Chapter 11
Familiarly Queer? Same-Sex Relationships and Family Formation

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11.1 Introduction

On any given weekend in the inner suburbs of Melbourne, as in most other Australian capital cities, it is commonplace to walk past a lesbian couple out and about with their baby and toddler. The phenomenon sometimes known as the 'gayby boom', whereby increasing numbers of same-sex attracted women and men become parents, is but one example of how same-sex relationships and family formation in Australia have undergone quite dramatic changes in a short space of time.[1]

[1] Language used to describe 'non-heterosexual' families and relationships is evolving, and there is no consensus on correct terminology (see Weeks et al. 2001; Dempsey 2012a; Brown 2008; du Chesne and Bradley 2007). The term 'same-sex attracted' is used in this chapter in recognition of the fact that 'lesbian' and 'gay' are not universally used as self-descriptors by people who have same-sex relationships. The complex connection between sexual attraction, sexual behavior and a more overarching sense of sexual identity has long been noted in sexuality surveys since Alfred Kinsey's formative work in US in the 1940s, including studies conducted in Australia (Smith et al. 2003; Dempsey et al. 2001). Some Australian same-sex attracted adults (indications are, a small minority) may consider themselves 'bisexual' or 'queer' rather than 'lesbian' or 'gay' or use other identifiers (see Leonard et al. 2012; Power et al. 2010, 2012). Some of the studies of the personal lives of same-sex attracted adults discussed in this chapter also included transgender and intersex participants. 'Transgender' can refer to people who have had hormone treatment or surgery to reconstruct their bodies in order to conform to the sex and gender they identify with. It can also refer to those whose appearance, comportment and self-identification transgresses usual binary sex and gender categories in less permanent fashion (see Hines 2006; Couch et al. 2007). By contrast, "intersex" is a term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with ambiguous reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male. For example, a person might appear to be male but has mostly female internal anatomy, or vice versa (see Intersex Society of North America 2013).

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Over the past 10 years in many Australian states and territories, same-sex couple and parenting relationships have become more visible and gained legal recognition. These developments have ensued from gay and lesbian community activism and the increasing social acceptability of same-sex couple relationships. For instance, reproductive medicine clinics have extended their donor insemination and IVF services to lesbians in Victoria, Western Australia, NSW and Tasmania, and these states have also changed their *Status of Children* legislation to enable the legal recognition of lesbian co-parenting couples, irrespective of which partner gave birth. The Federal *Family Law Amendment* (de facto Financial Matters and Other Measures) *Act 2008* now enables cohabiting same-sex couples legal protection under the Family Law Act with regard to child and property concerns (Sifris 2010). Civil union schemes exist in four Australian states and the ACT in addition to this federal recognition of same-sex cohabiting relationships (Richardson-Self 2012). In Australia, as in many other parts of the industrialized world, same-sex marriage activism has taken centre stage in the lesbian and gay rights movement.[2]

In this chapter, I situate same-sex relationships and family formation practices within debates about the distinctiveness as opposed to the 'assimilationist' tendencies of these relationships. I then discuss relational and family formation patterns within the Australian same-sex attracted communities in more depth, as documented in recent Australian surveys and qualitative studies of same-sex attracted parenting and the personal lives of same-sex attracted transgender and intersex (LGBTI) Australians. These sources confirm the popularity but by no means ubiquity of cohabiting couple and couple-based parenting relationships, and mixed feelings about the extent to which marriage rights are necessary. I argue it is important not to lose sight of the ways in which same-sex attracted Australians organize their personal lives beyond the couple and nuclear family model that marriage assumes, and to retain other legal possibilities beyond marriage for the recognition of the diverse relational forms that exist.

It is difficult to ascertain the size of the population of LGBTI Australians (see Wilson 2004; ABS 2012a). Wilson estimates, based on responses to a sexual identity question on the nationally representative Australian Survey of Social Attitudes 2003, that in the vicinity of 2 % of adult Australians identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual, with higher numbers of gay and bisexual men identified than lesbian or bisexual women (Wilson 2004). There are no official sources of information on the size of the transgender population in Australia although it is likely to be vastly smaller than the same-sex attracted population.

