



HHS Public Access

Author manuscript

Gend Soc. Author manuscript; available in PMC 2018 March 06.

Published in final edited form as:

Gend Soc. 2018 ; 32(1): 109–131. doi:10.1177/0891243217742110.

GENDER CONFORMITY, PERCEPTIONS OF SHARED POWER, AND MARITAL QUALITY IN SAME- AND DIFFERENT-SEX MARRIAGES

AMANDA M. POLLITT,

University of Texas at Austin, USA

BRANDON A. ROBINSON, and

University of California, Riverside, USA

DEBRA UMBERSON

University of Texas at Austin, USA

Abstract

Research on gender inequality within different-sex marriages shows that women do more unpaid labor than men, and that the perception of inequality influences perceptions of marital quality. Yet research on same-sex couples suggests the importance of considering how gender is relational. Past studies show that same-sex partners share unpaid labor more equally and perceive greater equity than do different-sex partners, and that lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are less gender conforming than heterosexuals. However, studies have not considered how gender conformity might shape inequalities and marital quality within same- and different-sex unions. In this study, we analyze dyadic data from both spouses in same- and different-sex marriages to explore how sex of spouse and gender conformity influence perceptions of shared power within the relationship, which, in turn, influences marital quality. Results show that greater gender conformity is related to stronger perceptions of shared power in different-sex and male same-sex couples but not in female same-sex couples. Perceptions of shared power are positively associated with marital quality in all union types. Our findings suggest that maintaining hegemonic masculinity and power inequalities may be salient to marriages with men. In female same-sex couples, gender and its relation to power inequalities may carry less meaning.

Keywords

marriage; power; gender conformity; same-sex couples; different-sex couples

Marriage is a primary institutional context for the study of gender and gender inequality. Within this context, one way in which gender inequality is maintained is through gender norms, which are often upheld by hegemonic masculinity—the pattern of practices that

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Amanda M. Pollitt, The University of Texas at Austin, 305 E. 23rd Street, Stop G1800, Austin, TX 78712-1699, USA; apollitt@utexas.edu.

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legitimize men's dominance over women (Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). A rich literature on different-sex partnerships has focused on household labor as a measure of shared power in relationships to reveal substantial gender inequalities in the context of different-sex marriage, often through the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity. Men do less unpaid labor than their female partners, including less housework (Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard 2010), emotion work (Curran et al. 2015; Erickson 2005; Thomeer, Reczek, and Umberson 2015), and child care (Hochschild 1989; Poortman and Lippe 2009). However, almost all prior research on power inequalities in different-sex relationships analyzes gender by comparing women to men (Davis 2010), which does not account for the degree to which women and men within these couples are gender conforming (i.e., women embody femininity and men embody masculinity). Hegemonic gender norms are often exaggerated forms of how women and men are expected to behave and interact in ways that perpetuate gender inequalities (Ferree 2010); however, few people fully enact and conform to these norms (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Thus, we can more deeply understand gender inequalities and power in relationships through documenting how gender conformity shapes relationship dynamics within marriages.

Past research on same-sex couples points to the importance of considering not just gender but also gender conformity in understanding relationship and marital processes. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are less likely to be gender conforming than are heterosexuals (Li, Pollitt, and Russell 2016), and same-sex couples share the household division of labor more equally than different-sex couples (Balsam et al. 2008; Gotta et al. 2011). This research suggests that same-sex relationships enact power inequalities to a lesser degree and may be more likely to challenge the maintenance of hegemonic gender norms and relations. At the same time, same-sex couples might be under pressure to enact power inequalities through gender conforming behaviors to avoid stigma (Carrington 1999). Furthermore, research on power inequalities in different-sex relationships may not apply as well to gender nonconforming couples where at least one person within the relationship does not embody and/or enact the dominant gender norms of society. By examining gender conformity in same- and different-sex marriages, we go beyond a binary view of gender differences within marriage to consider one's gender appearance, demeanor, hobbies, and skills on a continuum (Davis 2010) and to extend prior research on how gender shapes and structures power inequalities in marital relationships.

Power inequalities are shaped and structured in part by the division of labor within a relationship, which in turn affects marital quality. Division of labor in different-sex marriages often remains unequal even when couples believe that both spouses should share equal power (Hochschild 1989; Stevens, Kiger, and Riley 2001), and such inequality is associated with lower relationship quality, including less relationship satisfaction and intimacy (Carlson, Hanson, and Fitzroy 2016; Galovan et al. 2014; Holm et al. 2001; Kurdek 2007; Stevens, Kiger, and Riley 2001). The maintenance of hegemonic gender norms in relationships then appears to arrange unequal divisions of labor and power in marriages despite often having negative associations with marital quality.

