



APA Public Interest Government Relations Office

Marriage Equality and LGBT Health

There is no scientific basis for the assertion that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons are not fit to marry or to become parents of healthy and well-adjusted children (Herek, 2006; Kurdek, 2004; Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007).

Marriage bestows substantial psychosocial and health benefits to individuals, due to the moral, economic, and social support to married couples. The denial of marriage rights to same-sex couples, therefore, adversely affects the health and well-being of the individuals involved, as well as their families and friends (Herdt & Kertzner, 2006).

Recent empirical evidence illustrating the harmful psychological effect of policies restricting marriage rights for same-sex couples is discussed below.

Findings

- Researchers have consistently shown that gay men and lesbians exposed to the stigma of homosexuality have a higher risk of experiencing distress and adverse psychological outcomes (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007).
- According to a quantitative study with more than 1,500 lesbian, gay, and bisexual participants, living in a U.S. State where same-sex marriage is outlawed was *directly* related to chronic social stress and psychological problems, and *not* due to pre-existing mental health issues or other factors (Rostosky, Riggle, Horne, & Miller, 2009).
- Beyond the negative effect of marriage restrictions for gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals, new research evidence indicates that the families of origin and allies of sexual minorities may suffer from some of the same serious negative physical and mental health consequences experienced by their loved ones (Arm, Horne, and Levitt, 2009).
- Children raised by same-sex couples are equivalent in their psychological adjustment, cognitive abilities, and social functioning to children of heterosexual partners (Fulcher et al., 2006; Tasker, 2005).
- Being denied the right to marry reinforces the stigma associated with a minority sexual identity, and can particularly undermine the healthy development of a well-adjusted emotional and social attachment style among adolescents and young adults (Herdt & Boxer, 1993).
- Emerging longitudinal evidence suggests that same-sex couples in legal unions are more likely to remain in a committed relationship, i.e., a legalized relationship status may positively impact relationship longevity over time (Balsam et al., 2008; Kurdek, 2004).

Recommendations

Scientific research provides no evidence that would justify discrimination against same-sex partners and their families. In its 2004 resolution on sexual orientation and marriage, APA strongly supports policy and legal decisions that support the health and well-being of same-sex couples, their children, and their communities.

Specifically, APA recommends:

- Adopting initiatives that support legal access to civil marriage and all its associated rights, benefits and privileges for same-sex couples.
- Funding and evaluation of further scientific studies that can enlighten and be utilized in policy development concerning sexual orientation and marriage.
- Efforts to increase the dissemination of empirical research to inform the U.S. population and policy makers regarding marriage equality issues.

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AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Resolution on Marriage Equality for Same-Sex Couples

Adopted by the APA Council of Representatives on August 3-5, 2011

WHEREAS People benefit by sharing their lives with and receiving support from their family, friends, and other people who are important to them (Cohen & Wills, 1985);

WHEREAS A person's sexual orientation defines the universe of persons with whom he or she is likely to find the satisfying and fulfilling romantic and intimate relationships that, for many individuals, comprise an essential component of personal identity (D'Augelli, 2000; Gonsiorek & Weinrich, 1991; Herek, 2001, 2006; Peplau & Garnets, 2000);

WHEREAS Homosexuality is a normal expression of human sexual orientation that poses no inherent obstacle to leading a happy, healthy, and productive life, including the capacity to form healthy and mutually satisfying intimate relationships with another person of the same sex and to raise healthy and well-adjusted children, as documented by several professional organizations (American Psychiatric Association, 1974; American Psychological Association, 2004a, 2004b; Conger, 1975, National Association of Social Workers, 2003);

WHEREAS Many gay men and lesbians, like their heterosexual counterparts, desire to form stable, long-lasting, and committed intimate relationships and are successful in doing so (Gates, 2006; Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 2001; Herek, Norton, Allen, & Sims 2010; Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007; Simmons & O'Connell, 2003);

WHEREAS The consideration of policies to provide or deny same-sex couples full access to civil marriage and other legal forms of family formation in all branches of both the federal and state governments in the United States has frequently subjected the human rights of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people to public debate and resulted in wide variation among jurisdictions in access to these rights (Gates, Badgett, & Ho, 2008; Hatzenbuehler, McLaughlin, Keyes, & Hasin, 2010; Herek, 2006; National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2010; Rostosky, Riggle, & Horne 2009; Russell, 2000);

WHEREAS Emerging evidence suggests that statewide campaigns to deny same-sex couples legal access to civil marriage are a significant source of stress to the lesbian, gay, and bisexual residents of those states and may have negative effects on their psychological well-being (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2010; Rostosky et al., 2009);

WHEREAS The denial of civil marriage, including the creation of legal statuses such as civil unions and domestic partnerships, stigmatizes same-sex relationships, perpetuates the stigma historically attached to homosexuality, and reinforces prejudice against lesbian, gay, and bisexual people (Badgett, 2009; Herek, 2006; Hull, 2006);

WHEREAS Many gay, lesbian, and bisexual adults who are in a committed same-sex relationship have taken advantage of the right to marriage, either in their home jurisdictions or in other jurisdictions, even though many jurisdictions that do not permit marriage of same-sex couples do not recognize these valid marriages (Badgett,

2009; Gates et al., 2008; Herel, Marech, & Lelchuk, 2004; Marech, 2004);

WHEREAS Many other adults who are in a committed same-sex relationship wish to marry, but are prevented by state law from being married in their home jurisdiction or from receiving recognition of their marriages performed elsewhere (Herek et al., 2010);