[2] Familial rights yet to be extended to same-sex attracted Australians include the right to adopt children or to marry. Gay men becoming parents through overseas surrogacy also face complex legal impediments to legal recognition of their parenthood in all Australian states.

11.2 Same-Sex Attracted Adults' Family and Personal Lives

A range of preoccupations with how same-sex attracted adults' families and relationships are similar to or different from normative nuclear family relationships are evident in the international social science literature. Some argue that same-sex relationality is based on distinctive assumptions, in which monogamous couple relationships and the importance of ties to biological family or family of origin are de-centred, and friendship plays a more important part. By contrast, an increasing body of empirical work on lesbian and (to a lesser extent) gay male parenting indicates the continuing importance of family forms based on biological parenting and cohabiting couple relationships, and a number of ways in which same-sex parented families are similar to heterosexual nuclear families.

North American anthropologist Kath Weston's work popularized what has come to be known as the 'Families of Choice' thesis. In *Families We Choose* (1991), Weston emphasized the pivotal importance of friendship in lesbian and gay notions of family. Weston interviewed gay men and lesbians in the Bay Area of San Francisco, and found they tended to base their personal lives around supportive communities of friends and partners, rather than mutually interdependent ties with families of origin. Weston claimed lesbians and gay men reversed the dominant understanding that friendships do not last because they are chosen, while biological ties with family are lasting and solid. She proposed that the possibility of rejection by family of origin due to the stigma attached to homosexuality, particularly for gay men diagnosed with HIV/AIDS, led to widespread skepticism in gay and lesbian communities about the unconditional and enduring character of 'blood' or family of origin ties.

Several more recent UK-based studies of the personal lives of same-sex attracted adults lend support to the 'families of choice' thesis. In Weeks et al.'s (2001) research into 'same-sex intimacies', the authors highlighted the 'life experiments' of same-sex attracted adults or their practices of love, mutual care and maintaining households beyond the nuclear family model. Non-monogamous long-term relationships, maintaining friendships with lovers and partners once romantic relationships end, and living in shared households well into adulthood were some of the practices these authors noted as characteristic of non-heterosexual personal lives. Similarly, Roseneil and Budgeon (2004) contended that many same-sex attracted people refuse heterorelationality. In other words, they do not organize their personal lives around monogamous, cohabiting couple relationships, or serial monogamy. Roseneil and Budgeon's research participants included same-sex attracted sole parents who shared a household and supported each other financially, single same-sex attracted adults who lived with their friends well into middle-age despite having non-cohabiting romantic partners, and single gay men and lesbians who were co-parenting children together without the involvement of a sexual or romantic partner.

Somewhat at odds with this emphasis on families of choice and friendship as a means to sustaining relationships of daily care and support is the interdisciplinary body of scholarship on lesbian and gay parenting. This work tends to accentuate the

continuing and possibly increasing influence of heterorelational notions of family in the international same-sex attracted communities. For instance, much recent work on lesbian-parented families formed through donor insemination emphasizes the sharing of parenting by a cohabiting couple, in which one or both women are biologically related to the children (e.g. Reimann 1997; Dunne 2000; Sullivan 1996; Dalton and Bielby 2000; Golombok et al. 2003; Gartrell et al. 1999, 2000, 2006).

Another recent theme in the literature on same-sex parented families formed through reproductive technologies is the extent to which careful and strategic decisions about biological relatedness are key to creating and maintaining family unity and sibling relationships. This work highlights the continuing symbolic and social power of biogenetic connections in lesbian mothers' and gay sperm providers' decision-making about forming families with children (e.g. Dempsey 2005, 2010; Riggs 2008a, b; Nordqvist 2010). For instance, lesbian prospective parents may match physical characteristics of the sperm donor to the non-birth mother in an attempt to create a stronger sense of family unity through resemblances, and to make it difficult for onlookers to pick who the biological mother in the couple is (Hayden 1995; Nordqvist 2010). Gay men forming families through surrogacy may have similar preoccupations (Dempsey 2013). This indicates biological relatedness remains an important reference point in the family relationships of lesbian and gay parents, despite the same-sex relational context.

