these things would have to be done. I have obligations as a person and a certain standard of living when it comes to the household labor.

In summary, the majority of participants reported that having more support with household tasks in their same-sex relationship was the biggest benefit from their

experiences. Most participants also discussed not facing any challenges dividing household tasks when going from a heterosexual cohabitating relationship to their first same-sex cohabitating relationship.

## Chapter V: Discussion

This study sought to understand gay men and lesbian's experiences of dividing household labor when going from a heterosexual cohabitating relationship to a same-sex cohabitating relationship. The six individuals interviewed provided important insight and described how division of household labor was decided in their heterosexual relationship and their same-sex relationships, what contributed to the decision to divide tasks, how that impacted satisfaction in each relationship, adjustment regarding the division of household labor when going from a heterosexual cohabitating relationship to their first same-sex cohabitating relationship, and any benefits and challenges faced from this experience. Participants described a traditional division of household labor in their heterosexual relationships based on their upbringing. Positive adjustment or no adjustment was reported and an equal division of household labor was most reported in participants' same-sex relationship. Although there were no challenges reported by most participants, participants felt the biggest benefit from their experiences was having more assistance dividing tasks in their same-sex relationship.

Consistent with empirical literature on traditional roles in heterosexual relationships where women assume more of the household labor (Arrighi & Maume 2000; Coltrane, 2000; Kurdek, 1993; Thébaud, 2010), four of the six participants mentioned a traditional division of household labor in their heterosexual relationships. Furthermore, participants described a traditional division of household labor due to gender, which is also consistent with empirical research (Esmail, 2010; van Hooff, 2011) and consistent with the Gender Role Ideology perspective (Beavers, 1982; Steil, 1997). One male participant and one female participant reported that gender roles were present

in their same-sex relationship but still reported that dividing tasks was more fluid compared to their heterosexual relationship. This may be because these participants reported feeling equal with their same-sex partner. Other participants reported explicitly discussing gender roles with their same-sex partner. This may be because participants were in a new type of relationship and did not necessarily fit the traditional gender roles reported in their heterosexual relationship. Research has reported that gay men and lesbians are not following gender expectations in regards to division of household labor (Khor, 2007). Thus, same-sex couples may have to talk more about gender roles, especially individuals who are in their first same-sex relationship.

Also, aligned with research, participants reported that the traditional division of household labor was expected at the time (Cunningham, 2001). Three of the four women stated that they were assumed to take on the majority or all of the household tasks because they were the females in their relationships. One male participant also reported that his wife was assumed to stay at home. This may be because of societal expectations that were imposed on these participants growing up. One female participant reported an equal division of household labor in her heterosexual relationship because both partners were working and making six figured incomes. This appears to be consistent with Cha and Thébaud's (2010) findings of couples with higher socioeconomic status having less traditional gender role ideology.

Participants also mentioned that the partner who worked outside the home had more power in their heterosexual relationship and therefore made the decisions about how household labor was divided. This is consistent with the Relative Resources Perspective in the literature on division of household labor (Knudsen & Waerness, 2008).

Also consistent with the literature on this perspective (Parkman, 2004), participants reported that the partner with the higher income in their heterosexual relationship spent less time on housework. Three female participants and both male participants mentioned this in their interviews. Three female participants stayed at home and did the majority of household chores because their husbands made the household income. One of the male participants reported having a stay at home wife that did the majority of the household chores because he was the one working and therefore, he was not responsible for most of the housework. Interestingly, the other male participant reported his girlfriend had a higher income than he did and therefore, felt he had to overcompensate around the house more.

Previous empirical literature has reported that there are differences between heterosexual couples and same-sex couples regarding the division of household labor (Kurdek, 1993; Kurdek, 2006; Oerton, 1997; Patterson, 2000;). Because of these differences this study focused on the adjustment when going from a heterosexual relationship to a same-sex relationship. Some participants reported having to adjust and others reported not having to adjust regarding the division of household labor when going from a heterosexual cohabitating relationship to their first same-sex relationship. The majority of women reported having to adjust to being more supported with household tasks in their same-sex relationship. This could be because they reported doing most of the housework in their heterosexual relationship and had to adjust to having more help with household tasks in their same-sex relationship. Also, it is possible that participants who came out during their heterosexual relationship might have already made adjustments before their first same-sex relationship.