WHEREAS Empirical research demonstrates that the psychological and social aspects of committed relationships between same-sex partners closely resemble those of heterosexual partnerships, and an emerging research literature suggests that legally recognized same-sex relationships may also be similar to heterosexual marriages in these psychological and social aspects (Balsam, Beauchaine, Rothblum, & Solomon, 2008; Kurdek, 2004, 2005; Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007);

WHEREAS Married individuals generally receive social, economic, health, and psychological benefits from their marital status, including numerous rights and benefits provided by private employers and by state and federal governments (Badgett, 2001; Brown, 2000; Chauncey 2005; Gove, Hughes, & Style, 1983; Gove, Style, & Hughes, 1990; Kiecolt-Glaser, 2001; Murray, 2000; Ross, Mirowsky, Goldsteen, 1990; Stack & Eshleman, 1998; Williams, 2003);

WHEREAS All people can be adversely affected by high levels of stress and the link between experiencing stress and manifesting symptoms of psychological or physical illness is well established in human beings and other species (Cohen, Doyle, & Skoner, 1999; Dohrenwend, 2000); Kiecolt-Glaser, McGuire, Robles, & Glaser, 2002);

WHEREAS Individuals with a homosexual or bisexual orientation are often subjected to minority stress, that is, additional stress beyond what is normally experienced by the heterosexual population, as a consequence of stigma, discrimination, and violence (Badgett, 2001; Berrill, 1992; Herek, 2009; Herek, Gillis, Cogan, 1999; Mays & Cochran, 2001; Meyer, 1995; 2003; Meyer, Schwartz, & Frost, 2008);

WHEREAS The experience of minority stress may create somewhat higher levels of illness or psychological distress in the sexual minority population, compared to the heterosexual population (Herek & Garnets, 2007; Mays & Cochran, 2001; Meyer, 1995; 2003);

WHEREAS Minority stress is common to all minority groups that experience stressors due to prejudice and discrimination based on their minority status (Meyer, 2003);

WHEREAS Lesbian, gay, and bisexuals with multiple minority statuses (e.g., people of color, persons with disabilities) often experience a dual minority stress that may negatively impact their mental health (Crawford, Allison, Zamboni, & Soto, 2002; Green, 1994; Harley, Nowak, Gassaway, & Savag, 2002).

WHEREAS Policies supportive of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people's human rights may have positive effects on their psychological well-being (Blake, Ledsky, Lehman, Goodenow, Sawyer, Hack, 2001; Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006; Hatzenbuehler, Keyes, Hasin, 2009);

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, That the American Psychological Association supports full marriage equality for same-sex couples;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the American Psychological Association reiterates its opposition to ballot measures, statutes, constitutional amendments, and other forms of discriminatory policy aimed at limiting lesbian, gay, and bisexual people's access to legal protections for their human rights, including such measures as those that deny same-sex couples the right to marry (Conger, 1975, APA 2007);

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the American Psychological Association calls on state governments to repeal all measures that deny same-sex couples the right to civil marriage and to enact laws to provide full marriage equality to same-sex couples;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the American Psychological Association calls on the federal government to extend full recognition to legally married same-sex couples, and to accord them all of the rights, benefits, and responsibilities that it provides to legally married different-sex couples;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the American Psychological Association encourages psychologists and other behavioral scientists to conduct quality research that extends our understanding of the lesbian, gay, and bisexual population, including the role of close relationships and family formation on the health and well-being of lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults and youths;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the American Psychological Association encourages psychologists and other professionals with appropriate knowledge to take the lead in developing interventions and in educating the public to reduce prejudice and discrimination and to help ameliorate the negative effects of stigma;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the American Psychological Association will work with government and private funding agencies to promote such research and interventions to improve the health and well-being of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people.

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Loving for All

By Mildred Loving*

Prepared for Delivery on June 12, 2007,
The 40th Anniversary of the *Loving vs. Virginia* Announcement

When my late husband, Richard, and I got married in Washington, DC in 1958, it wasn't to make a political statement or start a fight. We were in love, and we wanted to be married.

We didn't get married in Washington because we wanted to marry there. We did it there because the government wouldn't allow us to marry back home in Virginia where we grew up, where we met, where we fell in love, and where we wanted to be together and build our family. You see, I am a woman of color and Richard was white, and at that time people believed it was okay to keep us from marrying because of their ideas of who should marry whom.

When Richard and I came back to our home in Virginia, happily married, we had no intention of battling over the law. We made a commitment to each other in our love and lives, and now had the legal commitment, called marriage, to match. Isn't that what marriage is?

Not long after our wedding, we were awakened in the middle of the night in our own bedroom by deputy sheriffs and actually arrested for the "crime" of marrying the wrong kind of person. Our marriage certificate was hanging on the wall above the bed.

The state prosecuted Richard and me, and after we were found guilty, the judge declared: ""Almighty God created the races white, black, yellow, malay and red, and he placed them on separate continents. And but for the interference with his arrangement there would be no cause for such marriages. The fact that he separated the races shows that he did not intend for the races to mix." He sentenced us to a year in prison, but offered to suspend the sentence if we left our home in Virginia for 25 years exile.

We left, and got a lawyer. Richard and I had to fight, but still were not fighting for a cause. We were fighting for our love.