Same-sex parenting research may also challenge the notion that same-sex attracted adults turn to friends rather than families of origin for mutual support. On the contrary, the transition to parenthood is reported to bring new parents closer to their families of origin, meaning that same-sex parented children appear to have good access to grandparents and extended family of origin relationships. In the US National Longitudinal Lesbian Families Study, which has been running for nearly 20 years now, many of the lesbian couples taking part reported strong social support from their parents. Most grandparents were very happy about having grandchildren, and grandparents' openness about their daughters' lesbian-parented families increased over time (Gartrell et al. 1999, 2000, 2006). Having children strengthened the relationships between lesbian mothers and their own parents. Goldberg (2010) also found that both partners in lesbian couples received increased support from their own parents in the transition to parenthood. It is also apparent that having children brings gay men closer to their own parents and other members of their families of origin (Tuazon-McCheyne 2010; Bergman et al. 2010; Power et al. 2012).

The assumption that same-sex couples are at the core or heart of family relationships is also apparent in the focus of gay and lesbian community activism, and of law reform in Australia. Obtaining legal recognition for same-sex cohabiting relationships, on a par with the considerable legal recognition now extended to heterosexual de facto relationships, was the priority for gay and lesbian rights lobbies throughout the 1990s and early 2000s (see GLAD 1994; VGLRL 1999), resulting in amendments to various state and federal acts. Lesbian parenting rights activism in the early to mid 2000s succeeded in changing the state laws in favour

of 'presumptive parenthood' (see Dempsey 2008; VLRC 2007, Millbank various). This means that state legislation governing the registration of children's births and status of children's parentage is applicable to lesbian as well as heterosexual couples that have children by donor insemination. Lesbian couples in Western Australia, NSW, Victoria, ACT and Tasmania now have legal parenting rights from the time of a child's birth as long as the lesbian co-parent consented to the birth mother's donor insemination pregnancy (see Sifris 2010; Surtees 2011). Changes to the Status of Children Act in New Zealand in 2005 similarly gave parental rights to the same-sex partner of a woman who gives birth, and extinguished any legal claim to parenthood by the sperm donor (Surtees 2011).

As Hopkins et al. (2013) have recently noted in the US, increasing legal recognition for same-sex couples, including parents, and demands that this should be extended to marriage rights generate a strong critique from some scholars and activists. A counter claim from those influenced by queer theory and gay liberation sensibilities is that legal reform emphasizing cohabiting couple relationships, with marriage at the pinnacle of these, is in danger of erasing the distinctiveness of LGBT personal lives. For instance, queer theorists such as Lisa Duggan (2002) and Michael Warner (1999) raise concerns that gay marriage is 'assimilationist' and will marginalize those members of the LGBT communities who cannot or choose not to privilege monogamous, cohabiting relationships. They fear the fight for marriage rights will confer normalcy to 'good, married, monogamous' gay men and lesbians at the expense of their 'bad, queer, promiscuous' counterparts, and further marginalize the relationships of care and mutual support that are predicated on friendships rather than couple relationships.

Having sketched out the parameters of this debate about distinctiveness, diversity and assimilationist tendencies in same-sex relationships, I turn now to look in more depth at recent family, household and relationship patterns in the Australian same-sex attracted communities. Data in this section of the chapter come from the Australian Census and three recent non-representative national surveys of the relational lives of same-sex attracted and gender diverse Australians. These surveys are: Private Lives 2 (PL2) (Leonard et al. 2012), a Victoria-based national survey of 3,853 Australians; Not so Private Lives (NPL) (Dane et al. 2010), a Queensland-based national survey of the relationship patterns and forms of relationship recognition desired by 2032 Australian same-sex attracted adults[3]; and Work, Love, Play (Power et al. 2010), a survey of family formation practices among 445 Australian same-sex attracted, transgender and intersex parents. I also draw on my qualitative research into family formation practices in the Australian same-sex attracted communities.

[3] The Not So Private Lives online survey was conducted by researchers in the School of Psychology at The University of Queensland, Australia. It aimed to add to knowledge of the personal lives of sexual minorities in Australia. Themes covered by survey questions included: the timing of disclosure of same-sex attractions; preferred relationship recognition; same-sex attracted individuals' perceptions of how others value their relationships relative to different-sex relationships and the role of mainstream acceptance in relation to psychological well-being.

