Expectations for the Division of House Labor based on Race and Gender Identity

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Abstract

There is little research surrounding the conformity of gender expectation in mixed-race relationships. Additionally, there is very little to no research that has explored if transgender couples conform to cisgender stereotypes in relationships. Our study examined whether changing socially progressive mores influenced perceptions of traditional gender conformity in mixed race and transgender relationships by participants. Our analysis of mixed-race couples was evident with a positive relationship between participants receiving the mixed-race couple and an increase in assigning housework tasks to the male partner. Participants did view the transgender couple as socially progressive, but that did not affect their house tasks assignment. Participants did not view the mixed race, same race, or cisgender couple as socially progressive. Our findings support prior research on gender dynamics and racial and gender minorities and provide a new perspective from outside perceptions of a couple. Additionally, we found that self-reported conservative ideology of participants was positively correlated with racist, transphobic, and sexist views. Future research should use ideology as the mediating variable between marginalized couples and assigned housework tasks.

Keywords: stereotypes, race, transgender, social perceptions, housework, relationships

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Despite much work done by activists and politicians over 50 years to fully expand gender equality in both the general society and everyday interpersonal relationships, research shows that gender stereotypes are alive and well in American homes (Miller & Carlson, 2016). House labor-based gender stereotype research is one of the basic ways to see the progression of gender equality. This research has historically revolved around White, cisgender couples (Perry & Gerstel, 2020). This research is quickly becoming outdated as American relationships change. There have been studies examining race as another factor to analyze gender division, but most of these studies have examined couples who have the same racial composition and compared across different races (e.g., Black vs. White couples). There is little research surrounding the conformity of gender expectations in mixed-race relationships. Additionally, there is very little to no research that has explored if transgender couples conform to cisgender stereotypes in relationships. This finding is surprising as rates of transgender individuals continue to rise as American society is becoming more socially progressive with the expansion of equal rights for racial, sexual, and gender minorities. Gender minorities have always been around but being able to express your gender differently than the vast societal norm has been historically extremely frowned upon. It even still is a large point of contention, vastly republican states such as Florida and Texas that are actively passing laws to make transitioning incredibly difficult (ex. Florida's "Don't Say Gay" bill, Greg Abbot's directive to Texas State healthcare and wealth fare systems deeming gender affirming care to minors as child abuse). Our study examined whether changing socially progressive mores influenced perceptions of traditional gender conformity in mixed race and transgender relationships by participants.

Racial Stereotypes in Interracial Relationships

Research on why interracial couples seek therapy has exposed differences in disagreements and stressors in interracial relationships that do not occur in same race relationships such as: differences in

social support, racial privilege that only occurs to one partner, radically different personal histories,

strength of ties to their different racial identities, experience of different microaggressions, and

differences in taught communication from parental figures (Leslie & Young, 2015). Even though race is

only one factor to the relationship it is clear it creates a large difference between the partners as

individuals. Race affects how the world interacts with an individual especially in America. Social

environments are historically much harsher to people of color; thus, people of color learn different

behavior from the racial majority to mitigate brash treatment in a harsh environment (Carter & Murphy,

2015). Learned behaviors transfer into a relationship. They influence each person in the relationship's

interaction with their partner and then continue to influence a couple's interaction with society as an

interracial whole. The current study examined how these factors are viewed from an outsider's

perspective into the relationship. To see if the differences listed by interracial couples changed if the

participants saw the relationships in a traditional way.

Transgender versus Cisgender Stereotypes

Stereotypes play a heavy factor in both societal interaction between genders and how the

different genders are raised to behave. Transgender individuals get caught in a special crossroads. They

are raised to act out a gender that is not theirs. Most can be very good at it as a full proof way to mask

their identity in unsafe spaces. Once transgender people start to transition, they teach themselves how

to act in a way that is normative with their actual gender (Fein et al., 2017). No matter how long they

have been transgender they never lose the information taught to them while they presented as a

cisgender person. Thus, they have learned stereotypes and behaviors of both sides of the gender binary

and can pull from each side when wanted/needed. Transgender people also have a third stereotype that

is prescribed to them from outer society that is solely reserved for them. These stereotypes tend to be

negative such as: being transgender is a mental illness, transgender people are trying too hard,

transgender individuals will never actually be a different gender than what they were assigned at birth

even with prescribed hormones or gender affirming surgery (Howansky & Wilton, 2021). There is little to no research that investigates how these stereotypes affect transgender relationships (colloquially described as T4T). In the increasing research into how others view transgender individuals there is also little research that focuses on perceptions of T4T relationships. Through our research we wanted to examine how stereotypically gendered and traditional participants viewed T4T relationships.