Though it turned out we had to fight, happily Richard and I didn't have to fight alone. Thanks to groups like the ACLU and the NAACP Legal Defense & Education Fund, and so many good people around the country willing to speak up, we took our case for the freedom to marry all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. And on June 12, 1967, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that, "The freedom to marry has long been recognized as one of the vital personal rights essential to the orderly pursuit of happiness by free men," a "basic civil right."

My generation was bitterly divided over something that should have been so clear and right. The majority believed that what the judge said, that it was God's plan to keep people apart, and that government should discriminate against people in love. But I have lived long enough now to see big changes. The older generation's fears and prejudices have given way, and today's young people realize that if someone loves someone they have a right to marry.

Surrounded as I am now by wonderful children and grandchildren, not a day goes by that I don't think of Richard and our love, our right to marry, and how much it meant to me to have that freedom to marry the person precious to me, even if others thought he was the "wrong kind of person" for me to marry. I believe all Americans, no matter their race, no matter their sex, no matter their sexual orientation, should have that same freedom to marry. Government has no business imposing some people's religious beliefs over others. Especially if it denies people's civil rights.

I am still not a political person, but I am proud that Richard's and my name is on a court case that can help reinforce the love, the commitment, the fairness, and the family that so many people, black or white, young or old, gay or straight seek in life. I support the freedom to marry for all. That's what *Loving*, and loving, are all about.

* Together with her husband, Richard Loving, Mildred Loving was a plaintiff in the historic Supreme Court *Loving v. Virginia*, decided 40 years ago June 12, striking down race restrictions on the freedom to marry and advancing racial justice and marriage equality in America.



Sound science, sound policy

Lesbian and Gay Parents

Some assert that same-sex couples should not have the right to adopt or become foster parents because lesbian and gay individuals would be unfit for parenting. Scientists, however, who for several decades have researched the behavior of same-sex couples and their children, have consistently found empirical evidence that contradict these assumptions.

Charlotte J. Patterson, a renowned social scientist, writes on this topic:

"The evidence suggests that relationships of lesbian and gay couples are just as supportive and that home environments provided by lesbian and gay parents are just as likely as those provided by heterosexual parents to enable psychosocial growth among family members."¹

Selected Scientific Findings

- There is no scientific basis to assert that lesbian and gay persons are not equally fit to marry or to become parents of healthy and well-adjusted children.²
- There is no empirical foundation for concluding that lesbian mothers or gay fathers should not become parents on the basis of their sexual orientation.³
- Being involved in a gay and lesbian relationship is unrelated to a person's ability to care for children.⁴
- Scientific surveys show that lesbian and heterosexual women share similar approaches to child rearing.⁵
- Numerous studies indicate that gay fathers are no different from heterosexual fathers in their ability to parent and to foster the healthy development of their children.⁶

About SPSSI

The Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI) is an international group of approximately 3000 psychologists, allied scientists, students, and others who share a common interest in research on the psychological aspects of important social issues. In various ways, the Society seeks to bring theory and practice into focus on human problems of the group, the community, and nations, as well as the increasingly important problems that have no national boundaries.

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Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Parented Families

A Literature Review prepared for The Australian Psychological Society

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Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Parented Families

Prepared for the Australian Psychological Society by Elizabeth Short, Damien W. Riggs, Amaryll Perlesz, Rhonda Brown & Graeme Kane

Overview

This review provides an overview and summary of the main bodies of research about parenting by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT)¹ people, as well as relevant information about the wider family studies field within which this research is situated, and background information on the Australian context. This review will assist psychologists to provide effective and appropriate services to people in such families. The review will also assist psychologists in contributing, where appropriate, to public debates in relation to legal and public policy reform of the type that has occurred extensively over the last five years in Australia (for example, about which family relationships should be recognised in law, and who should be able to access fertility services or adopt children), and which can be expected to continue into the future. Given the importance of psychologists promoting accurate understandings of scientific research, a primary focus of this review is the role that psychological research can play in such debates, and the contribution of psychologists to promoting well-being for children, parents, families and the general community.

As detailed in this review, the family studies literature indicates that it is family *processes* (such as the quality of parenting and relationships within the family) that contribute to determining children's well-being and 'outcomes', rather than family *structures*, per se, such as the number, gender, sexuality and co-habitation status of parents. The research indicates that parenting practices and children's outcomes in families parented by lesbian and gay parents are likely to be at least as favourable as those in families of heterosexual parents, despite the reality that considerable legal discrimination and inequity remain significant challenges for these families. The Australian Psychological Society (APS) is committed to contributing the knowledge of psychology in the public interest, and to fostering a social environment in which all children and their families experience support, recognition, and are valued, and in which discrimination and prejudice have no place.

Background

Over the past forty years, we have witnessed a significant diversification of family forms in Western societies, and this has been accompanied by a rapidly expanding literature on the diverse forms that families take.

