

Money, Housework, Sex, and Conflict: Same-Sex Couples in Civil Unions, Those Not in Civil Unions, and Heterosexual Married Siblings

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In this study we examined the division of finances, the division of household tasks, relationship maintenance behaviors, sexual activity, monogamy, and conflict among same-sex couples who had had civil unions in Vermont, same-sex couples who had not had civil unions recruited from their friendship circles, and married heterosexual couples recruited from among their siblings. Married heterosexuals had a more traditional, gendered division of finances, household tasks, and relationship maintenance behaviors, even though the heterosexuals were all siblings or in-laws of lesbians or gay men. Sexual orientation was a stronger predictor of the division of household tasks than was income difference within couples. Lesbians reported less frequent sexual activity than married heterosexual women, and gay men were less monogamous than married heterosexual men. Gay men in civil unions differed on a few variables from gay men not in civil unions, but there were no differences among lesbians.

KEY WORDS: civil unions; same-sex couples; lesbian couples; gay male couples; sexual orientation; division of housework; division of finances; relationship maintenance behaviors.

When Philip Blumstein and Pepper Schwartz published their book *American Couples* in 1983, they subtitled it “Money, Work, Sex.” What was unique about the large study of 12,000 couples described in this book was the inclusion of 788 lesbian and 969 gay male couples. The authors stated in their introduction (p. 12): “. . . the social change of the past 20 years has given rise to new options in living as couples, options not generally sanctioned in previous generations. We considered it important, even urgent, to apply the customary marriage-research questions to other types of couples as well, to see what we could learn about the nature of relationships.”

Despite the 20 years that have passed since *American Couples* was published, the above quote is still relevant. Lesbian and gay issues are increasingly

depicted in the media, and a number of countries have legalized same-sex relationships: same-sex marriage (Belgium, Canada, The Netherlands, Spain), same-sex partnerships (Denmark), and registered same-sex cohabitators (Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Israel, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, and Sweden) (Eskridge, 2001). In the United States, three states have legalized relationships for same-sex couples: civil unions in Vermont, domestic partnerships in California, and marriage in Massachusetts (Strasser, 2002). Given the recency of most legislation available to same-sex couples, there has been little social science research to date about lesbians and gay men in legal relationships. Whereas most studies of same-sex couples have had to rely on convenience samples, contact information about couples in legalized same-sex relationships is public information. Thus, it is possible to compare respondents to characteristics of the whole (same-sex married, cohabiting, or civil union) population.

We (Solomon, Rothblum, & Balsam, 2004) surveyed same-sex couples who had had civil unions in

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Vermont during the first year of this new legislation (2000–2001), at a time when this was the only cohort of same-sex couples to have had legalized relationships in the United States. Although civil union legislation only covers statewide benefits for residents of Vermont, 79% of the same-sex couples who took advantage of this legislation during its first year were from out of state. We contacted all 2,475 couples who had had civil unions in Vermont during the first year of the legislation about participation in our questionnaire study. Couples were also asked to provide contact information for a married, heterosexual sibling and his/her spouse and for a gay or lesbian couple in their friendship circles who had not had a civil union. This methodology allowed comparison between same-sex couples in legal relationships, same-sex couples not in legal relationships, and heterosexual couples in legal relationships. Because civil union couples were compared with heterosexuals recruited from among siblings, our results showed that these two types of couples were similar on race, ethnicity, age, and childhood factors, such as religion while growing up. Because civil union couples were compared with same-sex couples from their friendship circles who were not in civil unions, our results indicated that these two types of couples were similar on such factors as age and length of relationship (Solomon et al., 2004). Before our study, all couples research in the United States had focused on same-sex couples without legalized relationships, thus the same-sex couples not in civil unions represent the status quo of couples research.

In our prior article (Solomon et al., 2004) we presented the results of same-sex couples with civil unions, those not in civil unions, and married heterosexual siblings on demographic factors, length of relationship, social support from family and friends, contact with family of origin, social activities, and degree of “outness” about sexual orientation. Married heterosexual couples had been together longer, differed on a variety of demographic factors, and had more contact with their family of origin than did both types of same-sex couples. Lesbians in civil unions were more “out” or open about their sexual orientation than lesbians not in civil unions (this variable was not significantly different between the groups of gay men). Gay men in civil unions had more contact with their family of origin, had more mutual friends as a couple, were less likely to have seriously considered ending their relationship, and were less likely to have seriously discussed ending their relationship, than were gay men not in civil unions. Thus, the re-

sults indicated that same-sex couples were similar to each other on demographic and relationship factors when compared with married heterosexual couples. There were few differences between lesbians in civil unions and those not in civil unions, but gay men in civil unions did differ from gay men not in civil unions on several factors.

Here we present the results from our study related to gender role behaviors of the same-sex couples in civil unions, those not in civil unions, and married heterosexual couples. Our questionnaire included five measures adapted from the *American Couples* study (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983), including division of finances (whose income pays for what), division of household tasks, sex and monogamy, relationship maintenance behaviors, and conflict. For the current study we posed four research questions.

The first concerned the gendered division of tasks. For several decades, research has shown that lesbian and gay male couples are more egalitarian in division of housework and finances, whereas heterosexual couples tend to divide tasks along traditional gendered lines (women do more housework, men pay for more items; c.f., Peplau & Spalding, 2000, for a review). In this study we used a more conservative methodology than did prior researchers, in that each heterosexual married couple consists of a sibling plus an in-law of a lesbian or gay man. This means that the same-sex couples in civil unions and the heterosexual married couples grew up in and were socialized by similar families. Our first hypothesis was that same-sex couples would have a more egalitarian division of tasks, including division of finances, household tasks, and relationship maintenance behaviors, than would heterosexual married couples, even with the added rigor of similarity in family of origin.

One of the problems in studying division of labor among heterosexual couples is that gender is confounded with income. Because most men earn higher incomes than most women, it is hard to know whether women do more of the housework because of gender role socialization, or because they have less power due to earning less money than their male partners. Analysis of division of household labor among same-sex couples allowed examination of income difference without the confound of gender. Our second hypothesis was that sexual orientation would be more strongly associated with division of household labor than would income difference. That is, being lesbian or gay would be a stronger predictor

of equitable division of household labor than would earning similar incomes.