Social Progressiveness and Acceptance in America into the 21st Century

Social progressiveness in America has been fought for by movements and protests by gender and racial minorities for over a century. From the beginnings of the suffragettes, the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 60s, into the 2nd wave of feminism in the early 70s, and the gay liberation movement minorities have been fighting for laws and policies to direct change in American progressiveness and acceptance (for general history of these movements see: Burkett, 2022; Carson, 2022; Levy, 2022). It has worked to an extent. Tolerance for hate-speech against these minority groups has declined since the turn of the 21st century (Chong et al., 2021). Less tolerance for hate is not necessarily an indicator of more acceptance, but it is a step in that direction. Can the previous research be an indicator of American's perceptions of minorities in relationships? This is what the current study examined.

Method

The current study utilized a 2 (race: same vs. mixed) x 2 (gender: cis vs. trans) between-subjects factorial design. We hypothesized that mixed race and transgender couples would be viewed by participants as more egalitarian. We expected participants to assign household tasks more gender neutral towards these couples compared to the same race and cisgender couples. The study received IRB approval from a mid-sized southwestern university.

Participants

We recruited a convenience sample of university student participants (*N* = 92) via the Sona

system at a mid-sized southwestern university. Participants who completed the study received 0.5

research credit applied to the course of their choosing. The research design did not necessitate criteria

for participant exclusion.

The mean age of our sample was 19.2 years (*SD* = 2.05 years). The sample consisted of 68

women (73.9%), 23 men (25%), and 1 participant who identified as other gender (1.1%). Most

participants were Hispanic (*n* = 45, 48.9%) followed by White (*n* = 39, 42.4%), Black (*n* = 6, 6.5%), and

Asian (*n* = 2, 2.2%). The participants self-identified as primarily neither liberal or conservative (*n* = 40,

43.5%), followed by somewhat liberal (*n* = 16, 17.4%), somewhat conservative (*n* = 14, 15.2%), and

equally very liberal (*n* = 11, 12%) and very conservative (*n* = 11, 12%).

The Qualtrics survey software platform randomly assigned participants to the 1 of 4 vignettes:

Same Race (*n* = 24, 26.1%), Mixed Race (*n* = 23, 25%), Cisgender (*n* = 22, 23.9%), and Transgender (*n* =

23, 25%).

Materials and Procedure

Participants used the Sona system to enroll in the online study titled "Expectations in

Relationships." Once enrolled, participants clicked a link to the study and agreed to an informed consent

document. Qualtrics software randomly assigned participants to 1 of 4 vignettes. The vignettes used in

the current study were adapted from previous research (Doan & Quadlin, 2019). The participants were

also provided with photos of the imaginary couples from the Chicago Face Database (Ma et al., 2015).

The participants were asked to assign 5 house tasks on a scale from 1 (*always the feminine presenting*

partner) to 5 (*always the masculine presenting partner*). The house tasks included: dishes, laundry,

cleaning/picking up around the house, yard work, and taking the trash out. Participants were then asked

2 questions regarding the social progressiveness of the couple they were presented with:

1. How socially progressive do you perceive this couple to be? (Socially progressive is defined

     as having progressive ideas and modern ideas about how things should be done, rather than

traditional ones.)

- With the following response scale: 1 (Not at all socially progressive) to 5 (Very socially

progressive)

2. To what extent do you believe this couple exhibits traditional gender traits?

- With the following response scale: 1 (This couple exhibits very NON-traditional gender traits)

to 5 (This couple exhibits very TRADITIONAL gender traits)

Next, participants answered 3 individual differences measures:

Measure of Racist Attitudes

Participants responded to 5 items on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) that

measured if race is important to the participant's perception of the world and if they agree with racist

ideas and attitudes. Items included: Racism may have been a problem in the past, but it is not an

important problem today, White people in the U.S. have certain advantages because of the color of their

skin, etc. (Neville et al., 2000).

Measure of Transphobic Attitudes

Participants responded to 5 items on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) that

will measure if they agree with transphobic ideas and attitudes. Items include: An individual will always

be the gender they were born no matter how much they change their outward appearance, Sex change

operations are morally wrong, etc. (Tebbe et al., 2014).

Measure of Sexist Attitudes

Participants responded to 5 items on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

measuring their attitudes towards sexist/traditionally gendered remarks. Items included: A woman will

never be truly fulfilled in life if she doesn't perform traditionally feminine tasks (such as being a mother

and a homemaker), Most women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist, etc. (Bendixen &

Kennair, 2017)

Demographic Items and Memory Check

Finally, participants indicated their age, race, gender, political ideology, and class rank. Participants who received the transgender couple were asked an additional question asking if the participant believed that the couple presented were truly transgender individuals (Yes: *n*= 8, 34.8%; No: *n* = 15, 65.2%). At the end of the study, participants read a debriefing statement and returned to the Sona system to receive their research credit.