Gender as Relational and Gender Conformity

Recent research on shared power and household division of labor has moved away from describing gender as the result of socialization to a view of gender as relational, which focuses on how gender is “influenced by social interactions within relational contexts” (Umberson, Thomeer, and Lodge 2015, 542). In this perspective, gender is enacted differently depending on whether one is in a relationship with a man or a woman, so that social interactions unfold differently for men in relationships with men, men in relationships with women, women in relationships with men, and women in relationships with women. A gender as relational perspective examines how broader cultural expectations about gender influence behaviors and relationship dynamics (Thebaud 2010). Thus, gender is constructed, negotiated, and performed within relationships (Umberson, Thomeer, and Lodge 2015). Furthermore, gender appearance, demeanor, hobbies, and skills also can affect how gender is constructed, negotiated, and performed within a relationship. As “doing gender” is the activity or accomplishment of managing one’s behavior in everyday life (West and Zimmerman 1987), doing gender in conforming ways can maintain gender norms in relationships, particularly hegemonic masculinity. From a gender as relational perspective then, studying gender conformity rather than gender binaries reveals more about how gender structures power inequalities.

The gender as relational perspective has been applied to different-sex partnerships to show how women and men structure gender in their relationships through an examination of the division of household labor. Within committed partnerships such as marriage, men do less unpaid labor—including emotion work, household work, and child care—than do women (Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard 2010), in part because this unpaid labor is associated with hegemonic gender norms expected of women. Women may do unpaid labor to conform to societal gender norms, and men may avoid unpaid labor in the home also to conform to gender norms (Civettini 2016; Curran et al. 2015; Pfeffer 2010). Thus, unpaid labor becomes a way in which adherence to gender conformity maintains power inequalities in relationships and reinforces hegemonic gender norms. For example, some wives who are not gender conforming because they earn more income than their husbands do more housework as a form of deviance neutralization, as a way to re-emphasize their femininity (Civettini 2016). Likewise, some economically dependent husbands, whose masculinity might be threatened by not being the breadwinner, do less housework to reinforce their masculinity (Greenstein 2000). Although the research on gender deviance neutralization has been inconsistent and may only apply to certain couples (e.g., low-income heterosexual couples; see Sullivan 2011), the fact that gender inequalities in household labor remain suggests that gender conformity could be an important facet of how couples enact and reproduce gender norms and maintain power inequalities in their relationships (Collins 1998; Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard 2010)

Gender as relational perspective also has been used to examine power inequalities in division of household labor for same-sex couples. Compared to different-sex couples, same-sex couples have more egalitarian attitudes about how gender structures their relationships (Shechory and Ziv 2007), which manifest in a more equal division of household labor (Balsam et al. 2008; Gotta et al. 2011; Kurdek 1993; Shelton and John 1996). These

differences may result in part because there is less need to enact practices that reify inequalities between women and men when both people in a relationship are the same sex (Goldberg 2013). Same-sex couples often challenge notions of the gendered meanings of housework, such that same-sex couples both “do” (West and Zimmerman 1987) and “undo” gender (Deutsch 2007; Goldberg 2013; Risman 2009). For example, in her research on black lesbian stepfamilies, Moore (2008) found that regardless of personal income, biological mothers do more household chores than nonbiological mothers. She argues that doing more household chores is associated with greater relationship power within black lesbian stepfamilies because gender norms related to family identities (such as biological mothers should do more child care work) enable lesbian mothers to “associate control over some forms of household labor with greater relationship power” (Moore 2008, 353).

Despite these differences in attitudes and household division of labor, same-sex couples may re-create power inequalities through gender norms. In his in-depth study of family life among same-sex couples, Carrington (1999) found no evidence for the argument that there is equality regarding domestic work in same-sex couples simply because both partners are the same sex. He argues that same-sex couples “strategically emphasize those behaviors that conform to and affirm the reigning ideals concerning gender and family in American culture” (217), but, to prevent stigma, that they are under more pressure to appear both different from (i.e., egalitarian) and the same as different-sex couples (i.e., conform to gender norms). Typically, partners with less job prestige or less personal income do more housework (Carrington 1999; Goldberg 2013); that is, the partner who does not meet masculine ideals of paid labor is expected to conduct more “feminine” tasks at home, and couples struggle to reconcile these divisions as equal and fair (Carrington 1999). Though gender conformity may not fully explain these divisions, even from a financial rationality or relative resources perspective—which suggest that couples divide household labor based on who earns more or works more hours—the person who is more engaged in the masculine realm of paid work is not expected to conduct as much feminine, unpaid labor at home. However, inconsistencies in the research on divisions of labor in same-sex couples suggest that gender conformity may depend on whether the couple consists of two women or two men.

Gender Conformity, Perception of Power, and Marital Quality

In general, for both same- and different-sex relationships, more equality in household labor is associated with better relationship quality (Carlson, Hanson, and Fitzroy 2016; Galovan et al. 2014; Holm et al. 2001; Kurdek 2007; Stevens, Kiger, and Riley 2001). However, despite relationship benefits, gender differences in division of household labor among different-sex couples persists (Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard 2010). Subjective measures of gender inequality in relationships, such as perceptions of shared power or equity, have been less studied than reports of hours spent doing housework and child care labor. These subjective perceptions of shared power appear to have important implications for marital quality: both women and men report worse marital quality and increased likelihood of divorce when they perceive inequality in their relationship (Frisco and Williams 2003). One study found that, among middle-class, different-sex couples, perceived inequity in relationships was the strongest predictor of marital conflict (Perry-Jenkins and Folk 1994).