11.3 Relationships, Family and Household Circumstances

Since 1996, the Australian Census of Population and Housing (hereafter 'the census') has provided information on numbers of same-sex cohabiting couples in Australia (Fig. 11.1). Same-sex couples have increased in number in every census since 1996. More than triple the number of couples counted in 1996 was counted in the most recent 2011 census (ABS 2013). This could indicate increasing willingness to disclose relationship status due to perceptions of the greater social acceptability of homosexuality or same-sex relationships, rather than a rise in the numbers of couples per se. In each census since 1996, male same-sex couples have outnumbered female same-sex couples (Fig. 11.1).

In the 2011 census data, there is more detail available than in previous census collections about how same sex couples described their relationships. The majority (96 %) of individuals in the 33,714 same-sex couples counted described themselves as de facto partners. A relatively small minority of individuals living in same-sex couple households (about 4 %) referred to themselves as 'husband' or 'wife'. Given gay marriage is not permitted in Australia, those who referred to their partner as a spouse may have done so because this was their subjective view of the status of their partnership, or due to the fact that they had married overseas in a jurisdiction where gay marriage is legal (ABS 2012a).

Census data collected in 2011 indicated there are far fewer same-sex couples with resident children than heterosexual couples with children. Same-sex couples with resident children were also greatly outnumbered by same-sex couples without resident children. It was much more common for female than male same-sex couples to have children living with them in the household (22 % of female couples compared with 3 % of male couples) (Fig. 11.2). In 2011, 12 % of same-sex

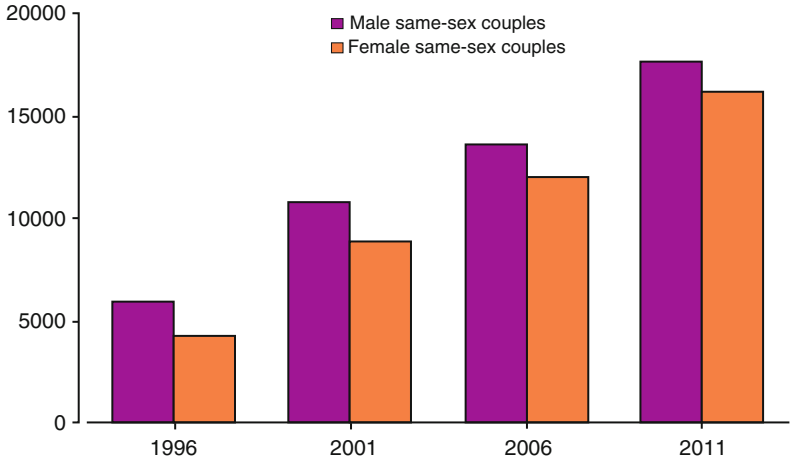

Fig. 11.1 Same-sex couples, Australia, 1996–2011 (ABS 2013)

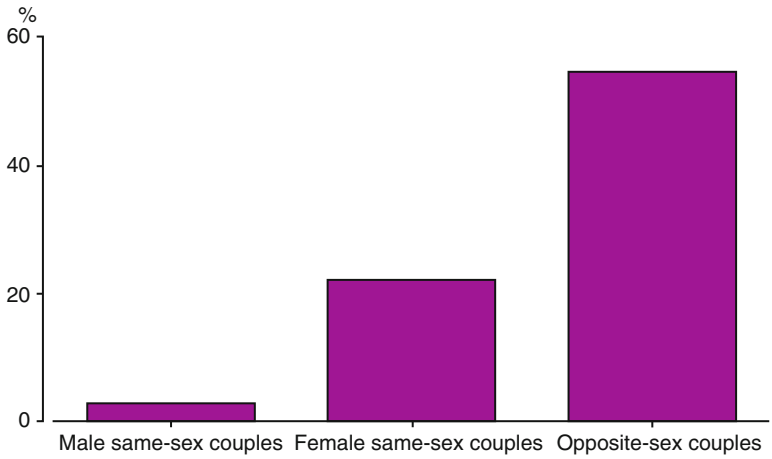

Fig. 11.2 Couples with resident children (includes all dependent and non-dependent children in the family), Australia, 2011 (ABS 2013)

cohabiting couples counted in the census had dependent or adult children living with them, which is an increase of 1 % on the figure obtained from the 2001 census (ABS 2002).