Increased Family Diversity

Increasingly, we are witnessing the diversification and recognition of a wider range of family types than simply the heterosexual-parented nuclear family, including intentionally childless families, families of separated parents, single-parent families, step-families, blended-families, families of same-sex parents, and families in which the children are conceived with donated gametes and/or reproductive technologies (e.g., see de Vaus, 2004; McNair, 2004; Wise, 2003). One aspect of this diversification has occurred as a result of what is sometimes referred to as the "lesbian baby boom" or a "gayby boom", which has occurred and intensified since the 1970s. In addition to the many people who have children within a heterosexual relationship and who subsequently identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgendered, there are increasingly large numbers of children being born into a family with

¹ Issues of language play a significant role in scientific discussions on the lives of LGBT people and members of their families. The term 'LGBT' itself represents a highly contested category, and its claims to representativeness or inclusivity must be viewed carefully for its potential to mask significant differences amongst lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals. Whilst the term is used throughout this literature review, significant effort has been made to clarify gender- and sexuality-specific issues.

one or more same-sex attracted parents. Predominantly, these families are headed by female couples. One recent Australian estimate suggests that 50-70% of children being raised in lesbian-parented households are children who were born into that family (Millbank, 2003). In many lesbian-parented families, each member of the couple gives birth to one or more children. Such families are also constituted through blended and step-parents, and may involve multiple parents. Gross (2006) makes an important distinction between what she terms 'biparental' and 'multiparental' families, the former being constituted through one or two primary parents, and the latter involving multiple parental relationships. Such family forms may change over time, and will often develop both in response to the relationships between adult members, and as a result of the needs of adult and children members (as is the case with heterosexual-headed families).

Some lesbian women and gay men are also parenting children through fostering and adoption, although the latter is rare as there remain considerable restrictions on same-sex attracted people adopting children across most of Australia (see Duffey, 2007, for a summary of adoption laws across Australia). Some gay men have also more recently become parents through surrogacy arrangements and through co-parenting arrangements with single women or lesbian couples. As Ruth McNair summarised, "it seems anecdotally that more gay men are now looking to have a primary parenting role, however, there are still very few in this position in Australia" (2004, p. 55).

Much like the rest of the population, LGBT-parented families are diverse, and family members come from a variety of ethnic, racial, cultural, and class groups. The primary difference between LGBT-parented and heterosexual-parented families is that the former live in a legal, public policy, social, and discursive context in which discrimination and prejudice on the basis of the parents' gender or sexuality are a feature of day-to-day life.

Increasing Family Studies Research

Largely in response to the increased visibility of diverse family forms, family research has burgeoned. In part, this has been undertaken to explore and document increasing numbers of newly emerged family forms, and to investigate concerns that have been expressed by some about families other than those headed by co-habiting married heterosexual couples who are the biological parents of their children. Research has examined how this particular family type has repeatedly been promoted as the 'ideal', and has often been depicted as the only 'real' family type, in contrast to other family types that are constructed as less desirable and less able to meet the needs of children (e.g., see Biblarz & Stacey, 2006; Millbank, 2003; Rickard, 2002). In Australia since the late 1990's (as in some other countries, e.g., see Biblarz & Stacey, 2006), the notion that all children 'need' or 'do better' with both a mother and a father has repeatedly been used as justification for retaining or even extending discrimination in the area of family-related laws and policies, such as who should have access to fertility services and who should be able to get married (see Flood, 2003; Short, 2007a, 2007b). As noted by Jenni Millbank (2003), "Much of the recent overt objection to lesbian-mother families, for instance, has centred on father absence rather than lesbian sexual orientation *per se*" (p. 545) and "there remains a presumption in much legal and social policy that lesbian and gay parenting is suspect, second-rate or harmful to children" (p. 541-542).

In this context, a very large body of research has been conducted by psychologists and researchers in related disciplines comparing different family types on parenting practices and children's 'outcomes'. Substantial and justified critiques of comparative family research have highlighted how this research has tended to inadvertently: a) follow the agenda set by those prejudiced against LGBT parents and their families; b) restate or frame certain research questions as legitimate or reasonable concerns rather than prejudice; and c) down-play research findings of better levels of functioning by same-sex parents or the children of same-sex parents (e.g., see Clarke, 2000a; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 2004; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). However, one positive result of this comparative research is that the negative assumptions about families other than those of heterosexual married parents have been extensively empirically investigated, and researchers have been able to distinguish between family factors that do contribute to children's outcomes and well-being, and those that, in and of themselves, *do not*.

Legal, Public Policy, Social and Discursive Contexts of LGBT-Parented Families

Over the last ten years, there have been significant legislative changes in many parts of the world to recognise the family relationships of gay and lesbian people, and of their children. In many countries, including, for example, Belgium, Canada, The Netherlands, South Africa, Spain, and parts of the United States of America, people are now able to marry the partner of their choice, regardless of their gender. Many other countries, including, for example, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Israel, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, the Czech Republic and the United Kingdom, have amended laws so as to recognise same-sex couples and provide them with all or most of the benefits and privileges that different-sex couples are accorded. In Australia, all state and territory governments have amended legislation so as to recognise same-sex couples as de facto couples for all or many purposes, and there is capacity in many jurisdictions for registration of relationships.

In Western Australia, the Australian Capital Territory, the Northern Territory, and [2008 update] New South Wales, laws have been passed to allow a birth mother's *female* partner to be automatically recognised and registered as the legal parent of a child born to her partner in the same way that a woman's *male* partner can be, Australia-wide, whether or not he is the biological parent (e.g. after donor insemination). [2008 update: legislation on this issue is expected to come before the Tasmanian and Victorian parliaments in 2008]. Over the last ten years, in many countries and states, laws and policies that previously restricted access to fertility services to women with a male partner have been amended, so as to provide access to fertility services to women who need them, without consideration of their sexuality or the gender of their partner (or, whether or not they have a partner). Same-sex couples and single people can now be assessed as suitable foster parents across most of Australia.