Research shows that same-sex couples perceive more equity in their relationships than do different-sex couples (Goldberg 2013; Shechory and Ziv 2007). Greater perceived equity in same-sex couples may be sensitive to gender and gender conformity. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual people report less gender conformity (Li, Pollitt, and Russell 2016), and that they share the division of labor more equally in relationships than do heterosexuals (Shechory and Ziv 2007). Women and men in different-sex relationships often perceive an unequal division of labor as “fair” (Claffey and Manning 2010), potentially because conforming to hegemonic gender norms requires that women do more unpaid labor at home than men. In fact, women who believe women and men should share equal power in relationships report less relationship satisfaction than women who believe power should be divided based on sex (i.e., that men should hold more power in relationships) (Amato and Booth 1995; Lavee and Katz 2002). This finding suggests that women whose gender conformity relies on traditional beliefs about gender, such as women should do the majority of household labor, do not perceive unequal power in their relationships and report better relationship quality. In contrast, divisions of labor among same-sex couples that are unfair or unequal, particularly if these divisions are based on gender norms (e.g., breadwinners do less household labor), can result in relationship dissatisfaction and breakup (Carrington 1999).

Therefore, it is important to examine how gender conformity influences perceptions of shared power in same- and different-sex relationships, because inequalities in relationships are shaped by partners’ struggles to conform to and/or reject hegemonic gender norms (Carrington 1999; Ferree 2010). These inequalities then have important implications for marital quality. In examining gender conformity, we can more clearly understand how spouses enact gender inequalities and extend our empirical and theoretical understandings of gender in relationships. In the current study, we examine the relationship between gender conformity and perceptions of shared power, as well as associations between perceptions of shared power and marital quality, in same- and different-sex marriages.

METHODS

We utilized dyadic data from a survey of 460 ($n = 920$ individuals) mid-life married couples: 171 female same-sex couples, 124 male same-sex couples, and 165 different-sex couples. Participants were between the ages of 35 and 65, had been legally married for at least three years, and had an average relationship duration of 15.14 years. Both spouses completed the online survey separately, and the survey took about 45 minutes. The survey focused on a range of questions about relationships and health, with a focus on how spouses in long-term relationships influence each other’s health and health care. Upon both spouses completing the survey, each person received a \$50 gift card.

To create comparable groups of same- and different-sex couples on demographics such as relationship duration, age, and place of residence, participants were recruited systematically through Massachusetts’s vital records office and snowball sampling. We began the study in Massachusetts since it was the first state to legalize same-sex marriage (in 2004) and thus has a significant population of long-term same-sex married couples. Same-sex couples meeting the age requirement and married between 2004 and 2012 were sent invitations to participate through letters/flyers sent to the address on file. Those who participated then

were asked to refer same- and different-sex couples of similar age within their social networks. To recruit the other part of the different-sex couple sample, letters/flyers were mailed to different-sex couples from publicly available city lists in Massachusetts that included demographic data on household members. Some of the couples that were married in Massachusetts lived in other states at the time they participated; in addition, participants referred couples that resided in states other than Massachusetts (55 percent of male same-sex couples, 62 percent of female same-sex couples, and 52 percent of different-sex couples lived outside of Massachusetts).

The sample was predominantly non-Hispanic white ($n = 799$), followed by Hispanic ($n = 38$), non-Hispanic Black ($n = 28$), non-Hispanic Asian ($n = 26$), non-Hispanic mixed race ($n = 17$), non-Hispanic other ($n = 11$) and non-Hispanic Native American ($n = 1$). We show demographic and other model variable descriptives in Table 1.

Measures

We measured *gender conformity* with the mean of two items: (1) “My physical appearance and demeanor are typical of someone of my gender,” and (2) “My interests, hobbies, and skills are typical of someone of my gender.” *Perceptions of shared power* were measured with the single item: “My spouse and I have equal power in our relationship.” Responses to each of these items were on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). We created a composite variable ($\alpha = .93$) of *marital quality* with the following items: “In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship”; “I have a warm and comfortable relationship with my spouse”; “I feel I can confide in my spouse about virtually anything”; and “How rewarding is your relationship with your spouse.” Response options for each of those items were on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 6 (completely).

We controlled for whether there were *children in the household* (dichotomized: 0 = no, 1 = yes) and *years married*. Though there are other important control variables associated with perceptions of shared power and marital quality, we did not include them in the current study because of detriment in model fit during the model building process, as described below.