In terms of a more egalitarian division of household labor, three of the four women in this study described a more equal division of household labor in their same-sex relationship, which is consistent with the existing research (Dunne, 2003; Patterson, 2000). This may be because they took on the majority of the household tasks in their heterosexual relationship and strived for a more equal division. One woman described no difference in terms of dividing household tasks between her heterosexual relationship and her same-sex relationship, but later describes she also had to strive for equality in her heterosexual relationship because she did not want to end up doing majority of household tasks like her mother. Consistent with Khor (2007) and Kamano (2007), fluidity was mentioned by female participants in their same-sex relationship regarding allocation of household tasks.

There were some differences between the men and women in this study. Interestingly, both male participants seemed to report a more traditional division of household labor in their same-sex relationship, where one partner worked and the other stayed home and took on the majority of the household tasks, but still described being happier and more equal in their same-sex relationship. One male described gender roles as a factor for division of household labor in his same-sex relationship whereas the other did not feel gender roles played factor in how household labor was divided, but still used words such as “flamboyant” and “reserved” when describing himself and his partner. Consistent with Kurdek’s (2007) findings of male partners specializing in particular tasks, both male participants described one partner having specific tasks either inside or outside the house. The partner that stayed home, whether it was the participant or the participant’s partner, also took on the majority of household tasks.

In addition, participants also stated there were some benefits in regards to the division of household labor when going from a heterosexual cohabitating relationship to their first same-sex cohabitating relationship. Participants reported feeling that they had more help with the household tasks in their same-sex relationships and three female participants specifically mentioned that they no longer had to take on all of the household responsibilities, which is consistent with a previous study on women who had formerly been in heterosexual relationship and were currently in a same-sex relationship (Boon & Alderson, 2009). Congruent with Boon and Alderson's (2009) findings, five participants in the current study mentioned continuous communication regarding division of household labor in their same-sex relationship compared to their previous heterosexual relationship. This may be because participants put forth more effort to communicate with their same-sex partner since they reported little to no communication regarding division of household labor in their heterosexual relationship. Participants may have also reported more communication regarding division of household labor with their same-sex partner because they were in their first same-sex relationship, and thus, discussing differences in allocating tasks may have been necessary.

The majority of participants described no challenges regarding division of household labor when going from a heterosexual cohabitating relationship to their first same-sex cohabitating relationship, while two participants reported different challenges. Four participants reported no challenges. This may be due to participants' reports of being happier in their same-sex relationship. One participant reported different personalities as a challenge, which was described as differing ideologies of cleanliness. One participant reported no challenges but later described navigating gender roles as a

challenge. This may be due to figuring out who does what responsibility because both partners are the same gender and according to research, same-sex relationships do not follow the same schemas as heterosexual couples. Research shows that lesbians and gay men are creating new norms for themselves in same-sex relationships while being aware of traditional gender norms (Khor, 2007; Kamano, 2009).

Overall, participants' reported a more traditional division of household labor in their heterosexual relationship and a more equal division of household labor in their same-sex relationship, which is consistent with the empirical literature. Participants attributed a traditional division of household labor on societal expectations and how they were raised. Some participants reported a positive adjustment in terms of being more supported in their same-sex relationship and others felt there was no adjustment in their experience. The female participant that reported an equal division of household labor in her heterosexual relationship reported having to make an effort for it to be equal. All females reported equal divisions of household labor in their same-sex relationship and both male participants seemed to report a more traditional division of household labor, but all participants reported feeling satisfied with their same-sex partner. Communication and fluidity were major factors that contributed to this satisfaction, which is also consistent with findings in previous research. Division of household labor seems to be a high conflict issue in heterosexual relationships since research shows women do more of the household tasks (Arrighi & Maume 2000; Coltrane, 2000; Kurdek, 1993; Thébaud, 2010). Participants in the current study reported more satisfaction in their same-sex relationship because of an equal division of household labor and feeling equal in their relationship. Thus, studying individuals' experiences who have been in both types of

relationships could help give more understanding on what contributes to relationship satisfaction.