The above changes have been called for by governments, legal reform bodies, human rights organisations, child welfare groups, academics, and people in same-sex parented families around the world, and such changes can be expected to increasingly be called for and enacted over the next ten years. It is increasingly recognised that family-related discrimination and non-recognition for many children, parents and extended family members leads to significant practical and financial disadvantage, and potential social difficulties and emotional distress that can in no way be justified by findings in the family studies literature (e.g. see Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2007a, 2007b; Victorian Law Reform Commission, 2007). Further, such discrimination fails to meet human rights obligations and principles such as those set out in the Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As an example of the momentum to remove discrimination, to recognise human rights, and to enhance the well-being of families and children, in 2007, two Australian legal inquiries recommended significant family-related law reform. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (2007a) identified a large number of "federal laws which discriminate against same-sex couples and their children" (p. 2). [2008 update: The recommended removal of discrimination in federal legislation has been and/or is in the process of being made]. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission recommended continuing "changes to federal, state and territory laws to recognise the relationship between a child and both parents in a same-sex couple", noting that this "would better protect the best interests of the child", and that the current discrimination "breaches human rights" (p. 2-3). Similarly, and with a more specific focus on Victorian state laws, the Victorian Law Reform Commission extensively documented the ways in which children of same-sex couples "lack many of the rights and protections afforded to all other children" (2007, p. 7). Having reviewed family-related laws, the negative effects of the laws, human rights obligations, and the family studies research, they recommended significant family-related legislative reform, including that "[l]egal recognition of non-birth mothers should be achieved in the same way as for non-biological parents of donor-conceived children born to heterosexual couples: by way of automatic statutory presumption" (p. 7).

However, significant discrimination remains in Australia. For example, marriage is restricted to opposite-sex couples. Under state law, in some parts of Australia, if a woman who gives birth has a female partner, she still receives no recognition as a parent, even though a male partner without a biological relationship to the child would be recognised and registered as the child's parent. Further, Victoria and South Australia still have legislation restricting or denying access to fertility services if women do not have a male partner, at the same time rendering artificial or alternative insemination in contexts other than fertility services a criminal offence (including insemination by a woman's partner). (For details on the above material see Millbank, 2003; 2006a; 2006b).

Psychology and the Public Interest

Over the last ten years, many expert and professional bodies have made public statements about research findings in relation to parenting in diverse families, and in particular parenting by lesbian women and gay men, with a focus on addressing misrepresentations, or what Biblarz and Stacey (2006) have referred to as "abuses of the social sciences literature" (p. 8), and have called for discriminatory family-related laws and policies to be amended. Such statements are particularly necessary in political climates where the rights of marginalised groups continue to be denied. For example, the main reason given (by law makers) for not allowing people to marry the person of their choice if that person is of the same gender has been the inaccurate assertion that this is in the best interest of children, and that children 'need' or 'do better' in a family with one parent of each gender. As the reviews, statements, and recommendations written by these bodies indicate, this assertion is not supported by the family studies research, and in fact, the promotion of this notion, and the laws and public policies that embody it, are clearly *counter* to the well-being of children. As noted by Professor Judith Stacey, of New York University: "Rarely is there as much consensus in any area of social science as in the case of gay parenting, which is why the American Academy of Pediatrics and all of the major professional organizations with expertise in child welfare have issued reports and resolutions in support of gay and lesbian parental rights" (cited in Cooper & Cates, 2006, p. 36).

The American Academy of Pediatrics (2002), for example, has reported that "no data have pointed to any risk to children as a result of growing up in a family with one or more gay parents", and assert that "Children who are born to or adopted by one member of a same-sex couple deserve the security of two legally recognized parents" (p. 339). The American Society for Reproductive Medicine has documented commonly expressed concerns about the well-being of children in families with gay and lesbian parents, including that: "children need a father"; children of gay fathers and lesbian mothers "will experience social isolation and gender-identity or sexual-orientation problems"; men are "less caring and nurturing than women"; and "children of single men or of gay-male couples are at greater risk for sexual abuse, paedophilia, or other mistreatment". They reported "the evidence to date, however, cannot reasonably be interpreted to support such fears" (2006, p. 1334). They noted that although there is less research on the children of gay men, "the literature that does exist, however, found no evidence that being raised by a homosexual father had any negative effect on children... Indeed, identified differences tended to favour gay fathers" (p. 1334). Some professional bodies have revoked the membership of people who are seen to promote discrimination against the families of lesbian and gay parents by making derogatory claims about gay and lesbian-led families, and falsely claiming that research supports such a position (e.g., see Cooper & Cates, 2006; Herek, 2006).

The American Psychological Association (APA) has long contributed its expertise to this area of public interest. For example, the APA in 1975 deplored "all public and private discrimination against gay men and lesbians" and urged "the repeal of all discriminatory legislation against lesbians and gay men" (Conger, 1975, cited in Paige, 2005, p. 498). In 2004 the APA resolved to "take a leadership role in opposing all discrimination in legal benefits, rights, and privileges against same-sex couples" and "in matters of adoption, child custody, and visitation, foster care, and reproductive health services". They resolved to "provide scientific and educational resources that inform public discussion and public policy development regarding sexual orientation and marriage" and "discrimination based on sexual orientation in matters of adoption, child custody and visitation, foster care, and reproductive health services" (Paige, pp. 498-500).