Surveys conducted in the Australian same-sex attracted communities can provide more detail about relationship and household circumstances than census data, which only documents cohabiting couple relationships. PL2 was conducted by Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria and The Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University in 2011.[4] Although the focus of PL2 is the health and well-being of same-sex attracted and transgender Australians, the survey asked participants a number of descriptive questions about their relationship, family and household circumstances. Answers to these questions indicate that although cohabiting couple relationships were popular, many respondents were not in couple relationships or couple-based households. Nearly 40 % of respondents currently lived with their partner only, 7 % with their partner and one or more children, and 23 % lived alone. Almost a quarter or 22 % lived with a housemate or friends. About 4 % of respondents reported living as a single parent with one or more children, while almost 17 % lived with one or more parents and/or relatives.

[4] PL2 participants were aged between 16 and 89 years (mean age of 38), with 48 % identifying as female, 44 % as male, 4 % as transgender and over 3 % preferring another term to describe their sex/gender. Just over 42 % identified as "gay", 30 % identified as "lesbian" and 12 % as "bisexual". Participants came from all Australian states and territories in numbers roughly proportionate to the population. They were well educated compared to the Australian population and also more likely to be employed.

Table 11.1 Living arrangements of PL2 respondents compared to living arrangements of census respondents, 2011 (PL2; ABS 2012b)

	PL2 2011 (16–89 years)	Census 2011 (15+ years)[a]
	%	%
Living with partner (with or without children)	47	59
Living alone	23	12
Housemate/group household member	22	5
Lone parent	4	6
Living with parents or relatives	17	17
Unrelated individual living in family household	2	1
Total	115[b]	100

[a]Persons in occupied private dwellings, excluding those who were not at home on census night
[b]Percentages do not add to 100 because the PL2 survey allowed for multiple responses

Table 11.1 presents these proportions alongside proportions in the same living arrangements amongst the general population aged 15 years or more, the latter derived from the 'relationship in household' variable in the 2011 census. The two data sources are not strictly comparable because the PL2 survey allowed for multiple responses, whereas the census data categories are mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, the figures suggest that same sex attracted Australians are more likely than others to live alone or in group households, while being less likely to live with a partner.

Although many respondents to PL2 were in monogamous couple relationships, it was also apparent that alternatives to monogamous cohabitation were popular. Of the 55 % of PL2 respondents who were currently in a relationship, 94 % were in a relationship with one other person, while the remaining 6 % were in a relationship with more than one person. About 62 % of the group reported that they were in a monogamous relationship, while a substantial minority (27 %) indicated they "have a clear and spoken agreement with their regular partner about casual sex with other sexual partners" (Leonard et al. 2012, p. 22). Furthermore, it was quite common for partners not to cohabit. Over a quarter or 28 % of the people in a relationship did not live with their partner.

There was also evidence that considerable numbers of respondents would turn to their friends for emotional support or care in the event of illness, although most made qualitative distinctions between the kinds of support provided by friends as opposed to partners and family of origin. In answer to a multiple response question, 73 % said they would turn to LGBT friends for emotional support, 67 % to straight friends, 56 % to a current partner, and 53 % to their family of origin. Indications were that family of origin was relied on by most in the event of illness (61 %), followed by a current partner (53 %). However, just over a third of the group indicated they would turn to their friends for care in the event of illness. These results suggest that same-sex attracted and transgender people associate dependent care more with ties of blood and intimate relationships; however, a sizeable minority relied on friends for this kind of support.

11.4 Parenting in the Australian Same-Sex Attracted Communities

Available data sources indicate relatively small numbers of children parented by same sex couples, with lesbian parents of resident children outnumbering gay male parents. The 2011 Census counted 6,120 children and young adults under 25 years living in mostly female same-sex couple families. Of these children, 78 % were under 15 years of age, 14 % were dependent students, and 8 % were non-dependent children aged 15–24 years (ABS 2012a). The Census cannot give an accurate picture of how many lesbians and gay men have children because it only counts resident children and does not collect information on people's individual sexual identity. Lesbians or gay men who live in sole parent households are not identified although they would be included in the total number of sole parents (ABS 2012a). Of almost a quarter or 22 % of PL2 respondents with children, about 11 % of gay male participants indicated that they were parents or step-parents, or had some other kind of parent-like relationship with children, as opposed to 33 % of lesbian participants.