The third hypothesis concerned sex and monogamy. Prior researchers have reported that gay men have sex more frequently, and lesbians less frequently, than heterosexual married couples (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Peplau, Fingerhut, & Beals, 2004). Loulan (1988) found that a significant percentage of lesbians—78%—reported having been celibate for some time. Although most of her respondents had been celibate for less than 1 year, and although that study did not focus specifically on lesbians in relationships, the results of Loulan's study raised the issue of how "sex" may be defined differently (perhaps more romantically and less genitally) when both members of a couple are female. Furthermore, whereas monogamy is highly valued among lesbian and heterosexual couples, nonmonogamy is often an accepted part of gay men's culture (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Peplau et al., 2004). Researchers in the United Kingdom found that the majority of gay male couples had a specific agreement about sex outside their relationship (Hickson et al., 1992). One of the problems with same-sex couples research is that in the absence of legal marriage, few studies clearly distinguished between the casual dating/noncommitted cohabiting couples and those with long-term involvement in a relationship. Thus, most past research has included couples whose relationship was quite new, and sexual activity declines with length of relationship for lesbian, gay, and heterosexual couples (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Peplau et al., 2004). An advantage of research on civil union couples is that, for the first time, a legal definition can be used that is comparable to heterosexual marriage. For this study, we hypothesized that lesbian and gay male couples in civil unions would be more similar in sexual activity and monogamy to married heterosexual couples than to same-sex couples not in civil unions.

Finally, we were interested in sources of conflict among the three types of couples. The research on gendered division of labor led us to speculate that married heterosexual couples would have more conflict about housework, money management, and relationship issues (such as communication). In contrast, we predicted that lesbians would have more conflict about sex, and gay men would have more conflict about monogamy.

Only one of the four hypotheses above focused on differences between lesbians and gay men in civil unions and those not in civil unions. Nevertheless,

the inclusion in this study of same-sex couples in civil unions as well as those not in civil unions allowed us to examine any differences that legalized relationship status would have on the gendered division of tasks, relative role of sexual orientation versus income difference on division of household tasks, and conflict.

METHOD

Procedure

The Vermont Office of Vital Records of the Vermont Department of Health maintains records of all same-sex couples who have civil unions in Vermont, and this information is publicly available. Based on information on the civil union certificates from the first year of this legislation, 21% of the couples were from Vermont, two-thirds of couples were female, and 10% of individuals were members of ethnic minority groups. We (Solomon et al., 2004) sent all 2,475 couples who had had civil unions in Vermont during the first year of the legislation a letter to request their participation in a research project; 206 could not be included (e.g., incorrect address, relationship had terminated, partner had died). Of the actual resulting pool of 2,269 couples, 947 couples (42%) indicated their willingness to participate. Funding permitted questionnaires to be sent to the first 400 civil union couples who sent back reply forms and who were willing to provide contact information about siblings and friends. Questionnaires did not include names or addresses, but had an identifying number that was identical for the two members of the civil union couple (e.g., 166 A and B), their same-sex friends (e.g., 166 C and D), and their heterosexual married sibling and spouse (e.g., 166 E and F). Of the 400 sets of questionnaires sent out, we received back at least one questionnaire from 388 (97%) "families" of couples (this ranged from completed questionnaires by both members of all three types of couples to only one questionnaire from all six possible respondents). Of the 800 questionnaires sent to both members of 400 civil union couples, 659 (82%) were returned. For same-sex couples not in civil unions, 466 (58%) were returned, and 413 (52%) were returned by married heterosexuals (these numbers represent total respondents; not every couple sent back two questionnaires). Twelve same-sex couples who had not had civil unions and 10 heterosexual married couples could not be included (e.g., their relationship had terminated, their address was incorrect).

Among the civil union couples, the gender ratio of two-thirds women and one-third men in the present sample corresponds to the gender ratio of the civil union population. Similarly, race and ethnicity of the sample (with about 10% People of Color) is comparable to the whole civil union population. Regarding geographic distribution, only one-fifth of respondents were from Vermont, thus the sample, and the civil union population, constituted a national sample. As such, our sample is representative of the civil union population, and this is one of the few samples of same-sex couples that allowed such a comparison to a population.

Participants

For the present analyses, we used only questionnaires that had the letter A (from one member of the civil union couple), C (from one member of a same-sex couple that had not had a civil union), and E and F (both members of the heterosexual married couple, given that they were always of different genders). If only one member of a couple returned a questionnaire, we included it if it had the letter A, C, E, or F; if it had the letter B or D we did not include it. This was done in order not to overly represent questionnaires from the member of the couple more likely to respond or to respond in time. The resulting sample included 336 members of civil unions (212 lesbians and 123 gay men), 238 members of same-sex couples not in civil unions (166 lesbians and 72 gay men), and 413 married heterosexuals (219 women and 193 men).

Measures

In addition to demographic items (including age, race/ethnicity, years of education, individual income, and number of children), the questionnaire included seven subscales adapted from the American Couples Study (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). Couples in civil unions were asked to rank the three main reasons they had had a civil union, the three most important changes that resulted from their civil union, who attended their civil union ceremony, and whether the ceremony was religious or secular.

Division of Finances

This subscale asked whose income pays for each of 10 items (e.g., rent/house payment, utilities,

groceries). Items were rated on 9-point Likert scales where 1 = *my income pays for all*, 5 = *both of our incomes contribute equally*, and 9 = *my partner's income pays for all*. Items could also be marked *not applicable*.

Division of Household Tasks

This 19-item subscale assessed which partner does various household tasks (e.g., repairing things around the house, doing the dishes, taking out the trash). Items were rated on 9-point Likert scales where 1 = *I do this all of the time*, 5 = *We do this equally*, and 9 = *He/she does this all of the time*. Items could also be marked "not applicable." Summary variables were created by taking the mean score for traditionally women's housework and traditionally men's housework items. The Women's Housework subscale included doing the dishes, cooking breakfast, cooking dinner, vacuuming, doing laundry, cleaning the bathroom, shopping for groceries, and ironing. The alpha for this variable was .75, which indicates good reliability. The Men's Housework subscale included repairing things, taking out the trash, mowing the lawn, and driving the car. The alpha for this variable was .65.

Sex and Monogamy

Respondents were asked if they had had sex during the past year and, if so, the frequency of sex (on a 9-point Likert scale where 1 = *daily* and 9 = *never*). They were also asked if they had ever had sex with anyone other than their current partner since they and their partner became a couple, if they had ever had a meaningful love affair with someone else since they and their partner became a couple, and whether they have an agreement with their current partner about sex outside their relationship.

Relationship Maintenance Behaviors

This 19-item subscale asked who is more likely to do certain behaviors in their relationship (e.g., pay the other compliments, see the other's point of view during an argument, take on a problem in a rational rather than emotional way). Items were scored from 1 (*I do this much more*) to 9 (*My partner does this more*), with 5 = *We do this equally*. Items could also be marked *not applicable*.

Conflict

This subscale consists of 17 areas of conflicts (e.g., how the house is kept, our social life, sex outside our relationship) scored on 9-point Likert scales where 1 = *daily or almost every day* and 9 = *never*. Items can also be marked *does not apply to my situation*.