In Australia, despite important debates and inquiries that have occurred across the country since the mid 1990's, child-welfare related professional bodies have been comparatively slow to contribute their expertise. As Millbank (2003) noted in a review of the relevant family studies literature, whilst "the number of adults and the sex of the adults in a household has no significant bearing on children's well being – one adult or two, female or male, heterosexual or homosexual... the happiness of the *relationship between adults* in the household, and the openness of warmth and communication *between the adult/s and the children* do have a major impact on the child" (p. 571, original emphases). This knowledge, she suggests, "remains under-utilised in Australian social policy and legal forums" (p. 561). This is highly problematic given that, as she concluded, "it is no longer possible to formulate or defend discriminatory regimes – such as restricting access to fertility services or adoption – on the basis that it is in children's best interests to do so. This position is simply unsupportable in any empirical sense" (p. 571). Further, as summarised by O'Hanlon, Dibble, Hagan and Davids (2004), research indicates that "the public discriminatory attitudes and second-class legal status cause physical, emotional, and financial harm to lesbians, their families, and their children" (p. 227).

The current situation behoves psychologists, widely regarded as experts on the well-being of children and families, to contribute the expertise of their discipline in the public interest. However, as Kelly (2003) notes, many professionals, including mental health professionals, are not familiar or up-to-date with the relevant child development literature: "Too often, what they know is simplistic or old, and has not been updated by more reliable, differentiated knowledge" (p. 52). The remainder of this review therefore presents an updated account of research relevant to LGBT-parented families. The primary focus of this review is research on planned same-sex parented families rather than the families of same-sex parents with children born in prior heterosexual relationships, as this earlier work has been reviewed more extensively elsewhere (e.g., see APA, 1995; 2005; Patterson, 1995b; 2000; 2005; Tasker, 2000; 2005).

The Family Studies Research

Since the 1970s, it has become increasingly clear that it is family *processes* (such as the quality of parenting, the psychosocial well-being of parents, the quality of and satisfaction with relationships within the family, and the level of co-operation and harmony between parents) that contribute to determining children's well-being and 'outcomes', rather than family *structures*, per se, such as the number, gender, sexuality and co-habitation status of parents (e.g., see Chan, Brookes, Raboy and Patterson, 1998; Chan, Raboy & Patterson, 1998; Clarke-Stewart, Vandell, McCartney, Owen, & Booth, 2000; Featherstone, 2003; Flood, 2003; Golombok, 2000; Kelly, 2000, 2003; McIntosh, 2003; McNair, 2004; Millbank, 2003; Patterson, 1995a, 1998, 2001; Patterson, Fulcher & Wainright, 2002; Savin-Williams & Esterberg, 2000; Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999; Tasker, 2005; Vandewater & Lansford, 1998; Wainright, Russell & Patterson, 2004; Walker & McGraw, 2000; Wise, 2003). As Walker and McGraw (2000, p. 563) conclude in relation to the frequently made assertion that all children 'need' or will 'do better' with the involvement of a father (as well as a mother), "although there might be an ideological basis to this assumption, it lacks empirical support". Similarly, as Biblarz and Stacey (2006) summarise, "studies have not 'shown that the ideal is where a child is raised by their own married mother and father'. No evidence supports the view that the ideal gender mix of parents is a man and a woman" (p. 43).

Specifically, and regardless of family structure, children are likely to do well in a family environment characterised by an absence of conflict; high levels of co-operation, trust, ease and cohesion; high levels of warmth and care; and high levels of social connection and support. The main family factors related to poor outcomes for children are high levels of conflict, with compromised or poor mental health and well-being of primary care-givers also being a key factor (e.g., see Amato & Keith, 1991; Depner, 2002; Featherstone, 2003; Flood, 2003; Golombok, 2000; McIntosh, 2003; Kelly, 2000; 2003; McNair, 2004; Lipman, Boyle, Dooley & Offord, 2002; Sanson & Lewis, 2001; Spruijt & Iedema, 1998; Vandewater & Lansford, 1998; Wise, 2003).

Findings from studies that specifically compare children both from lesbian-parented and heterosexual-parented families, and children from one and two parent families, provide further weight to the conclusion that it is process rather than structure that is key to positive outcomes. Drawing on a sample of 80 families from the records of The Sperm Bank of California, and using standardised instruments (completed by parents, children and teachers) to compare children who had been conceived with donated sperm in four types of families (single parent and two-parent families, lesbian-parented and heterosexual-parented families), Chan, Raboy and Patterson (1998) found that neither the number nor gender-mix of parents influenced children's psychological adjustment. However, for all family types, increased levels of parenting stress, conflict and relationship dissatisfaction were associated with increased behaviour problems.

In the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (a study based on a representative sample of 1200 ethnically diverse American adolescents and their families), researchers compared adolescents from carefully matched families headed by female couples and those headed by heterosexual couples and found no differences on all measures of adjustment and well-being, including self-esteem, anxiety, grade averages, reported substance abuse, delinquency, and peer victimisation. Researchers did find a difference in how connected the children felt to people at school, whereby children with same-sex parents showed a greater connection. However, across family types, the *quality* of relationships was related to adolescents' well-being and outcomes (Wainright et al., 2004; Wainright & Patterson, 2006).

In a study comparing children from 39 lesbian-parented families (including single and couple-parent families, and both step-parent and planned lesbian-parent families), 60 families with a heterosexual single mother, and 74 families with coupled heterosexual parents, using standardised interviews and questionnaires with parents, children and teachers, researchers found that although sexual orientation or family structure were not related to level of children's psychological adjustment, children of mothers who showed greater warmth and lower levels of parenting stress exhibited fewer emotional and behavioural problems (Golombok et al., 2003). Researchers have also found that higher levels of equality in caring for children between lesbian parents, and higher levels of satisfaction with the distribution of caring for children, is associated with higher scores on measures of children's psychological adjustment (Chan, Brooks et al., 1998; Patterson, 1995a).