Planned same-sex parented families may be beginning to outnumber same-sex families in which the children were born in the context of a previous heterosexual relationship. Power et al. (2010) found more participants had children in the context of same-sex relationships, including a number of gay male couples who had children through surrogacy arrangements overseas. Planned same-sex parented families also include those created through foster care and permanent care arrangements (Riggs 2007, 2011). The reverse was true of an earlier Australian survey conducted by McNair and colleagues (2002) in which the majority of (mostly lesbian) participants had children from prior heterosexual relationships. These data in themselves are insufficient to determine that planned same-sex families in Australia outnumber families in which the children were conceived in previous heterosexual relationships, given sampling and recruitment methods could explain this difference. However, reproductive technologies did become more accessible to lesbians and single Australian women and gay men in the intervening period between the surveys. Law reform in a number of Australian states may also have led to more lesbian couples feeling secure in their decision to become parents.

The Work, Love and Play survey found there were six major family forms in the Australian and New Zealander same-sex parenting communities. These include: a two-parent same-sex couple based family; families in which a lesbian couple were the primary parents but a known sperm donor lived separately and had involvement in the children's lives; families in which a lesbian or gay man was still co-parenting with an ex-heterosexual partner; separated same-sex families where women or men were co-parenting with their ex-same-sex partner; sole parent families and finally, multi-parent families, usually a gay male couple and a lesbian couple raising children from birth across two households (Power et al. 2010).

Dempsey (2010, 2012a, b) notes there are a range of possibilities for the relationship between known sperm donors, children and lesbian parents, which may give rise to two, three or four parent families. At one end of the spectrum, the sperm donor may

be anonymous or have very little or no involvement with the children. Conversely, and less frequently, sperm donors may be acknowledged as known fathers or full co-parents with substantial care-giving responsibilities and entitlements. In addition to the two parent lesbian couple family, some of the participants in Dempsey's research included single gay men and their single lesbian friends who lived near each other and were raising children together, lesbian couples co-parenting their children with gay male couples who lived nearby or interstate, and lesbian couples who co-parented children with regular non-resident parental support from the 'donor dad'. Although it appeared rare for multi-parent families to cohabit or for the men to have equal responsibilities to the women when it came to children's primary care, some assumed parental responsibilities, particularly as children grew beyond infanthood. These included decision-making about schooling and healthcare, overnight stays for some weeknights, weekends and school holidays and/or provision of financial support for children's education.

11.5 Desired Forms of Relationship Recognition

PL2 and NPL asked about desired forms of relationship recognition in the same-sex attracted communities, albeit in different ways. PL2 asked people in relationships whether or not they planned to formalize their relationship and how. By contrast, NPL asked all respondents, those currently in relationships and those not in relationships, a more comprehensive array of questions about the kinds of formal legal recognition for relationships they were interested in.

In PL2, 55 % of respondents were in a relationship. Nearly 18 % of this group reported that they had formalized their commitment (through marriage overseas or some other ceremony), and about a third or 34 % said that they had yet to formalise their relationship but either planned to or would like to. This indicates that nearly one half of the PL2 group who were in a relationship were not unduly concerned by relationship recognition issues.

All NPL respondents were asked 'If you are or were to become involved in a long-term committed same-sex relationship, in what way would you prefer Australian law to recognize your relationship?' Findings revealed respondents' preferences for a range of options for having their own relationships formally acknowledged. Marriage was the preferred choice for recognition, with 55 % of respondents stating they preferred or would prefer the option of marriage. The next largest group preferred having their relationship recognized and documented at a Federal registry other than marriage (28 %) and 15 % wanted de facto status rather than marriage or formal registration. Only 3 % of respondents said they would prefer to have no legal recognition at all of their own relationship.