RESULTS

Data Analyses

We performed separate one-way ANOVAs for women and men for continuous variables, which guaranteed that no two members of any couple were represented in the same analysis. This yielded a comparison of 212 lesbians in civil unions, 166 lesbians not in civil unions, and 219 heterosexual married women. Among men, there were 123 gay men in civil unions, 72 gay men not in civil unions, and 193 heterosexual married men. The heterosexual women and men were from the same couples, but were never compared to each other. Because of the large number of comparisons, we used a Bonferroni adjustment to control for the number of comparisons for each gender. The resulting adjustment set the corrected value at a very conservative level of $p < .0005$.

Finally, Pearson correlations and regression analyses were conducted separately for male and female participants in order to examine predictors of division of household labor. Factors entered into the hierarchical linear regressions included sexual orientation (being in a heterosexual or same-sex relationship), income, income difference from partner/spouse, total division of finances, employment status (full-time, part-time, none), and housework hours per week.

Women

Demographic Information

Women in the three groups did not differ significantly on age, race, or ethnicity; their mean age was in the early 40s. Over 90% of women in each group identified as European American/White. Lesbians in civil unions and those not in civil unions had significantly higher levels of education (close to a college degree on average) than married heterosexual women (just over 3 years of college), and this

difference was significant. The effect for individual income was not significant. Mean individual income was \$55,518 for lesbians in civil unions and \$54,733 for lesbians not in civil unions. Married heterosexual women earned \$40,583 on average. When heterosexual women who were homemakers and earned no income were excluded, the mean income of employed married heterosexual women rose to \$49,773. Married heterosexual women were significantly more likely to have children (80.3%) than were either lesbians in civil unions (34.0%) or lesbians not in civil unions (31.3%).

Civil union couples listed the following reasons for having a civil union (they were asked to rank the three main reasons): love and commitment for each other (93.7%), wish for relationship to have a legal status (91.6%), desire for society to know about lesbian or gay relationships (59.7%), factors related to children (10.4%), factors related to parents or partner's parents (3.0%), factors related to property (5.1%), factors related to finances (6.0%), factors related to own or partner's job (0.9%), factors related to health benefits (8.1%), factors related to a will or inheritance (8.1%), and other reasons (2.7%). In addition, civil union couples were asked to rank the three main changes in their relationship as the result of having had a civil union. These were changes in love and commitment for each other (53.7%), wish for relationship to have a legal status (63.0%), desire for society to know about lesbian or gay relationships (54.3%), factors related to children (8.4%), factors related to parents or partner's parents (7.5%), factors related to property (5.1%), factors related to finances (7.8%), factors related to own or partner's job (1.2%), factors related to health benefits (9.9%), factors related to a will or inheritance (5.7%), and other reasons (2.1%). The civil union ceremony was a secular event for about one-half of the couples (54.2%), a ceremony involving clergy in a house of worship for 7.2%, a ceremony involving clergy in a location other than a house of worship for 11.7%, and "other" for 26.8%.

Division of Finances and Household Tasks

Table I shows results of the analyses of the five subscales for lesbians in civil unions, lesbians not in civil unions, and heterosexual married women. Married heterosexual women were more likely to report that their partner paid for items in general, including rent/mortgage, utilities, groceries, the women's own clothing, major household appliances, entertainment

Table 1. Comparison of Lesbians in Civil Unions, Lesbians Not in Civil Unions, and Heterosexual Married Women on Division of Finances, Division of Household Tasks, Sex and Monogamy, Relationship Maintenance Behaviors, and Conflict

Variable	Lesbians in civil unions <i>N</i> = 212	Lesbians not in civil unions <i>N</i> = 166	Heterosexual married women <i>N</i> = 219	Statistic
Employed full-time	69.8%	81.3%	53.7%	$\chi^2 = 33.74^*$
Income (in dollars)	55,518	54,733	40,583	$F = 3.77$
Income difference (in dollars)	1134.05 _a	-6666.21	-31718.35 _b	$F = 7.91^*$
Total division of finances ^d	4.71 _a	4.40 _a	5.67 _b	$F = 28.88^*$
Division of finances ^a				
Rent/mortgage	5.27 _a	5.06 _a	6.12 _b	$F = 11.18^*$
Utilities	5.30 _a	4.87 _a	6.09 _b	$F = 15.05^*$
Groceries	4.86 _a	5.01 _a	5.71 _b	$F = 9.36^*$
My clothes	3.74 _a	3.04 _b	4.98 _c	$F = 30.16^*$
Items for children	5.34	5.20	5.86	$F = 9.74$
Alimony/child support to previous spouse or partner	4.00	5.75	5.74	$F = 3.14$
Housecleaning help	4.73	5.02	5.19	$F = 0.75$
Major household appliance	5.16 _a	4.97 _a	6.07 _b	$F = 16.17^*$
Entertainment/eating out	5.06 _a	4.93 _a	6.03 _b	$F = 20.64^*$
Personal spending money	3.47 _a	2.79 _b	4.68 _c	$F = 27.90^*$
Housework hours per week ^b	3.39 _a	3.32 _a	4.15 _b	$F = 27.99^*$
Total women's housework ^c	4.81 _a	4.83 _a	3.32 _b	$F = 90.75^*$
Total men's housework ^c	4.84 _a	4.93 _a	6.74 _b	$F = 101.79^*$
Individual household tasks ^c				
Repairing things around the house	4.73 _a	5.03 _a	7.12 _b	$F = 62.39^*$
Doing the dishes	4.87 _a	4.90 _a	3.71 _b	$F = 20.26^*$
Cooking breakfast	4.81	4.79	4.39	$F = 1.77$
Cooking the evening meal	4.70 _a	5.05 _a	3.18 _b	$F = 31.11^*$
Vacuuming the carpets	4.96 _a	5.24 _a	3.34 _b	$F = 33.93^*$
Doing the laundry	5.17 _a	5.03 _a	3.17 _b	$F = 258.46^*$
Making arrangements to have repairs made around the house	4.67	4.92	5.15	$F = 11.62$
Making complaints to the landlord/landlady	3.74	5.19	4.51	$F = 2.37$
Cleaning the bathroom	4.98 _a	5.09 _a	2.60 _b	$F = 67.40^*$
Caring for pets	5.08	4.79	4.55	$F = 2.98$
Taking out the trash	5.00 _a	4.65 _a	6.04 _b	$F = 18.47^*$
Doing the grocery shopping	4.59 _a	4.76 _a	3.49 _b	$F = 18.74^*$
Taking care of the lawn	4.91 _a	5.19 _a	6.99 _b	$F = 35.92^*$
Ironing my clothes	4.22 _a	3.46 _a	2.27 _b	$F = 22.95^*$
Making drinks for company	4.74 _a	4.82 _a	5.58 _b	$F = 11.77^*$
Driving the car when we are going somewhere in town together	4.79 _a	5.01 _a	6.89 _b	$F = 42.92^*$
Punishing the children	5.18	5.31	4.68	$F = 3.26$
Taking the children to their activities and appointments	4.33 _a	4.67 _a	3.38 _b	$F = 10.60^*$
Playing with the children	5.05	4.71	4.69	$F = 1.57$
Sex				
Had sex in past year	91.5%	86.5%	94.9%	$\chi^2 = 8.33$
Frequency of sex ^d	4.56 _a	4.71 _a	3.76 _b	$F = 29.23^*$
Had sex outside relationship	9.0%	7.3%	13.9%	$\chi^2 = 5.03$
Had meaningful love affair outside relationship	4.7%	3.0%	0.0%	$\chi^2 = 0.78$
Understanding about sex outside the relationship:				$\chi^2 = 10.15$
Discussed and decided it is not ok under any circumstances	86.1%	85.1%	82.3%	
Discussed and decided it is ok under some circumstances	5.3%	5.0%	3.5%	
Discussed and do not agree	2.9%	2.5%	3.0%	
Have not discussed it but feel we would not agree	2.9%	1.9%	4.0%	
Have not discussed but think it would be ok under some circumstances	0.0%	0.0%	1.5%	
Have not discussed it but feel it would not be ok	2.9%	5.6%	5.6%	
Relationship maintenance behaviors ^c				
Pay the other compliments	5.06	4.99	4.88	$F = 0.73$
See the other's point of view during an argument	4.94	5.02	4.54	$F = 12.31$