Analyses

We conducted all analyses in Mplus 7.4. Our hypothesized model consisted of (1) each spouse’s and their partner’s gender conformity predicting their own and their partner’s perceptions of shared power and (2) each spouse’s and their partner’s perceptions of shared power predicting their own and their partner’s marital quality. We followed guidelines from Olsen and Kenny (2006) to fit both distinguishable (men with women; women with men) and indistinguishable (women with women; men with men) Actor-Partner Interdependence Models (APIM) in a structural equation modeling (SEM) framework. SEM is a regression-based framework that relies on a matrix of covariances (between-variable associations) and variances (variability of each variable) to estimate the model-specified associations between variables. That is, the associations specified by the researcher are estimated and compared to this matrix of unique associations between study variables. The benefit of using an SEM framework for these analyses over other regression-based models (such as multilevel modeling, in which ordinary least squares regression equations are estimated for both the

couple and individual level data) is that it allows for models that incorporate multiple dependent variables and indirect effects analyses, such as mediation (Olsen and Kenny 2006). In addition, the purpose of APIM is to account for interdependence between dyad members: members of a couple are more likely to respond similarly to each other than they are to members of other couples (Kenny 1996). APIM corrects the estimates of dyadic models for interdependence and also allows for an examination of how partners influence one another.

“Distinguishable” and “indistinguishable” dyads are terminologies drawn from the statistical literature on dyadic data analysis. To examine how partners both differ and influence one another, dyad partners must be differentiated from one another by some distinction variable. For example, siblings can be distinguished by birth order, employer/employee can be distinguished by job title, and parents and children can be distinguished by age or simple designation. In contrast, twins, coworkers, and roommates cannot be distinguished in the same way. The only effect this indistinguishability has on the models has to do with how dyad members are assigned in the statistical analysis. In distinguishable dyads, the assignment of wives as 1 and husbands as 2 is not arbitrary and often a point of comparison within the analysis of different-sex dyads. For indistinguishable dyads, the assignment of 1 or 2 is arbitrary because, as in the current study, both members are the same sex. In SEM, this arbitrary assignment complicates the analysis because, unlike in multilevel modeling in which all participants and their spouse’s data are incorporated into the model at the same time, SEM models spouses separately.

The APIM specification for dyads in SEM requires direct regression paths from one spouse’s independent variable to their dependent variable (actor effects), and also direct regression paths from one spouse’s independent variable to their spouse’s dependent variable (partner effects) (Olsen and Kenny 2006). In addition, each spouse’s dependent variable residual variances and independent variables are allowed to covary; that is, we control for the interdependence between dyads by correlating one partner’s gender conformity, for example, with their partner’s gender conformity. Because sex could not distinguish spouses in same-sex marriages and therefore the designation of spouses as spouse 1 or 2 was arbitrary, we constrained actor and partner pathways to equality (Olsen and Kenny 2006); that is, for spouses in same-sex marriages, the model estimates the exact same regression values for associations between gender conformity and perceptions of shared power and between perceptions of shared power and marital quality. Though this method does not allow for the estimation of unique actor and partner effects for spouses in same-sex marriages, any such unique effects would be arbitrary and, particularly because we are interested in gender relational contexts, would not add any additional useful information about the associations between study variables for these couples.

We used maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors to control for skew in highly skewed items such as marital quality. We followed a model building process whereby we conducted null (means and variances between partners were constrained to equality and all covariances constrained to zero), saturated (means, variances, and all covariances were allowed to be freely estimated, except in the case of indistinguishable dyads), and analysis models. If the model fit of the analysis models did not differ significantly from the model fit

of the saturated models, then the model fit the data well. However, random assignment in the indistinguishable dyad models can introduce poor fit to the data because the distinction between spouse 1 and spouse 2 is arbitrary; switching the arbitrary distinction between spouses could potentially influence the associations between variables as a result of individual variability rather than true relations between variables (Peugh, DiLillo, and Panuzio 2013). Therefore, we followed the methods of Peugh, DiLillo, and Panuzio (2013) to calculate accurate estimates of fit to the data by comparing indistinguishable dyad models to more specific null models.

Table 2 shows model fit statistics of the null, saturated, and analysis models by same- and different-sex couples. Once we confirmed that the hypothesized models fit the data well, we incrementally added control variables to the models to examine model fit, particularly because SEM is sensitive to sample size and the addition of multiple controls can result in less power to estimate effects. The models fit the data well with the addition of relationship length and children in the household as controls; however, the model fit decreased significantly after the addition of other theoretical controls, including religiosity, education, race, and personal income. Associations between major study variables were similar between models with and without these additional controls; thus, we proceeded with the best-fitting model for parsimony.

DYADIC ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN GENDER CONFORMITY, PERCEPTIONS OF SHARED POWER, AND MARITAL QUALITY

We conducted univariate analyses with Bonferroni post hoc tests to test for differences on study variables among husbands and wives in same- and different-sex marriages. Significant differences on demographic variables are shown in Table 1. Among key study variables, groups differed on marital quality ($F[3, 916] = 7.97, p < .001$) and gender conformity ($F[3, 916] = 14.09, p < .001$) but not on perceptions of shared power ($F[3, 916] = 2.22, p = 0.08$). Men and women in different-sex marriages reported significantly less marital quality than men in same-sex marriages ($p = .002$ and $.004$, respectively) and women in same-sex marriages ($p = .001$ and $.002$, respectively). There were no differences in marital quality between men and women in different-sex marriages or between women and men in same-sex marriages. On gender conformity, men ($p = .01$) and women ($p = .004$) in different-sex marriages and men in same-sex marriages ($p < .001$) were more gender conforming than women in same-sex marriages. No other group comparisons were significant.