NPL findings also showed that numbers of those who selected marriage as their personal choice were higher among younger respondents (see Fig. 11.3). Two-thirds of participants aged 18–19 selected marriage as their personal preference compared with one third of those 60 years of age or older. Similarly, proportions of respondents

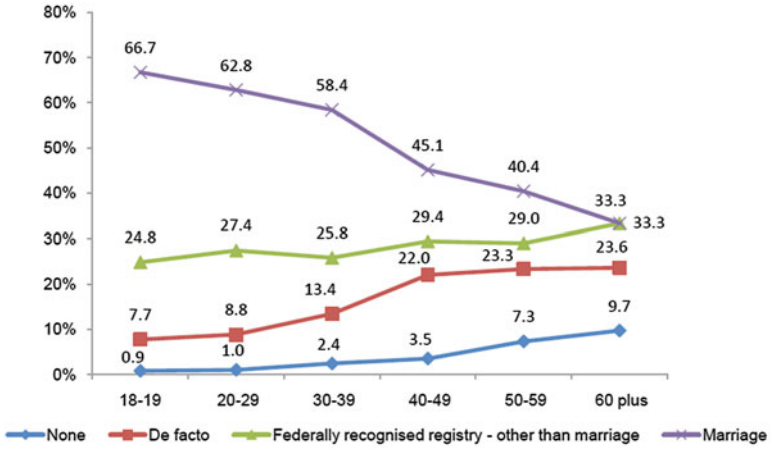

Fig. 11.3 Personal preference for relationship recognition by age (n = 1,877), NPL survey (Dane et al. 2010: 44)

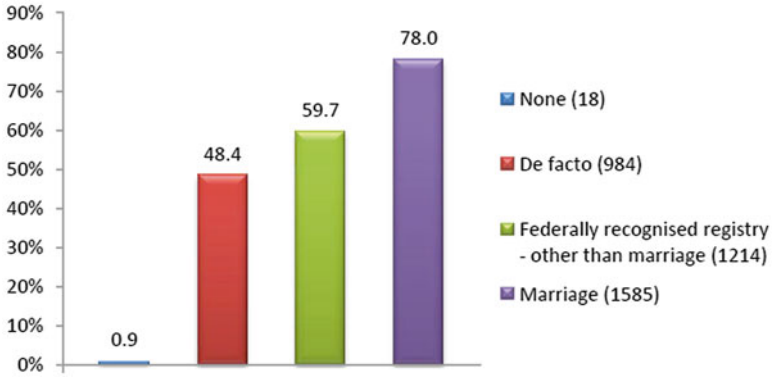

Fig. 11.4 Legal options respondents believed should be available to Australian same-sex couples (n = 2,032), NPL survey (Dane et al. 2010: 49)

supporting de facto or no legal recognition were higher among the older cohort. Preferences for a federally recognised registry (other than marriage) varied only slightly between age groups, relative to other options. The majority of both male and female participants in the three younger age groups (i.e., 18–19, 20–29, and 30–39) selected marriage as their personal choice. Although marriage was the most frequent response for both male and female participants in the older age groups (except the 60+ group), the proportions nominating this answer were less than 50 %.

Finally, respondents to NPL were asked about which forms of legal relationship recognition they would like to see remain in general and/or become available in this country for same-sex couples (see Fig. 11.4). Responses to this question (which allowed for multiple responses) followed a similar pattern to the personal

preference for own relationship recognition question in that marriage was the most popular form of recognition and no recognition was the least popular. In general, 78 % of respondents, regardless of their current relationship status, would like to see marriage become available, 60 % would like to see a federally recognised relationship other than marriage to be made available and 48 % would like to see de facto recognition remain. Many participants selected multiple options, indicating strong beliefs that there should be a choice and a range of options for relationship recognition.

11.6 Gay Marriage and Beyond

To summarise what these data can tell us about the relationship and family circumstances of same-sex attracted Australians, there is evidence for the popularity of cohabiting couple relationships and of dependency on intimate partners as well as family of origin members in circumstances where care is needed in the event of illness. However, large numbers of same-sex attracted Australians, in keeping with the 'families of choice' thesis discussed earlier, do not have cohabiting or monogamous partners, do not have or live with children, live alone or in shared household arrangements, and would turn to friends rather than a partner or family member in the event of illness.