### **Limitations**

The findings from this study were collected from a small sample size of individuals who were primarily recruited by word of mouth or through listserv emails. Consequently, the participants recruited for this study may have already had an interest in topics concerning same-sex relationships and the division of household labor. In addition, four of the six participants had a partner with a disability or the participants themselves had a disability, which may mean that participants that struggled with division of household labor wanted to come forth and share their experiences. All participants also described feeling happy and satisfied in their same-sex relationship so it is possible that those individuals who were not happy in their heterosexual relationship and are currently happy in their same-sex relationship felt more compelled to share their experience on what it was like going from one relationship type to another in regards to the division of household labor. Also, only two men were recruited for this study, and both males had different experiences in their heterosexual relationship, but both experienced a disability in their same-sex relationship where one participant was on disability and the other's partner was on disability. It is possible that men who do not have a disability or a partner with a disability may have different experiences in their same-sex relationships. Also, the majority of participants in this study were cohabitating with their same-sex partner. Same-sex marriage is a new institution for same-sex couples and individuals who are married to their same-sex partner may have different experiences of allocating household tasks than individuals in a cohabitating same-sex relationship or a heterosexual marriage.

## **Clinical Implications**

Findings from the present study have important implications for marriage and family therapists and other mental health clinicians working with individuals who identify as gay or lesbian and have previously been in a heterosexual relationship and are currently in a same-sex relationship. These implications are especially important for therapists who do not identify as gay or lesbian because they may need to increase their cultural competency and cultural sensitivity when working with this population. Marriage and family therapists and other mental health clinicians, particularly those who do not identify as gay or lesbian, should not assume that every individual who has been in a heterosexual relationship was unsatisfied or had a traditional division of household labor and a satisfying, egalitarian division of household labor in their same-sex relationship. Nonetheless, clinicians should understand that each individual brings his or her own beliefs and expectations from being in a heterosexual relationship to his or her same-sex relationship, and realize that individuals' experiences will vary. Thus, addressing previous experiences in a heterosexual relationship is important and will help facilitate more understanding between the therapist and client, as well as between the client and his or her partner if involved in therapy. Furthermore, marriage and family therapists along with other mental health professionals who know little about the LGBT community may not realize what this population has faced from heterosexual schemas regarding the division of household labor. Therapists should help clients address any stigmas they have felt from their heterosexual relationship that have transpired in their same-sex relationship, and how that has impacted the decision-making process regarding division of household labor. Addressing stigmas and having increased awareness about this

population can improve the quality of care and comfort levels from those individuals seeking services.

### **Future Research**

More research should be conducted to fill the gap in the literature on this population and their experiences. Future research should include more men in its samples since the current study had an uneven ratio of men to women. There should also be more multicultural diversity among participants' races and ethnicities since different cultural backgrounds may contribute to different experiences. Research delving more into how division of household labor impacts relationship satisfaction would contribute to more understanding about cohabitating same-sex relationships. Future research should also explore married gay men and women who were once married to a heterosexual partner due to the growing number of states legalizing same-sex marriage, and what they have to say about division of household labor versus those individuals solely cohabitating. Including individuals who are not in their first same-sex cohabitating relationship since their heterosexual cohabitating relationship could also increase understanding on how couples decide to divide tasks based on experiences in previous cohabitating relationships. Also, focusing on how heterosexual and same-sex couples communicate about dividing household labor could increase understanding on how communication impacts relationship satisfaction. Finally, research including individuals with no disability or disease would increase understanding on how couples allocate division of household labor without a disability or disease impacting the decision.