Table I. Continued

Variable	Lesbians in civil unions <i>N</i> = 212	Lesbians not in civil unions <i>N</i> = 166	Heterosexual married women <i>N</i> = 219	Statistic
Do unasked favors for the other	4.94	4.95	4.72	<i>F</i> = 3.55
Begin to talk about what is troubling us when there is tension	4.91 _a	4.75 _a	3.77 _b	<i>F</i> = 18.49*
Give the other a spontaneous hug or kiss	4.95	4.86	4.61	<i>F</i> = 2.45
See oneself as running the show in our relationship	4.95	4.94	4.93	<i>F</i> = 0.00
Offer advice when the other is faced with a problem	4.94	4.75	5.00	<i>F</i> = 1.66
Sense that the other is disturbed about something	4.82 _a	4.84 _a	4.16 _b	<i>F</i> = 30.85*
Give in to the other's wishes	4.80	4.86	4.63	<i>F</i> = 2.89
Take on a problem in a rational rather than emotional way	4.97 _a	4.99 _a	5.86 _b	<i>F</i> = 12.60*
Contribute the most in reaching a solution when we face a dilemma	4.96	4.99	4.95	<i>F</i> = 0.04
Criticize the other's judgment	4.74	4.84	4.96	<i>F</i> = 0.66
Keep one's feelings to oneself	5.02 _a	5.14 _a	5.98 _b	<i>F</i> = 9.73*
Let the other know I would like to have sex	5.05 _a	4.95 _a	6.07 _b	<i>F</i> = 17.83*
Refuse to have sex	4.91 _a	4.88 _a	3.74 _b	<i>F</i> = 16.82*
In general, who has more say about important decisions affecting our relationship	4.99	5.13	5.02	<i>F</i> = 0.95
Who do you think should have the final say about important decisions affecting the relationship	5.05	5.01	4.97	<i>F</i> = 1.13
Who is more committed to the relationship	5.01	5.07	4.96	<i>F</i> = 1.30
Who has altered habits and ways of doing things more to please the other	5.08	4.99	4.61	<i>F</i> = 5.34
Total conflict ^d	7.48	7.28	7.30	<i>F</i> = 1.67
Conflict about ^d				
Housekeeping	6.68	6.64	6.78	<i>F</i> = 0.24
Partner's job	7.48	7.18	7.04	<i>F</i> = 2.81
Our social life	7.52	7.23	7.41	<i>F</i> = 1.23
My Job	7.38	7.03	7.42	<i>F</i> = 1.98
Partner's attitudes about children	8.30	8.32	8.18	<i>F</i> = 0.66
My relatives	7.50	7.33	7.45	<i>F</i> = 0.49
His/her relatives	7.35	7.55	7.38	<i>F</i> = 0.64
Moral/religious beliefs	8.57	8.64	8.30	<i>F</i> = 4.95
Communication	6.20	6.12	6.33	<i>F</i> = 0.59
Money coming in	7.69	7.67	7.37	<i>F</i> = 1.83
Managing money	7.33	7.24	7.04	<i>F</i> = 1.54
Expressing affection	7.57	7.04	6.98	<i>F</i> = 5.54
Both working	8.57	8.50	8.34	<i>F</i> = 1.56
Raising children	6.59	6.30	6.91	<i>F</i> = 1.50
Sex life	7.34	6.92	6.94	<i>F</i> = 3.22
Sex outside relationship	8.84	8.85	8.86	<i>F</i> = 0.01
Relationship in general	7.39	6.98	7.13	<i>F</i> = 2.72

**p* < .0005; Subscripts indicate significant differences in pairwise comparisons between groups.

^a1 = my income pays for all, 5 = both of our incomes contribute equally, 9 = his/her income pays for all.

^b1 = none, 2 = 5 hr or less, 3 = 6–10 hr, 4 = 11–20 hr, 5 = 21–30 hr, etc. up to 9 = 61 hr or more.

^c1 = I do this much more; 5 = we do this equally; 9 = my partner does this much more.

^d1 = daily or almost every day, 2 = 3–4 times a week, 3 = 1–2 times a week, 4 = 2–3 times a month, 5 = once a month, 6 = once every few months, 7 = a few times, 8 = less than once a year, 9 = never.

and eating out, and the women's personal spending money. Lesbians in civil unions and those not in civil unions tended to report sharing finances more equally. Conversely, married heterosexual women reported doing more of the household tasks than their partners did, including doing the dishes, cooking the evening meal, vacuuming the carpets, doing

the laundry, cleaning the bathroom, doing the grocery shopping, ironing, and taking the children to their activities and appointments. Married heterosexual women reported that their partner more often took out the trash, took care of the lawn, fixed drinks for company, and drove the car when the couple was going somewhere in town together. Again,

lesbians in civil unions and those not in civil unions were more likely to report sharing these household activities more equitably.

Predictors of Division of Household Tasks

Bivariate analyses revealed that doing traditionally women's housework was negatively correlated with personal income, $r = -.21, p < .001$, and participant's contribution to the overall finances, $r = -.23, p < .001$, and positively correlated with overall housework hours per week, $r = .43, p < .001$, and income difference (i.e., partner earns more money than participant), $r = .33, p < .001$. Doing women's housework was also associated with being in a heterosexual relationship, $t(593) = 13.48, p < .001$, and with not working full-time, $t(593) = 7.72, p < .001$. Doing men's housework was positively correlated with personal income, $r = .11, p < .01$, and participant's contribution to overall finances, $r = .21, p < .001$, and negatively correlated with overall housework hours per week, $r = .10, p < .05$. Doing men's housework was also associated with being in a lesbian relationship, $t(593) = -10.22, p < .001$, and with working full-time, $t(593) = -2.91, p < .01$.