First, we examined how gender conformity predicted perceptions of shared power among same- and different-sex couples. Results are shown in Table 3. In the analysis model for different-sex couples, the actor effects for husbands' and wives' own gender conformity predicted their own perception of shared power, such that greater gender conformity predicted greater perceptions of shared power (husbands: $\beta = 0.32, SE = 0.13, p = .01$; wives: $\beta = 0.26, SE = 0.16, p = .03$). There were no significant partner effects (husbands: $\beta = -0.01, SE = 0.12, p = .91$; wives: $\beta = 0.05, SE = 0.11, p = .67$). Similar results were found for male same-sex couples; husbands' own gender conformity predicted their own perceptions of shared power ($\beta = 0.35, SE = 0.07, p < .001$) but not their spouses' ($\beta = 0.12,$

SE = 0.07, $p = .07$). Among female same-sex couples, there were neither significant actor nor partner effects for gender conformity ($\beta = 0.10$, SE = 0.06, $p = .88$; $\beta = 0.00$, SE = 0.05, $p = .96$, respectively).

We next examined the association between perceptions of shared power and greater marital quality among same- and different-sex couples. We found that, among the different-sex couples, husbands' and wives' own higher perceptions of shared power predicted their own higher marital quality ($\beta = 0.43$, SE = 0.10, $p < .001$; $\beta = 0.40$, SE = 0.08, $p < .001$, respectively). Partner effects were significant for wives ($\beta = 0.16$, SE = 0.08, $p = .03$) but not husbands ($\beta = 0.10$, SE = 0.08, $p = .24$). Both actor ($\beta = 0.35$, SE = 0.08, $p < .001$) and partner effects ($\beta = 0.20$, SE = 0.06, $p = .001$) of perceptions of shared power on marital quality were significant for male same-sex couples. Actor but not partner effects were significant for female same-sex couples (actor effect: $\beta = 0.43$, SE = 0.05, $p < .001$; partner effects: $\beta = 0.06$, SE = 0.04, $p = .08$).

CONCLUSIONS

In the current study, we examined, through a gender as relational perspective, the effects of gender conformity on perceptions of shared power and the association of perceptions of shared power with marital quality in same- and different-sex married couples. We advance understanding of gender and marital dynamics in both same- and different-sex marriages by going beyond a gender binary focus on men and women in relationships to consider gender conformity along a continuum. Rather than assuming women and men express gender in conforming ways (Civettini 2016), we considered how gender conformity on appearance, demeanor, hobbies, and skills is associated with perceptions of power and marital quality.

We found that greater gender conformity is associated with stronger perceptions of shared power for male same-sex couples and for both spouses in different-sex couples. Among men in same-sex marriages, male spouses who are more gender conforming perceived more shared power in their marriage. In regard to hegemonic masculinity, gay men occupy a marginalized status position (Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), where, historically, male homosexuality was conflated with effeminacy (Hennen 2008). Some gay men may yearn to be masculine and for their partners to be masculine in order to lessen their subordinated position within society (Phua 2007; Robinson 2016). Therefore, even within gay communities where gender appearances and demeanors are often more flexible, gay men may be constrained by masculine norms and the devaluation of femininity (Hennen 2008; Robinson 2012). This link of gender conformity to perceptions of shared power among the male same-sex couples in this study suggests that some gay men may still assign significant meaning to masculine appearances and demeanors as means to negotiating power within their relationships. That is, when some gay men conform to masculine gender norms they then may perceive less power inequality in their marriage. Likewise, as some married gay men may be seen as wanting to assimilate into the dominant norms of society, this link of gender conformity to relationship power also may be a part of assimilating. Gender conformity makes the relationship appear more "normal" (Warner 1999), and, therefore, enacting gender norms may be another part of some gay men's assimilation practices along with getting married (Robinson 2012). In addition, among men in same-sex marriages,

gender conformity could influence their responses to whether their hobbies and skills are typical of someone of their gender. Men who do the majority of domestic work (activities typically considered feminine) may find it more difficult to leverage power in their relationships; however, this domestic work may be hidden or made invisible by one or more male partners in order to maintain gender conformity and to prevent—or perhaps to abate—stigma, despite considerable pressure to appear egalitarian (Carrington 1999; Goldberg 2013).