However, it is important to note that the ways in which family life is conducted is not *unrelated* to the sexuality and gender of the parents, nor are the efforts that parents put into having their children. As following sections of this review indicate, it is well documented that same-sex parents (with most research being about female couples), and particularly those couples who have planned to have a child together, organise family life and caring for children far more equitably than heterosexual partners usually do, and that people (including same-sex couples and same-sex attracted individuals) who have undertaken assisted fertility form a highly motivated group of potential parents. Hence, it is not surprising, and is in keeping with the conclusion that it is family processes rather than family structures *per se* that are important to children's outcomes and well-being, that research increasingly indicates some positive benefits for children conceived via surrogacy or assisted reproduction, and for those in families with same-sex parents. For example, in the large European Longitudinal Family Study, which compared parenting and children's outcomes in families in which the children had been conventionally conceived, conceived with donated sperm, conceived with IVF but not donated gametes, and adopted in infancy, several advantages have been found in terms of quality of parenting, family relationships, and behavioural outcomes for the children who have been conceived other than by conventional conception, and particularly, for those who have been conceived with donated gametes (e.g., see Golombok, Tasker & Murray, 1997; Golombok, MacCallum, Goodman & Rutter, 2002; see also reviews by Brewaeys, 2001; McNair, 2004).

LGBT Parenting and Families Literature

Three main areas of research and critical inquiry have been conducted in relation to parenting by LGBT people: 1) comparative research on parenting and children's outcomes across family types; 2) studies that map, explore and document aspects of family life, with some consideration given to the legislative, policy and social context; and 3) discursive and theoretical critiques around social discourses and assumptions about 'the family' and parenting by non-heterosexual people. As this literature review demonstrates, the area of comparative research is both the largest and the one with clearest implications for public policy and legal reform. However, empirical outcomes, critical theory building, and exploratory findings arising from these broad areas of LGBT family research will of course overlap, and thus all contribute to legal reform. All three areas of research have been undertaken by sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, health and family researchers, as well as by psychologists. Broadly in keeping with the distribution of parents within the category 'LGBT parents', the research literature on lesbian-parented families is now fairly large, with research on gay-parented families being significantly smaller (with the majority being about gay men who parent post heterosexual relationship), and research on the families of transgender and bisexual parents is relatively scant.

Comparative Research

Comparative research has compared lesbian mothers with heterosexual mothers (both single and partnered) and fathers, and, to a lesser extent, with known population norms. A small amount of research has compared gay fathers with heterosexual ones, and with lesbian parents. In the last ten years a number of large, well controlled studies of parenting in diverse family forms (including same-sex parented families) have been undertaken, shedding significant light on how gender, sexuality, number of parents, whether or not parents are biologically related to children, and whether or not assisted fertility methods were used relate to parenting practices and children's outcomes. These findings are summarised in the following main section.

Researchers conducting comparative research have used a wide variety of techniques, including observations, standardised interviews, a wide range of standardised social and psychiatric testing materials and procedures, reports by children, parents and teachers, ratings by psychiatrists, and time analysis diaries. Both small and large-scale studies, as well as population, prospective, cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, and meta-analyses have been undertaken. Although some, and particularly earlier studies, relied on volunteer and convenience samples (like much of the family studies research, and particularly that on stigmatised groups), increasingly researchers have carefully matched groups, used a comparison group from known populations (such as users of the same fertility clinic), or drawn the sample from a representative or population sample. Judith Stacey said the following of her 2001 review of the literature (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001) about parenting by same-sex parents:

because many lesbians and gay men remain in the closet, we cannot know if the participants in the studies are representative of all gay people. However, the studies we reviewed are just as reliable and respected as studies in most other areas of child development and psychology. They generally compare well-matched groups of children with heterosexual and lesbian or gay parents. The studies we discussed have been published in rigorously peer-reviewed and highly selective journals, whose standards represent expert consensus on generally accepted social scientific standards for research on child development. Those journals include *Child Development and Developmental Psychology*, the two flagship journals in the field of child development. The first is published by the 5,000-member academic Society for Research in Child Development, and the second is published by the American Psychological Association. (cited in Cooper & Cates, 2006, p. 35)

In their updated review, Biblarz and Stacey (2006) noted that significant intensification and advancement of the comparative research has occurred since 2001, including increased sample sizes, more studies with representational samples, and an increase in the age, into adolescence, of children in longitudinal studies of planned lesbian-parented families in the US, the UK and Europe.