Results

We used liner regression tests to examine our hypotheses related to both manipulated race and gender situations. We also performed a supplemental correlation analysis between participants ideology and individual differences measures of racism, transphobia, and sexism.

Socially Progressive Perceptions

Participants met in the middle for perceiving the couples as socially progressive (*M* = 2.73/5, *SD* = 0.84).

Assigned House Tasks

Participants assigned house tasks mostly egalitarian regardless of assigned vignette (*M* = 2.92/5, *SD* = 0.336). Our control tasks (dishes) reported this as well (*M* = 2.5/5, *SD* = 0.734). Our traditionally feminine tasks (laundry, cleaning house) leaned slightly towards the woman partner (*M* = 2.38/5, *SD* = 0.66). Our traditionally masculine tasks (taking out the trash, yard work) leaned towards the man partner (*M* = 3.74/5, *SD* = 0.863).

Hypothesis Tests

We used the Baron and Kenny (1986) approach to testing for mediation, resulting in four regression models. See Figures 1 and 2 for visual depictions of mediation analyses examining race and gender as X-variables, respectively.

Figure 1. *The effect of race on labor divisions explained by social progressiveness.* Note: * *p* < .05, ** *p* < .01, *** *p* < .001, ns = *p* > .05
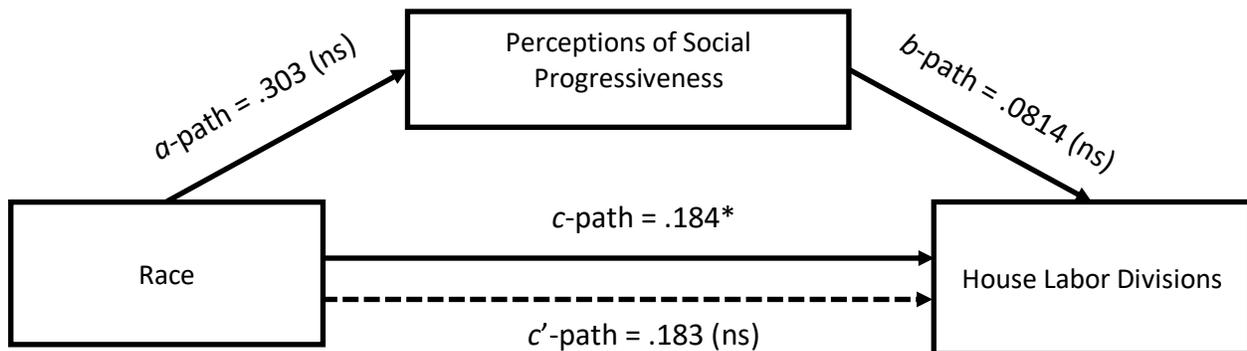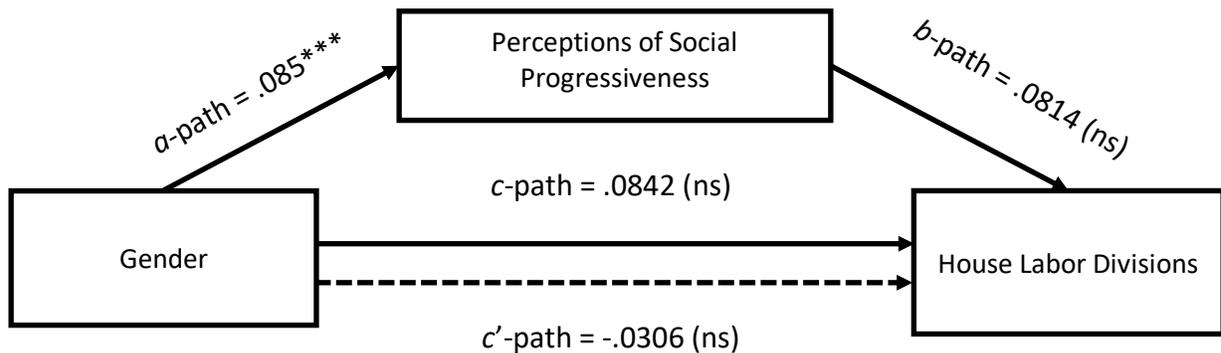
Figure 2. *The effect of gender on labor divisions explained by social progressiveness.* Note: * *p* < .05, ** *p* < .01, *** *p* < .001, ns = *p* > .05

Our first hypothesis was supported for race, but not for gender. Going from the same race (coded as 1) to mixed race couple (coded as 2) was associated with a 0.184-unit increase in the house tasks being assigned to the male partner ($b = 0.184$, $p = .48$). Our second hypothesis was not supported for race but was supported for gender. Going from the cisgender (coded as 1) to the transgender couple (coded as 2) was associated with a 0.852-unit increase in the couple being perceived as socially progressive ($b = 0.852$, $p < .001$). Our third hypothesis was not supported. Perceptions of social progressiveness did not explain how the participants assigned house tasks ($b = 0.081$, $p = .051$). Our fourth hypothesis was not supported for either manipulated condition. Perceived social progressiveness did not mediate the relationship between the manipulated race and gender of a couple and how participants assigned the couple house tasks due to the failure of the a-path, b-path, and c'-path in the

race condition and the failure of the b-path, c-path, and c'-path in the gender condition. Race and social

progressiveness explained 8.4% of the variance in household labor divisions. Gender and social

progressiveness explained 10.6% of the variance in household labor divisions.