To identify the extent to which sexual orientation, income difference between partners, and their interaction predicted division of labor, a series of hierarchical linear regression analyses were conducted. In step one, covariates identified in bivariate analyses were entered as predictors. In step two, sexual orientation, income difference, and a sexual orientation by income difference interaction term were entered simultaneously as predictors. Table III shows the results of these analyses. The overall model that predicts women's housework was significant, and it accounted for 33% of the variance. Sexual orientation, income difference between partners, overall contribution to household finances, and number of hours spent on housework all made unique contributions to the model, whereas income, full-time employment, and the interaction term did not. The overall model that predicts men's housework was also significant, and it accounted for 28% of the variance. However once all variables were accounted for, only sexual orientation made a unique contribution to the model.

Sex, Monogamy, Relationship, and Conflict

Table I indicates that married heterosexual women reported having sex more frequently (closer

to 2–3 times a month, on average) than did lesbians in both types of couples (closer to once a month, on average). Only a small percentage of women had had sex outside their current relationship. The majority of women in all three groups had discussed sex outside their relationship with their partner and decided it was not okay under any circumstances. Married heterosexual women differed from lesbians on a number of relationship maintenance behaviors. Heterosexual women reported that they were more likely than their partners to “begin to talk about what is troubling us when there is tension,” to “sense that the other is disturbed about something,” and to refuse to have sex. Heterosexual women reported that they were less likely than their partner to take on a problem in a rational rather than emotional way, to “keep one's feelings to oneself,” and to “let the other know that I would like to have sex.” Lesbians in both types of couples reported engaging in relationship maintenance behaviors more equally with their partners. Finally, the three groups of women did not differ significantly on any area of conflict.

Men

Demographic Information

Men in the three groups did not differ significantly on age, race, or ethnicity. Like the women, men on average were in their 40s and over 90% were European American/White. There were no significant differences among the three groups of men in either educational level or individual income. There was, however, a significant difference in those who had children. Among married heterosexual men, 81.8% had children, whereas only 17.9% of gay men in civil unions and 9.7% of gay men not in civil unions had children.

Division of Finances and Household Tasks

Table II presents the analyses of gay men in civil unions, gay men not in civil unions, and married heterosexual men. The total score for division of finances was not significantly different between groups, but married heterosexual men were more likely to report that they paid more of the couple's rent/mortgage, major household appliances, and entertainment/eating out. Gay men in both types of groups reported dividing finances more equally (with the exception of paying for utilities, where gay men

Table II. Comparison of Gay Men in Civil Unions, Gay Men Not in Civil Unions, and Heterosexual Married Men on Division of Finances, Division of Household Tasks, Sex and Monogamy, Relationship Maintenance Behaviors, and Conflict

Variable	Gay men in civil unions <i>N</i> = 123	Gay men not in civil unions <i>N</i> = 72	Heterosexual married men <i>N</i> = 193	Statistic
Employed full-time	72.4%	75.0%	77.1%	$\chi^2 = 0.90$
Income (in dollars)	65, 847	79, 172	73, 706	<i>F</i> = 0.60
Income difference (in dollars)	-7125.60 _a	9976.56	33477.91 _b	<i>F</i> = 12.12*
Total division of finances ^a	4.63	4.04	3.93	<i>F</i> = 6.36
Division of finances ^a				
Rent/mortgage	5.39 _a	5.06 _a	3.99 _b	<i>F</i> = 13.39*
Utilities	5.15 _a	4.46 _b	3.96 _b	<i>F</i> = 10.00*
Groceries	4.90 _a	4.52	4.26 _b	<i>F</i> = 3.40
My clothes	3.56	2.53	3.65	<i>F</i> = 6.64
Items for children	5.21	5.40	4.12	<i>F</i> = 2.64
Alimony/child support to previous spouse or partner	6.14	7.67	4.45	<i>F</i> = 4.45
Housecleaning help	5.13	4.58	4.75	<i>F</i> = 0.90
Major household appliance	5.02 _a	4.67 _a	3.98 _b	<i>F</i> = 9.09*
Entertainment/eating out	5.02 _a	4.60 _a	4.06 _b	<i>F</i> = 8.96*
Personal spending money	3.29	2.19	3.19	<i>F</i> = 6.02
Housework hours per week ^b	3.41	3.06	3.22	<i>F</i> = 2.67
Total women's household tasks ^c	4.67 _a	4.65 _a	6.12 _b	<i>F</i> = 60.09*
Total men's household tasks ^c	4.71 _a	4.82 _a	3.00 _b	<i>F</i> = 75.95*
Individual household tasks ^c				
Repairing things around the house	4.75 _a	4.90 _a	2.73 _b	<i>F</i> = 42.60*
Doing the dishes	4.80	4.82	5.55	<i>F</i> = 5.85
Cooking breakfast	4.93	4.93	5.11	<i>F</i> = 0.23
Cooking the evening meal	4.61 _a	4.70 _a	6.56 _b	<i>F</i> = 27.50*
Vacuuming the carpets	4.29 _a	4.74 _a	6.20 _b	<i>F</i> = 23.57*
Doing the laundry	4.92 _a	4.94 _a	6.65 _b	<i>F</i> = 23.69*
Making arrangements to have repairs made around the house	4.50	5.04	4.25	<i>F</i> = 2.48
Making complaints to the landlord/landlady	4.96	5.16	4.65	<i>F</i> = 0.21
Cleaning the bathroom	4.87 _a	4.54 _a	6.95 _b	<i>F</i> = 38.62*
Caring for pets	4.91	5.02	5.48	<i>F</i> = 2.79
Taking out the trash	4.85 _a	4.86 _a	3.32 _b	<i>F</i> = 25.23*
Doing the grocery shopping	4.59 _a	4.76 _a	3.49 _b	<i>F</i> = 18.74*
Taking care of the lawn	4.81 _a	4.94 _a	2.89 _b	<i>F</i> = 22.58*
Ironing my clothes	4.24 _a	3.63 _a	6.03 _b	<i>F</i> = 16.24*
Making drinks for company	5.00 _a	4.93 _a	3.99 _b	<i>F</i> = 10.24*
Driving the car when we are going somewhere in town together	4.50 _a	4.69 _a	3.04 _b	<i>F</i> = 16.83*
Punishing the children	5.47	4.67	5.04	<i>F</i> = 0.77
Taking the children to their activities and appointments	5.33	6.50	6.07	<i>F</i> = 1.51
Playing with the children	4.89	4.33	5.08	<i>F</i> = 0.74
Sex				
Had sex in past year	96.7%	87.5%	93.9%	$\chi^2 = 19.95$
Frequency of sex ^d	3.50	3.87	3.82	<i>F</i> = 2.42
Had sex outside relationship	58.3%	61.1%	15.2%	$\chi^2 = 80.07^*$
Had meaningful love affair outside relationship	5.8%	9.7%	0.0%	$\chi^2 = 1.21$
Understanding about sex outside the relationship				$\chi^2 = 98.96^*$
Discussed and decided it is not ok under any circumstances	50.4%	33.8%	78.6%	
Discussed and decided it is ok under some circumstances	40.3%	49.3%	3.5%	
Discussed and do not agree	4.2%	4.2%	4.0%	
Have not discussed it but feel we would not agree	0.0%	2.8%	5.2%	
Have not discussed but think it would be ok under some circumstances	4.2%	8.5%	2.3%	
Have not discussed it but feel it would not be ok	0.8%	1.4%	6.4%	
Relationship maintenance behaviors ^c				
Pay the other compliments	5.16	4.57	5.09	<i>F</i> = 8.89
See the other's point of view during an argument	4.85	4.79	4.90	<i>F</i> = 0.13