For different-sex couples, we found that when both women and men are more gender conforming, both partners report more power equality in their marriage. This finding supports prior research showing that women who hold more traditional views about gender roles (e.g., that men should be breadwinners and women should be caregivers) report less unfairness and gender inequality in their relationships than women who believe spouses should share divisions of labor more equally (Greenstein 1996; Lavee and Katz 2002). At the same time, there were no partner effects of gender conformity on perceptions of shared power. Husbands and wives may feel unable to regulate their spouses' conformity to gender norms; thus, they focus on maintaining their own gender conformity, perhaps through means such as deviance neutralization (Civettini 2016).

In contrast, we found that gender conformity had no effect on perceptions of shared power among female same-sex couples. Women in same-sex couples also were less gender conforming than men in same-sex unions or men/women in different-sex unions. Within female same-sex couples, power may rely on other facets of femininity tied to gender outside of physical appearance, demeanor, and hobbies and skills, such as biological motherhood, especially among non-white lesbian families (Moore 2006). Also, this finding would explain why, though not directly comparable, the negative effect of children in the household on marital quality was lower for women in same-sex marriages in comparison to other groups. Owing to essentialist beliefs about separate spheres of paid and unpaid labor (Collins 1998), identification with motherhood, especially in tandem with household labor (Moore 2008), may be more salient in doing gender for women in same-sex marriages than women in different-sex marriages. Our findings, though, do correspond to other work that shows gender appearances and demeanors are more flexible for female same-sex couples compared to male same-sex and different-sex couples (Kimport 2012). Such flexibility may allow women in same-sex marriages to negotiate power outside of hegemonic gender relationship structures; as no man is present within their marriage, they may be able to negotiate gender performances and relationships outside of hegemonic masculinity, including negotiations and expressions of female masculinities (Halberstam 1998). Likewise, facets of masculinity, such as who is the breadwinner or has the more “respected” (i.e., typically masculine) profession (Carrington 1999), may shape perceptions of shared power. Furthermore, female same-sex couples may queer notions of gender and perceptions of shared power such that motherhood and breadwinner roles may not be seen or treated as gendered divisions of labor; that is, child care, household labor, and other divisions may be more equally distributed because gender may carry a different or less significant meaning within their relationships.

As previous research has shown, our overall findings demonstrate that sharing power in a marital relationship benefits marital quality, and we find this is the case for both men and women in same- and different-sex unions. However, we go further to advance empirical and theoretical insights on power and marital quality with our findings on gender conformity. For many couples, power in their marriage may necessitate the gender conformity of spouses, especially among male same-sex and different-sex married couples. Specifically, our finding that gender conformity predicted perceptions of shared power among women and men in different-sex marriages, and that perceptions of shared power was then associated with marital quality, supports literature showing that women who hold traditional views about gender roles tend to have more relationship satisfaction than women in different-sex relationships who hold more egalitarian views about gender roles. This may be because the former see these inequalities as in line with their traditional gender role beliefs (Amato and Booth 1995; Greenstein 1996; Lavee and Katz 2002; Minnotte et al. 2010).

Other studies using dyadic data have noted that partner effects are found less frequently than actor effects (Gable, Reis, and Downey 2003; Overall, Fletcher, and Kenny 2012), often because people in relationships overestimate how much they contribute and underestimate how much their partners contribute (Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard 2010). However, we found partner effects of perceptions of shared power on marital quality for men in same-sex and women in different-sex marriages. A key piece of masculinity is maintaining power in relationships (Connell 1995). Among male same-sex marriages, the balancing of power and its interactional processes could be critical to maintaining satisfactory relationships. Thus, men in same-sex marriages who ensure their male partner also perceives power in the relationship can lead to better marital quality for both partners. This finding is particularly interesting considering there were no partner effects of gender conformity on perceptions of shared power. Men in same-sex marriages may endorse their own masculinity as contributing to power in their marriage but may not require that their partners also conform; however, both partners must agree on the balance of power for satisfactory relationships. Similarly, to report better marital quality, women in different-sex relationships, especially women who are more gender conforming or believe that women should conform to feminine gender norms, may find it particularly important that their male partners perceive fairness and equality in the relationship. This association can maintain hegemonic masculinity, because it is the man's perception of power that influences the woman's quality of the relationship. Although the man may perceive that there is shared power in his different-sex union, it may be the power of his perception that shapes marital quality for the spouse. Thus, partners of men, regardless of their own sex, gender, or gender expression, might need to ensure that the men in their lives perceive there to be shared power in the relationship in order to maintain *their own* relationship satisfaction. This negotiation has the potential to reinforce hegemonic masculinity and inequalities in relationships.