### **Conclusion**

This qualitative study sought to explore gay men and lesbian's experiences of

dividing household labor when going from a heterosexual cohabitating relationship to a same-sex cohabitating relationship. Individuals discussed a variety of experiences in both types of relationships. The participants described how division of household labor was decided in their heterosexual relationship and their same-sex relationships, what contributed to the decision to divide tasks, how that impacted satisfaction in each relationship, adjustment regarding the division of household labor when going from a heterosexual cohabitating relationship to their first same-sex cohabitating relationship, and any benefits and challenges faced from this experience. The data from participants' experiences suggest more traditional roles regarding division of household labor in their heterosexual relationships and a more egalitarian division of household labor in their same-sex relationships. Findings from this study will help marriage and family therapists and other mental health professionals by raising awareness about this population's experiences of dividing household labor. Future research is needed to better understand decisions behind dividing household labor when going from a heterosexual cohabitating relationship to a same-sex cohabitating relationship.

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**Table 1. Demographics**

<i>Table 1</i>								
<i>Demographics</i>								
<b>Pseudonym Name</b>	Age	State of Current Residency	Number of Years in Heterosexual Relationship	Relationship Status	Heterosexual Partner's Annual Household Income	Number of Years in Same-Sex Relationship	Relationship Status	Same-Sex Partner's Annual Household Income
<b>Dan</b>	40	VA	1 year, 1 month	Cohabiting	\$45,000	6	Engaged, Cohabiting	Disability
<b>Nicole</b>	43	FL	5	Married	\$115,000	8	Married	\$200,000
<b>Zachary</b>	47	VA	5	Married	\$0	6	Cohabiting	\$70,000
<b>Patricia</b>	48	TX	24	Married	\$80,000	7	Cohabiting	\$36,000
<b>Leslie</b>	48	MA	22	Married	\$200,000	2	Cohabiting	\$30,000
<b>Blair</b>	29	MD	1 year, 2 months	Cohabiting	\$45,000	2	Cohabiting	\$50,000



## Appendix B

### Participant Recruitment Email

Hello,

I am pleased to announce that I am now recruiting for my thesis study exploring what gay men and lesbians experience regarding the division of household labor when going from a heterosexual cohabiting relationship to their first same-sex cohabiting relationship.

Participant eligibility includes men and women who must be at least 25-years or older and must have been in their heterosexual relationship (cohabitated or married) for at least one year and are now in their first same-sex relationship (cohabitating or married) for at least one year.

Please contact me if you are willing to volunteer to participate in my study.

Sincerely,

Laura Olah  
Virginia Tech MFT Masters Candidate  
Grnis012@vt.edu  
(757) 613-2265

## Appendix C

### Internet and Facebook Posting

Hello,

I am pleased to announce that I am now recruiting for my thesis study exploring what gay men and lesbians experience regarding the division of household labor when going from a heterosexual cohabiting relationship to their first same-sex cohabiting relationship.

Participant eligibility includes men and women who must be at least 25-years or older and must have been in their heterosexual relationship (cohabitated or married) for at least one year and are now in their first same-sex relationship (cohabitating or married) for at least one year.

Please contact me if you are willing to volunteer to participate in my study.

Sincerely,

Laura Olah  
Virginia Tech MFT Masters Candidate  
Grnis012@vt.edu  
(757) 613-2265

## Appendix D

## Screening Questions

Name:

Date:

1. Do you self-identify as a gay male or lesbian?
2. How old are you?
3. Was your last relationship a heterosexual relationship?
4. Were you married or cohabitating in your heterosexual relationship?
  - a. For how long?
  - b. Do you have children from this relationship?
  - c. Do you have custody of your children?
5. Are you currently in your first committed same-sex relationship?
6. Are you married or cohabitating?
  - a. For how long?
7. How often to do you get outside help for household tasks?