Table II. Continued

Variable	Gay men in civil unions <i>N</i> = 123	Gay men not in civil unions <i>N</i> = 72	Heterosexual married men <i>N</i> = 193	Statistic
Do unasked favors for the other	5.02	4.85	5.06	<i>F</i> = 0.42
Begin to talk about what is troubling us when there is tension	4.80 _b	4.04 _a	5.78 _c	<i>F</i> = 21.08*
Give the other a spontaneous hug or kiss	4.95	4.46	5.16	<i>F</i> = 4.17
See oneself as running the show in our relationship	4.79	4.49	5.10	<i>F</i> = 3.96
Offer advice when the other is faced with a problem	4.77	4.43	4.76	<i>F</i> = 1.44
Sense that the other is disturbed about something	4.63 _a	4.38 _a	5.09 _b	<i>F</i> = 7.97*
Give in to the other's wishes	4.71	4.76	4.66	<i>F</i> = 0.08
Take on a problem in a rational rather than emotional way	4.90	4.56	4.08	<i>F</i> = 6.54
Contribute the most in reaching a solution when we face a dilemma	4.81	4.76	5.02	<i>F</i> = 1.49
Criticize the other's judgment	4.65	4.52	4.96	<i>F</i> = 1.93
Keep one's feelings to oneself	4.83 _a	5.41 _a	3.95 _b	<i>F</i> = 11.80*
Let the other know I would like to have sex	5.28 _a	4.19 _b	3.82 _b	<i>F</i> = 16.97*
Refuse to have sex	4.87 _a	5.58 _b	6.55 _c	<i>F</i> = 17.04*
In general, who has more say about important decisions affecting our relationship	4.99	4.70	5.03	<i>F</i> = 1.20
Who do you think should have the final say about important decisions affecting the relationship	5.03	4.96	4.96	<i>F</i> = 0.25
Who is more committed to the relationship	5.02	5.19	5.14	<i>F</i> = 1.09
Who has altered habits and ways of doing things more to please the other	4.65	4.96	4.52	<i>F</i> = 1.79
Total conflict ^d	7.42	7.22	7.32	<i>F</i> = 0.67
Conflict about ^d				
Housekeeping	6.94	6.54	6.73	<i>F</i> = 0.88
Partner's job	7.22	7.30	7.33	<i>F</i> = 0.11
Our social life	7.12	6.89	7.53	<i>F</i> = 4.39
My job	7.31	6.86	7.05	<i>F</i> = 1.12
Partner's attitudes about children	8.37	8.19	8.27	<i>F</i> = 0.24
My relatives	7.64	7.85	7.44	<i>F</i> = 1.45
His/her relatives	7.63	7.71	7.46	<i>F</i> = 0.77
Moral/religious beliefs	8.46	8.20	8.28	<i>F</i> = 1.18
Communication	6.43	6.41	6.34	<i>F</i> = 0.09
Money coming in	7.39	7.24	7.34	<i>F</i> = 0.13
Managing money	7.01	6.91	6.96	<i>F</i> = 0.06
Expressing affection	7.38	7.09	6.92	<i>F</i> = 2.12
Both working	8.50	8.49	8.26	<i>F</i> = 1.15
Raising children	7.92	9.00	7.08	<i>F</i> = 2.90
Sex life	7.22	6.56	6.92	<i>F</i> = 2.73
Sex outside relationship	8.01 _a	8.12 _a	8.77 _b	<i>F</i> = 9.80*
Relationship in general	7.27	6.97	7.27	<i>F</i> = 0.79

**p* < .0005; Subscripts indicate significant differences in pairwise comparisons between groups.

^a1 = my income pays for all, 5 = both of our incomes contribute equally, 9 = his/her income pays for all.

^b1 = none, 2 = 5 hr or less, 3 = 6–10 hr, 4 = 11–20 hr, 5 = 21–30 hr, etc. up to 9 = 61 hr or more.

^c1 = I do this much more; 5 = we do this equally; 9 = my partner does this much more.

^d1 = daily or almost every day, 2 = 3–4 times a week, 3 = 1–2 times a week, 4 = 2–3 times a month, 5 = once a month, 6 = once every few months, 6 = a few times, 7 = about once a year, 8 = less than once a year, 9 = never.

in civil unions reported more equality in paying for utilities than did either heterosexual men or gay men not in civil unions). Regarding household tasks, married heterosexual men reported greater responsibility than their partners for repairing things around the house, taking out the trash, doing the grocery shopping, taking care of the lawn, fixing drinks for com-

pany, and driving the car when they are going somewhere in town. Married heterosexual men reported doing less cooking of the evening meal, vacuuming, laundry, cleaning the bathroom, and ironing than their partners. Gay men in both types of groups reported sharing household tasks more equitably with their partner.