Though the major strength of the present study is the focus on how gender conformity influences perceptions of shared power and marital quality, limitations must be noted. Overall, the sample was generally well educated with high income and predominantly white. In addition, the age of the sample may contribute to the general findings. The study sample consisted of participants between the ages of 35 and 65; the average age of the sample was 50. These couples were together 15 years on average; thus, we focused on a cohort of older

adults with relatively stable relationships. Same-sex couples in longer-duration relationships report greater divisions in household labor (Carrington 1999), suggesting that other relationship types that are not as stable may enact gender differently. Evidence of gender deviance neutralization in different-sex couples was stronger in the 1970s and 1980s than recently (Sullivan 2011). Younger couples could enact gender differently in their marital relationships as societal acceptance of same-sex sexuality and diversity in gender increases (including but not limited to transgender identities; see Russell and Fish 2016). However, preliminary evidence shows that younger cohorts are becoming less egalitarian about gender in the family, not more (Pepin and Cotter 2017). As we, and many others, have shown, essentialist beliefs about gender norms are difficult to abandon (Carrington 1999; Goldberg 2013; Moore 2008). Future research should examine generational differences across and within diverse married same- and different-sex couples and other relationship types to determine if and how gender conformity and perceptions of shared power are unfolding and possibly shifting.

There are also some caveats with the study design. The measure of power is based on self-reports and perceptions of shared power in the marriage. We were unable to examine other measures of inequalities related to power, such as hours spent on household tasks. Future research should focus on both measures in order to deconstruct whether perceptions of shared power and actual (measurable) power differ and associate with marital quality. Data were cross-sectional, so we are unable to assess causal inferences of gender conformity, power, and marital quality: effects could occur in different directions than those modeled here. For example, the cross-sectional nature of the design prevents us from examining whether the correlation between perceptions of shared power and marital quality is because couples who are more satisfied with their relationships are more likely to report more perceptions of shared power. In addition, because of the relatively small sample sizes of each group, we were unable to include other control variables that may be related to the key study variables such as income or education. However, a strength of the study design is the comparability of demographic variables across groups; study recruitment was designed to match couple groups on age, relationship duration, and place of residence. Finally, our measure of gender conformity only illuminates the extent participants believe their gender is typical; we do not have information on exactly what participants believe to be typical of their gender. Responses to these items may be different depending on other contexts, such as class or race/ethnicity; for example, gendered hobbies, skills, and activities could be different for lower-income compared to higher-income respondents. Further research on perceived hegemonic gender at these and other intersections is needed.

To summarize the current study, we extended the literature on gender inequalities by studying gender conformity and gender as relational within and among married different-sex and same-sex couples. We found gender conformity, especially conformity to masculinity, was predictive of perceptions of shared power in male same-sex and different-sex couples. We found that gender conformity did not predict perceptions of shared power among women in same-sex marriages. We also found that greater perceptions of shared power in marriage are linked to better marital quality for all union types. The interactional processes that maintain hegemonic masculinity may be particularly salient to marriages with men in them; in female same-sex couples, where no man is present, gender appearances and demeanors

may be less critical than other indicators of gender, such as motherhood or being a breadwinner. Alternatively, gender may carry less meaning around tasks and roles within lesbian same-sex couples, perhaps altering or queering how gender and perceptions of shared power operate within certain relationships.

Acknowledgments

This research was supported, in part, by Grant R21AG044585 from the National Institute on Aging (PI, Debra Umberson); Grant P2CHD042849 awarded to the Population Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development; and Grant T32 HD007081, Training Program in Population Studies, awarded to the Population Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

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Biographies

Amanda M. Pollitt is an NICHD Postdoctoral Fellow at the Population Research Center at the University of Texas-Austin. Her research focuses on the health and well-being of sexual and gender minority people across the life course. Currently, she is extending that work into research on intimate relationships.

Brandon A. Robinson is a UC Chancellor’s Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Gender and Sexuality Studies at University of California, Riverside. Brandon’s research focuses on gender and sexualities, race and ethnicity, health and HIV/AIDS, and urban poverty and homelessness. Their coauthored book *Race & Sexuality* is forthcoming with Polity Press.

Debra Umberson is professor of sociology and director of the Population Research Center at the University of Texas-Austin. She studies social ties and health across the life course. Recent work considers marital dynamics and health of same-sex couples and racial disparities in the loss of relationships across the life course.

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Characteristics and Model Variables by Gendered Relational Context

	Women with Women, M (SD)	Men with Men, M (SD)	Women with Men, M (SD)	Men with Women, M (SD)
<i>Demographic characteristics</i>				
Relationship duration	13.88 (7.89) ^b	16.36 (7.82) ^a	15.55 (8.45)	15.55 (8.45)
Education	5.41 (0.82) ^{cd}	5.26 (0.90) ^d	5.15 (0.93) ^a	4.93 (1.09) ^{ab}
Less than high school	0	0	0	0
Some high school	0	0.01 (0.09)	0	0.01 (0.08)
High school/GED	0.03 (0.17)	0.02 (0.14)	0.05 (0.23)	0.08 (0.30)
Some college	0.11 (0.31)	0.16 (0.36)	0.16 (0.37)	0.18 (0.38)
College graduate	0.27 (0.45)	0.31 (0.46)	0.33 (0.47)	0.37 (0.48)
Postgraduate degree	0.58 (0.49)	0.50 (0.50)	0.44 (0.50)	0.35 (0.48)
Age	49.41 (8.39) ^{bcd}	49.91 (8.25) ^{acd}	43.93 (7.70) ^{abd}	45.50 (8.10) ^{abc}
Nonwhite	0.11 (0.31)	0.13 (0.34)	0.15 (0.36)	0.16 (0.37)
Children in household	0.39 (0.49) ^{bcd}	0.13 (0.33) ^{acd}	0.76 (0.42) ^{ab}	0.76 (0.42) ^{ab}
Years married	6.06 (3.71) ^{cd}	6.85 (2.93) ^{cd}	13.56 (8.79) ^{ab}	13.56 (8.79) ^{ab}
<i>Model variables</i>				
Marital quality	5.04 (0.92)	5.08 (1.03)	4.69 (1.13)	4.74 (1.12)
Perceptions of shared power	4.18 (1.02)	4.11 (1.05)	4.07 (1.01)	3.93 (1.02)
Gender conformity	3.56 (1.04)	4.08 (0.94)	3.87 (0.89)	3.84 (0.96)
Individual-level n (total sample = 920)	342	248	165	165