Figure 2. *The effect of gender on labor divisions explained by social progressiveness.*

Correlation Matrix between Ideology, Racial Attitudes, Transgender Attitudes, and Sexist Attitudes

We ran an additional correlation matrix on the individual difference measures and self-reported

personal ideology information we received from our participants. There was a positive correlation

between increasing conservativeness and racism ($r = 0.67$, $p < .001$), transphobia ($r = 0.646$, $p < .001$),

and sexism ($r = 0.517$, $p < .001$).

Correlation Matrix

		Mediator	Ideology	IDRace	IDTrans	IDSexism
Mediator	Pearson's r	—				
	p-value	—				
Ideology	Pearson's r	-0.012	—			
	p-value	0.911	—			
IDRace	Pearson's r	0.069	0.671 ***	—		
	p-value	0.514	< .001	—		
IDTrans	Pearson's r	-0.006	0.646 ***	0.648 ***	—	
	p-value	0.952	< .001	< .001	—	
IDSexism	Pearson's r	-0.018	0.517 ***	0.448 ***	0.518 ***	—
	p-value	0.861	< .001	< .001	< .001	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Discussion

Exploring gender stereotypes using interpersonal relationships and housework has become a common practice based on previous social psychology research (Doan & Quadlin, 2019). The present study was built to determine if marginalized couples were perceived to be more egalitarian than traditional couples using this common technique. We choose mixed race couples based on research that showed that racial stereotypes affected mixed race couples personally (Leslie & Young, 2015) and we choose transgender couples based on previous knowledge that transgender stereotypes are majorly negative (Howansky & Wilton, 2021). We were also examined if perceiving a couple as socially progressive explained the relationship between our marginalized couples and the housework tasks assigned to each partner in reflection of increasing socially progressive attitudes in America since the turn of the century (Chong et al., 2021).

Our analysis of mixed-race couples was evident with a positive relationship between participants receiving the mixed-race couple and an increase in assigning housework tasks to the male partner. Our analysis of transgender couples did not support our housework hypothesis. Participants did view the transgender couple as socially progressive. They did not view the mixed race, same race, or cisgender couple as socially progressive. Our findings support prior research on gender dynamics and racial and gender minorities and provide a new perspective from outside perceptions of a couple. Additionally, we found that self-reported conservative ideology of participants was positively correlated with racist, transphobic, and sexist views.

These findings are direct reflections of the views of the general population and can be used in a variety of ways. A politician could use the findings to reject or support legislation that aligns with the majority ideology of population that they are representing. Civilians could use the findings to support their own opinions and to be fully informed about the society around them. The present findings can be beneficial for future social psychology research as a basis for several special topics including gender

roles, political ideology, and social perceptions of minorities. Furthermore, the findings contribute to a

new and growing discourse of the transgender population.

Limitations and Future Directions

We used androgynous names for the couple in the vignette. It may have confused participants.

Future research should design the study with a memory check for participants or continue to provide

labeled pictures of the couple during the assignment tasks as memory of the couple's names was crucial

for that task. The participants who received the transgender couple were asked if they truly believed

that the couple provided in the pictures was transgender. The majority answer was no. This could have

affected how they divided household tasks and should be taken into consideration for future research or

study replication. In the mixed-race couple, we pictured a white woman, and a black man future

research could switch this dynamic to see if it changes the results of the present study. Future research

should use ideology as the mediating variable between marginalized couples and assigned housework

tasks. Our sample population was majority young adults, but much prior research has proven evident

that college students reliably reflect the general population (see generally: Bornstein & Colleagues,

2017). Replication of this study should occur in at least a decade to continually measure changing social

perceptions of gender and racial minorities in American private life.

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Conclusion

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Examining house labor divisions to measure gender stereotypes and American social

perceptions has been a standard in social psychology for decades (Altintas & Sullivan, 2016). The current

study followed this traditional social psychology research plan with a fresh twist from minority

relationship dynamics. Our results both corroborated prior research and have provided new insights into

mixed race couples and the social perceptions of transgender couples. Our findings should encourage

further research to pursue personal ideology as having a broad implication for an individual's social

perceptions.

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