Table III. Hierarchical Linear Regression Analyses to Predict Division of Household Labor for Female Participants

Step	Criterion	Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	β	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	Change in <i>R</i> ²
1	Women's housework					.46***	.21***	.21
		Income	.00	.00	.07			
		Full-time employment	-.18	.15	-.06			
		Housework hours	-.34	.05	-.29***			
		Contribution to finances	-.18	.04	-.22***			
2	Women's housework					.58***	.33***	.12***
		Income	.00	.00	.07			
		Full-time emp.	-.17	.14	-.05			
		Housework hours	-.26	.05	-.22***			
		Contribution to finances	-.09	.04	-.11*			
		Sexual orientation	-1.00	.12	-.33***			
		Income difference	.00	.25	2.10*			
SO × ID	.00	.00	-.07					
1	Men's housework					.20***	.04***	.04***
		Income	.00	.00	-.05			
		Full-time emp.	-.06	.20	-.02			
		Housework hours	.11	.07	.07			
2	Men's housework					.53***	.28***	.24***
		Income	.00	.00	-.08			
		Full-time emp.	-.01	.17	-.00			
		Housework hours	-.04	.06	-.03			
		Contribution to finances	.09	.05	.09			
		Sexual orientation	1.98	.16	.52***			
		Income difference	-.00	.00	-.02			
SO × ID	.00	.00	.12					

p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

Predictors of Division of Household Tasks

Bivariate analyses revealed that doing traditionally women's housework was positively correlated with number of hours doing housework per week, *r* = .23, *p* < .001, and negatively correlated with age, *r* = -.15, *p* < .01. Doing women's housework was also associated with being in a same-sex relationship, *t*(381) = -10.98, *p* < .001. Doing men's housework was associated with being in a heterosexual relationship, *t*(381) = 12.33, *p* < .001, and with income difference (i.e., earning more than one's partner), *r* = .17, *p* < .01.

In order to identify the extent to which sexual orientation, income difference between partners, and their interaction predicted division of labor, a series of hierarchical linear regression analyses was conducted. In step one, covariates identified in bivariate analyses were entered as predictors. In step two, sexual orientation, income difference, and a sexual orientation by income difference interaction term were entered simultaneously as predictors. Table IV shows the results of these analyses. The overall model that predicts women's housework was significant, and it

accounted for 32% of the variance. Sexual orientation and number of hours spent on housework made unique contributions to the model, whereas age, contribution to household finances, income difference between partners, and the interaction term did not. The overall model that predicts men's housework was also significant, and it accounted for 28% of the variance. Only sexual orientation made a unique contribution to the model.

Sex, Monogamy, Relationship, and Conflict

Men in the three groups did not differ significantly in frequency of sex. However, over one-half of gay men in both types of couples had had sex outside their primary relationship, whereas only 15.2% of married heterosexual men had done so. Similarly, over three-quarters of the married heterosexual men had an agreement that sex outside their relationship was not okay under any circumstances, whereas one-half of the gay men in civil unions and one-third of the gay men not in civil unions had such an agreement. The only item in the conflict subscale that

Table IV. Hierarchical Linear Regression Analyses to Predict Division of Household Labor for Male Participants

Step	Criterion	Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	β	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	Change in <i>R</i> ²
1	Women's housework					.34***	.12***	.12***
		Age	-.01	.01	-.10			
		Housework hours	-.28	.07	-.21***			
2	Men's housework	Contribution to finances	-.19	.05	-.22***			
						.57***	.32***	.21***
		Age	-.00	.01	-.07			
		Housework hours	-.29	.07	-.21***			
		Contribution to finances	-.08	.05	-.09			
		Sexual orientation	1.18	.14	.41***			
		Income difference	-.00	.00	-.05			
SO × ID	.00	.00	.19					
1	Men's housework					.53***	.28***	.28***
		Sexual orientation	-1.70	.16	-.52***			
		Income difference	-.00	.00	-.18			
		SO × ID	.00	.00	.15			

p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

showed a significant difference between groups was that about sex outside the relationship. Gay men in both types of couples reported arguing about this issue more often (less than once a year, on average) than married heterosexual men (never, on average).

Regarding relationship maintenance behaviors, gay men in both types of couples reported sensing that their partner was disturbed about something significantly more often than did married heterosexual men. Conversely, married heterosexual men reported keeping their feelings to themselves more often than did gay men in both types of couples. Gay men in civil unions were the most egalitarian (i.e., mean scores closest to 5, which indicates that "we do this equally") on beginning to talk about what is troubling them when there is tension, initiating sex, and refusing to have sex.

DISCUSSION

As in prior research (e.g., Dunne, 1997, 1998; Kurdek, 1989; Peplau & Spalding, 2000), we found lesbian and gay male couples to be more egalitarian than heterosexual couples. Both heterosexual women and men reported that husbands paid for more items than did wives. Conversely, heterosexual women and men also reported that wives did more of the household tasks than did husbands. Furthermore, the household tasks that heterosexual men do (e.g., taking out the trash, mowing the lawn, fixing drinks for company, and driving the car) are done with less frequency or are less labor-intensive

than those performed by heterosexual women (e.g., cooking dinner, vacuuming, ironing, laundry, grocery shopping, and cleaning the bathroom). Money and housework are not unrelated concepts; Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) noted the relationship between money and power. Those who earn a higher income (men) do less housework than those who earn a lower income (women). In this regard, same-sex couples are a model for ways of equalizing the division of housework.

Furthermore, as predicted, sexual orientation (being in a heterosexual versus same-sex relationship) was a stronger predictor of division of household tasks than was income difference. For both women and men, only sexual orientation made a unique contribution to the model that predicts division of household labor. Thus, being in a same-sex relationship is more important in equalizing housework than is having similar incomes.

What is interesting about these results is that the married couples in this study are not typical heterosexuals, because each heterosexual respondent was the sibling or in-law of a lesbian or gay man. In order to participate in this study, same-sex couples had to be "out" to the sibling and in-law who were sent questionnaires. One could predict that heterosexual siblings of lesbians and gay men come from less traditional families (cf., Rothblum, Balsam, Solomon, & Factor, in press, for a review). Yet some prior research has shown that lesbians and gay men have heterosexual siblings who are quite traditional and similar to U.S. Census data in terms of demographic variables (e.g., religion, children, and length

of relationship) (Dibble, Roberts, & Nussey, 2004; Rothblum, Balsam, & Mickey, 2004; Rothblum & Factor, 2001). This is the first study to compare lesbians and gay men to heterosexuals recruited from among their siblings on gender roles, and we too found heterosexuals to be traditional on division of finances and housework. This raises questions about how women and men are socialized to assume gendered roles in adult relationships, because heterosexuals grew up in the same households as some of the lesbians and gay men in this study. Some researchers have raised questions about the shared environment of siblings, and argued that parents often treat children differently and also that children may highlight ways in which they are different from one another (e.g., Bussell & Reiss, 1993; Feinberg & Hetherington, 2001; Schachter, 1985). It could also be argued that children who grow up to be lesbian or gay are different from heterosexual siblings at an early age and thus elicit different childrearing patterns from their parents (e.g., a girl who is a tomboy may help her father more than her mother with chores). Further research is needed to understand what mediates this process.

Obviously, there are also cultural and environmental factors that lead to a gendered division of labor. Heterosexual couples who are married are more traditional than those who are cohabiting (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). In this study we did not focus on bisexuals, who have often been in sequential relationships with women and men. There has been relatively little research on bisexuals' gender roles, but it would be interesting to see whether bisexuals assume more traditional gender roles when in relationships with different-sex than when with same-sex partners. If that were the case, then childhood socialization and modeling may have less to do with adult gendered division of labor than does gender of current partner. Among the general civil union population, about 40% had been previously heterosexually married (Vermont Office of Vital Records of the Vermont Department of Health). Although our data set did not include information about lesbians' and gay men's former marital status, it would be interesting in future research to examine changes in division of labor as individuals move from heterosexual to same-sex marriage (or the reverse).