## Appendix E

### Research Informed Consent

#### **Informed Consent for Participants in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects**

**Title of Project:** Gay Men and Lesbian's Experiences Regarding the Division of Household Labor When Going from a Heterosexual Cohabiting Relationship to Their First Same-Sex Cohabiting Relationship

**Researchers:** Laura Olah, M.S. Candidate, Marjorie-Strachman-Miller, Ph.D., and Mariana Falconier, Ph. D.

**I. Purpose of Research:** The aim of the current study is to have a better understanding of gay men's experiences of allocating division of household chores who have gone from a heterosexual relationship to a same-sex relationship as well as exploring the benefits and challenges of their experiences.

**II. Procedures:** You will first be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire providing general information about you and your relationships. It is expected that this form will take about 5 minutes to complete. After completing the demographic questionnaire, the interview process will begin. The interview will take about an hour to an hour and a half to complete, and will be conducted in-person, over the phone, or via Skype. You will be asked to reflect and describe your experience of allocating division of household labor in both relationships as well as the challenges and benefits faced in both of your relationships. These interviews will be audio recorded and then transcribed for further analysis by the researchers.

**III. Risks:** The researchers anticipate minimal risks for participating in this research study. As a result of the interview questions, you may experience some emotional discomfort. You may decline to participate or answer a question at any point in time if you wish to do so.

**IV. Benefits:** As a result of participating in this study you may feel a sense of satisfaction for contributing to an important area of research that will help future clinicians as well as individuals with the same experience. You may also find it beneficial to share your experiences of allocating division of household labor in switching to your first same-sex relationship.

**V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality:** Every effort will be made to keep the information you provide strictly confidential. Your responses will be locked in a secure location for the duration of the study. Your names will be replaced with a pseudonym and any identifying information will be destroyed. Furthermore, your names and other identifying information will not be disclosed on any future reports or publications.

**VI. Compensation:** There is no compensation, however, participating in this study benefits research.

**VII. Freedom to Withdraw:** You do not have to participate in this research study. You have the freedom to withdraw from the study at any point in time without penalty.

**VIII. Participant's Responsibilities:** I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the following responsibilities: I will complete a demographic questionnaire. I will complete a one-hour interview in-person, over the telephone, or via Skype. If I complete

my interview in-person, it will take place at a location decided upon by the researcher and myself.

**IX. Participant's Permission:**

I have read the Consent form and the conditions of this project. I have had all of my questions answered, and I hereby give my voluntary consent to participate in this study.

Participant's Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact:

Laura K. Olah, B.S., Principal Researcher

(757) 613-2254

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Chair, Virginia Tech Institutional Review

Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Office of Research Compliance

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Appendix F  
Demographic Questionnaire

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Race/Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation and Estimated Annual Income:

\_\_\_\_\_

How long were you in your heterosexual relationship?

\_\_\_\_\_

Were you married or cohabiting?

\_\_\_\_\_

What was your partner's age and race/ethnicity?

\_\_\_\_\_

What was your partner's occupation and estimated annual income?

\_\_\_\_\_

Do you have any children from your heterosexual relationship? If so, how many?

\_\_\_\_\_

What does your custody and visitation of your children involve?

\_\_\_\_\_

When did you come-out and go from a heterosexual relationship to same-sex relationship?

\_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been in your same-sex relationship?

---

Are you married or cohabitating?

---

What is your partner's age and race/ethnicity?

---

What is your partner's occupation and estimated annual income?

---

Does your partner have any past experience in a cohabitating heterosexual and/or same-sex relationship?

---

## Appendix G

## Confidentiality Agreement



Department of Human Development  
Northern Virginia Center  
7054 Haycock Road, Falls Church, Virginia 22043-2311  
703 538-8470 Fax: 703 538-8465

**Confidentiality Agreement for Interview Data**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ agree to safeguard the identity of participants enrolled in the *Gay Men and Lesbian's Experience of the Division of Household Labor When Going from a Heterosexual Cohabiting Relationship to Their First Same-Sex Cohabiting Relationship* study. I will not disclose or discuss participant-related material outside of meetings with the research team. I will protect the confidentiality of all participants by safeguarding participant related-materials, which includes identifiable information disclosed in participants' interviews.

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_