The family lives of Australian same-sex attracted parents reveal overlap and divergence from heterorelational assumptions about family. Some children raised by lesbians and gay men will have been born into a heterosexual parented family in which parents later divorced and subsequently live in a same-sex parented step or blended family. Although many children raised from birth by lesbian or gay parents live in same-sex versions of a nuclear family, in which a cohabiting couple share parental responsibilities, there is a sizeable minority of lesbian-parented families in which children will also have contact with their known sperm donor and possibly his partner who may also have non-resident parental involvement.

Participants in PL2 and NPL varied with regard to the degree to which they believed relationship recognition important, and also indicated they valued diverse forms of relationship recognition beyond marriage rights. This is not surprising given the degree of relationship and family diversity already documented above. Single people stand to gain very little from recognition of couple relationships or gay marriage. Similarly, while marriage may be of great benefit to same-sex attracted parents in two parent families, other legal arrangements will continue to be needed to protect the rights of known sperm donors and/or their partners in families where the intention is that the men as well as the women have parenting rights in law (see Surtees 2011 for elaboration of this point in relation to New Zealander same-sex parents).

Living personal lives beyond heterosexuality may generate a range of assumptions about the meaning and conduct of family and intimate relationships, some of which closely resemble heterorelational family forms and some of which do not. At the same time, it appears that some of the 'life experiments' (Weeks et al. 2001) such as non-monogamy and rejection of institutionalized couple relationships, that were at

the forefront of Gay and Women's Liberation era critiques of the heterosexual nuclear family, have receded in the public discourse on same-sex relationships in Australia at this historical moment. Duggan (2002) coined the term 'homonormativity' to convey the assimilationist impulse she sees at work in the fight for marriage rights in the US, potentially at the expense of a distinctively 'queer' LGBT culture that embraces other kinds of relational values and arrangements. In this view, law reforms based on rights for married couples that privilege romantic love, monogamy and reproductive sexuality potentially threaten other kinds of relationships and relationship recognition. These include the mutual care and support for friends highlighted earlier through the literature on families of choice (Weston 1991; Weeks et al. 2001; Roseneil and Budgeon 2004), and arguably more relevant to the large numbers of people in Australia living beyond cohabiting coupledom.

In Australia, the campaign for gay marriage rights utilises the slogan 'Make Love Equal'. For many gay activists and members of the Australian same-sex attracted communities, only the right to marry on an equal footing with heterosexual couples will represent full equality for gay and lesbian family relationships. Although gay marriage would bring a number of legal and social benefits to same-sex attracted Australians, and the data discussed in this chapter suggest that many lesbian and gay couples would marry were this option open to them, this is clearly not the only form of relationship recognition that is relevant and appealing to Australian same-sex attracted adults. Notably, there are generational differences evident in support for marriage rights in that younger same-sex attracted adults appear more enthusiastic than their older counterparts about this form of relationship recognition. Ambivalence or outright distaste for marriage among older participants has also been noted in Australian qualitative research conducted with gay men aged between 19 and 87 (see Robinson 2012). These generational differences in sensibilities about relationship recognition warrant further exploration.

Richardson-Self (2012) has recently argued for a pluralisation strategy in Australia that would seek legal recognition for gay marriage but not at the expense of the other forms of relationship recognition that currently exist. Of note here is that some of the civil union schemes in existence in Australia do have the capacity for recognition of other kinds of relationships apart from cohabiting couple relationships in cases where those relationships are providing the kind of domestic support and care often associated with cohabiting relationships based on sexual intimacy and/or romantic love. For instance, The Relationships Act 2003 (Tas) has the capacity to recognize 'significant relationships' and 'caring relationships' whether or not these are relationships between friends, intimate partners or biologically related family members. As Richardson-Self points out, a pluralisation strategy cannot work without encouraging other familial and relational forms beyond marriage and cohabiting coupledom.

From the data available on how same-sex attracted and gender diverse Australians live their personal lives, it is difficult to know the degree to which those living beyond cohabiting coupledom actively choose to do so in defiance of heterorelationality. It is conceivable that many single adults would prefer to be in relationships, or that many child-free adults would have had or adopted children had their life circumstances

and opportunities been different. Nonetheless, it is clearly important to the lives of many same-sex attracted and gender diverse adults to maintain an Australian legal and policy context that recognises diverse family structures and practices beyond cohabiting couple and same-sex nuclear family relationships, and does not unduly privilege marriage as at the pinnacle of relationship recognition.

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