The results of the current study indicate a variety of ways in which married heterosexual couples, even those related by birth or marriage to lesbians or gay men, maintain relationship behaviors. Heterosexual women report initiating the discussion when

there is tension in the relationship, whereas heterosexual men report keeping their feelings to themselves. In contrast, same-sex couples engage in relationship maintenance behaviors in more egalitarian ways. Contrary to prediction, married heterosexual couples did not report more conflict about housework, money, or styles of communication than did lesbian and gay male couples, despite discrepancies in division of finances, housework, and relationship maintenance behaviors.

As predicted, lesbians had sex less frequently than did married heterosexual women. Other researchers have commented on the role that men play in initiating sex, and this was born out by the results of this study. In the Relationship Maintenance Behavior Subscale, heterosexual women were more likely to report that their partner initiated sex, and that they themselves were more likely to refuse sex, than were women in lesbian couples. As others have theorized (e.g., Peplau et al., 2004; Rothblum & Brehony, 1993), when couples consist of two women they lack someone socialized to be the sexual initiator. Lesbian couples, being female, may spend more time on romance than on genital sex, but it is also true that in Western societies "real" sex consists of genital activity (cf., McCormick, 1994; Rothblum & Brehony, 1993). This is one domain where lack of traditional roles may reduce relationship satisfaction among lesbians. Prior researchers have found that gay men report having sex more often than do heterosexuals and lesbians (e.g., Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983), but also that sexual frequency declines with increasing length of relationship for gay men (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). The gay male couples in this study had probably been coupled longer than men in a typical same-sex couples study (see Solomon et al., 2004, for variables related to couples' length of relationship in the current study).

Also as predicted, gay men were less monogamous than married heterosexual men. Whereas few lesbians, heterosexual women, or heterosexual men had had sex outside their current relationship, nonmonogamy was reported by over one-half of gay men. Furthermore, nonmonogamy was an accepted part of gay men's relationships in that over 40% of gay men in civil unions and those not in civil unions had an agreement that sex outside their relationship was permissible in some circumstances, whereas 5% or fewer of lesbian and heterosexual couples had such an agreement. There has been a lot of discussion about the culture of nonmonogamy in gay men's communities (cf., Peplau et al., 2004, for a review).

For example, Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) emphasized the importance of impersonal sex with strangers (“tricking”) as follows (p. 295): “But the trick mentality allows many men to have sex without emotional involvement. This is why gay male couples can tolerate very high rates of nonmonogamy.” To support this description, fewer than 10% of gay men in this study reported having had a meaningful love affair outside their relationship. Still, nonmonogamy is not without its complications. The only area in which couples differed in conflict was about sex outside their relationship. Although this type of conflict was relatively rare (less than once a year), gay men were still significantly more likely to have conflict about nonmonogamy than were heterosexual men.

We had predicted that lesbians and gay men in civil unions would be more similar to heterosexual couples than to lesbians and gay men not in civil unions in terms of sexual activity and monogamy. Lesbians in civil unions and those not in civil unions did not differ significantly in sexual activity, and, in fact, they differed on no other variable used in this study. Gay men in civil unions, however, did differ from gay men not in civil unions to some degree. One-half of gay men in civil unions had an agreement that sex outside their relationship was not okay under any circumstances (e.g., had agreed to be monogamous) whereas only 33.8% of gay men not in civil unions had such an agreement. Nevertheless, both groups were less exclusive than married heterosexual men, more than three-quarters of whom had an agreement that sex outside their relationship was not okay under any circumstances. Furthermore, regardless of their agreements about monogamy, more than one-half of gay men in both groups had actually had sex outside their relationship. Gay men in civil unions were more likely to report that they shared initiation of sex and also refusal of sex (i.e., their mean scores were closest to the midpoint, which indicated “we do this equally”), as well as sharing responsibility for bringing up topics when there was tension in the relationship. In this regard, they differed from gay men not in civil unions and from heterosexual married men. Thus, to some extent, gay men in civil unions are more egalitarian in terms of both traditionally masculine (initiating sex) and feminine (discussing tension in the relationship, agreeing to be monogamous, discussing topics when there is tension) relationship maintenance behaviors. Kurdek (1989) argued that lesbian couples involve two partners who have been socialized as women to be relational, caring, and nurturant, whereas gay male couples involve

two partners who have been socialized to be independent and autonomous. Perhaps the presence of a legal relationship underscores to the male partners in a civil union that their relationship is less independent and more interdependent. More research is needed to answer this question.

Our research is the first to focus on gender roles of same-sex couples in civil unions. The methodology allowed comparison between same-sex couples in legal relationships, same-sex couples not in legal relationships, and heterosexual couples in legal relationships. One limitation of this methodology is that we could only include civil union couples who were willing to have the research team contact their friends and siblings. Nevertheless, our sample was representative of the entire civil union population on gender ratio, race/ethnicity, and geographic distribution.

Civil union legislation is very recent, and the couples included in this study had only been legally recognized for about 1 year when they completed the questionnaires. Thus, this study is about who chooses to have a civil union and who does not. It is not about how being in a civil union changes a relationship; we will need longitudinal data to answer that question, and all three types of couples will in fact be followed over time. It is possible that longitudinal data will show more differences between same-sex couples who are in civil unions from those who are not. Possibly, changes over time may show more differences for gay men in civil unions compared with gay men not in civil unions, but not for lesbians (given the greater number of differences we found for gay men versus lesbians at this initial stage of analysis). For example, choosing to legalize their relationship may not be the norm in gay male culture, so that gay men with civil unions are different than those without such legislation. This may explain why so many more lesbians than gay men had civil unions even though most U.S. convenience surveys have greater numbers of gay men than lesbians. Or it is possible that even over time there are few differences between couples in civil unions and those who are not, given how little societal recognition there is for same-sex legalized relationships. The most recent election certainly demonstrated great opposition to same-sex legislation in many US states. In conclusion, given that civil union legislation in Vermont preceded that of domestic partnerships in California and same-sex marriage in Massachusetts, this cohort of couples will serve as the pioneers for our understanding of issues that face same-sex couples in legalized relationships in the United States.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study was funded by grants from the Gill Foundation and the University Committee on Research and Scholarship of the University of Vermont. The authors gratefully acknowledge the support of Vermont State Representative Bill Lippert for endorsing the study to participants and the Vermont Office of Vital Records of the Vermont Department of Health for providing us with copies of the civil union certificates.

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