NOTE: M = mean; SD = standardized deviation. Superscript letters indicate

^a significantly different from women with women;

^b significantly different from men with men;

^c significantly different from women with men; and

^d significantly different from men with women.

TABLE 2

Model Fit Statistics

	χ^2	df	P	MLR Scaling Factor	χ^2	df	P	CFI	CFI	TLI	TLI	RMSEA	LCI	RMSEA	UCI
Women with women															
Null model	174.21	21	0.00	1.06	-	-	-	0.00	-	0.24	-	0.21	0.18	0.24	0.24
Saturated model	10.73	12	0.55	1.14	-	-	-	1.00	-	1.00	-	0.00	0.00	0.07	0.07
Analysis model	7.40	8	0.49	1.09	3.37	4	0.50	1.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.09	0.09
Analysis model with controls	13.03	16	0.67	1.09	5.63	8	0.69	1.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.06	0.06
Men with men															
Null model	175.56	21	0.00	1.00	-	-	-	0.00	-	0.20	-	0.24	0.21	0.28	0.28
Saturated model	23.02	12	0.03	1.08	-	-	-	0.92	-	0.90	-	0.09	0.03	0.14	0.14
Analysis model	18.26	8	0.02	1.12	4.41	4	0.35	0.93	0.01	0.87	0.03	0.10	0.04	0.16	0.16
Analysis model with controls	26.10	16	0.05	1.06	7.23	8	0.51	0.93	0.01	0.91	0.04	0.07	0.00	0.12	0.12
Men with women/women with men															
Null model	141.81	15	0.00	1.29	-	-	-	0.00	-	0.00	-	0.23	0.19	0.26	0.26
Saturated model	0.00	0	0.00	1.00	-	-	-	1.00	-	1.00	-	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Analysis model	0.82	4	0.94	1.11	0.59	4	0.96	1.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.03
Analysis model with controls	13.35	12	0.34	1.05	12.75	8	0.12	0.99	0.01	0.98	0.02	0.03	0.00	0.09	0.09

NOTE: MLR = maximum likelihood with robust standard errors; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; RMSEA = root mean square of approximation; LCI = lower confidence interval; UCI = upper confidence interval. Lower χ^2 and RMSEA values and CFI and TLI values closer to 1.00 indicate close fit to the data.

TABLE 3
Model Estimated Unstandardized Betas and Standard Errors by Relationship Type

	Women with Women		Men with Men		Men with Women/Women with Men	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Spouse 1 perceptions of shared power	0.10	0.06	0.35***	0.07	0.32*	0.13
Actor gender conformity	0.00	0.05	0.12 [†]	0.07	-0.01	0.12
Partner gender conformity	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Spouse 2 perceptions of shared power	0.00	0.06	0.12 [†]	0.07	0.05	0.11
Partner gender conformity	0.10	0.05	0.35***	0.07	0.26*	0.16
Actor gender conformity	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Spouse 1 marital quality	-0.38**	0.12	-0.19	0.21	-0.31	0.17
Children in household	-0.00	0.10	-0.04	0.03	-0.00	0.01
Years married	0.43***	0.05	0.35***	0.08	0.43***	0.10
Actor perceptions of shared power	0.06	0.04	0.20**	0.06	0.10	0.08
Partner perceptions of shared power	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Spouse 2 marital quality	-0.38**	0.12	-0.19	0.21	-0.32*	0.16
Children in household	-0.00	0.10	-0.04	0.03	-0.01	0.01
Years married	0.06	0.04	0.20**	0.06	0.16*	0.08
Partner perceptions of shared power	0.43***	0.05	0.35***	0.08	0.40***	0.08
Actor perceptions of shared power	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE

NOTE: For analyses with different-sex couples, spouse 1 is the husband and spouse 2 is the wife. For analyses with male same-sex and female same-sex couples, spouse number assignment was chosen at random because of indistinguishable dyads. β = unstandardized beta estimates; SE = standard error.

[†] $p < .10$,

* $p < .05$,

** $p < .01$,

*** $p < .001$