Mapping and Exploratory Studies

Alongside, and partly on the basis of the body of comparative research, researchers in many countries have explored and documented a large array of aspects of life in lesbian-parented families, including: decisions regarding having a child, and patterns of and reasons for choosing known and unknown donors (e.g., Almack, 2006; Short, 2007b; Touroni & Coyle, 2002); descriptions of family life in the legal and policy context (e.g., Benkov, 1994; 1998; Lewin, 1993; 1998; Nelson, 1996); ways of forming families in varying contexts, including the impact of laws and policies on family formation (e.g., Griffin, 1998; Ryan-Flood, 2005; Short, 2007b); child-rearing goals (e.g., Bos, van Balen & van den Boom, 2004); negotiating and working with gendered understandings and discourses of family life (e.g., Dalton & Bielby, 2000; Donovan, 2000; Dunne, 2000; Hequembourg, 2004; Hequembourg & Farrell, 1999); the significance of surnames and language (e.g., Almack, 2005; Brown & Perlesz, 2007; Gabb, 2005); the experience of finding known donors and relationships with them (e.g., Dempsey, 2005; Ripper, 2007; Short, 2006; Touroni & Coyle, 2002); ways of 'doing family' and communicating family roles and relationships both privately and publicly (e.g., Perlesz et al., 2006a; 2006b); social support (e.g., Bos et al., 2004); how lesbian women speak to their children about conception and families (e.g., Dundas & Kaufman, 2000; Mitchell, 1998); family experiences of adults who grew up with lesbian mothers and/or gay fathers (e.g., Tasker & Golombok, 1997; Barrett & Tasker, 2001); ways that people who grew up with lesbian and/or gay families speak about their families (e.g., Goldberg, 2007); children's relationships with extended family members (e.g., Patterson, Hurt & Mason, 1998); family members' interactions with health care providers and schools (e.g., Perlesz et al., 2006b; Ray & Gregory, 2001); experiences of health care during pregnancy and birth (e.g., Ross, Steele & Epstein, 2006); strengths and sources of pride (e.g., McNair, Dempsey, Wise & Perlesz, 2002; Perlesz & McNair, 2004; Short, 2007b); social support (e.g., Speziale & Gopalakrishna, 2004); the benefits for children of laws which allow a child's parents to be legally recognised as parents, regardless of gender (e.g., Short, 2007a); aspects of the organisation and experience of family life such as the roles and experiences of biological and non-biological parents in caring for children (e.g., Ciano-Boyce & Shelley-Sireci, 2002; Dunne, 1998; 2000; McCandish, 1987; Sullivan, 1996; van Dam, 2004); and lesbian-parented step-families (e.g., Elera & Fredriksen, 1999; Hall & Kitson, 2000; Wright, 1990).

In relation to gay male parents or intending parents, researchers have explored interconnected aspects such as: the desire and decision to parent (e.g., Beers, 1996; Sbordone, 1993); parenting arrangements and satisfaction (e.g., McPherson, 1993); social support and parenting in families following adoption (e.g., Erich, Leung, Kindle & Carter, 2005); gay men negotiating the legal system as parents (e.g., Violi, 2004); relationships with women who give birth following insemination with the man's sperm (e.g., Dempsey, 2005; van Reyk, 2004); experiences of assessment for adoption, fostering (e.g., Hicks, 1996) and surrogacy (e.g., Lev, 2006); parenting arrangements (e.g., Beers, 1996); the experiences of the children of gay men (e.g., Barrett & Tasker, 2001; Mallon 2004); fatherhood practices (e.g., Schacher, Auerbach & Silverstein, 2005; Silverstein, Auerbach & Levant 2002); gay men parenting post-heterosexual divorce (Benson, Silverstein & Auerbach, 2005; Hicks, 2004); gay men negotiating step-parenting (Crosbie-Burnett & Helmbrecht, 1993; Current-Juretschko, 2005); the specific experiences of gay men who parent post heterosexual divorce (e.g., Violi, 2004); and summaries of these research areas (Barrett & Tasker, 2002).

Whilst research on parenting by bisexual and transsexual people is scant, it nonetheless is growing, and highlights the particular needs of such parents and their families (e.g., Arden, 1996; Morris, Balsam & Rothblum, 2002; Orel & Fruhauf, 2006). Existing research has explored and documented experiences of transitioning from one gender to another, and how this affects family relationships (e.g., Hines, 2006; Israel, 2005), and a small amount of research has been conducted on the experiences of children with transgendered parents (Green, 1978; 1998). Hines (2006), for example, suggests that research on parenting by transgender people must consider not only the relationships between parents and children, but also the shifting dynamics *within* the parenting relationship if it involves two or more parents, particularly when transitioning occurs within the family unit. As research on bisexual people more broadly has highlighted, there is a common tendency to assume non-monogamy to be a feature of the lives of bisexual people. Not only is this a problematic assumption, but it has been negatively

applied to (most often legal) discussions about bisexual parents (Tye, 2003). It will be important that future research continues to explore the experiences of bisexual parents. Such research needs to challenge the often-made assumption that bisexual parents are non-monogamous; nonetheless, it should recognise that bisexual parents, like all parents, may not identify as monogamous (see Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2006, for a discussion of this in relation to parenting and non-monogamy).

There have also been numerous collections of interviews or autobiographical and family narratives written by same-sex parents and the children of lesbian and gay parents (e.g., Borthwick & Bloch, 1993; Drucker, 1998; Pollack & Vaughan, 1987; Rosier & Hauschild, 1999; Saffron, 1996; Riggs, 2007a; Wakeling & Bradstock, 1995; Wells, 2000).

Arising directly or indirectly in many of these studies is evidence of hardships, discrimination and difficulties faced, particularly in terms of public policy and laws, and the lack of recognition of family relationships. Also evident in these studies, as in the comparative research, are resources used and strengths developed and demonstrated in the face of these difficulties, particularly in terms of quality of family relationships, commitment to family and parenting, and richness of social connections. Hence, researchers have increasingly turned attention to the issue of resilience and thriving, and explored how and why it is that people in these families often function comparatively highly, despite very significant discrimination (e.g., see Connolly, 2005; Hequembourg, 2004; Hequembourg & Farrell, 1999; Johnson & O'Connor; Kershaw, 2000; Lambert, 2005; McNair, 2004; Perlesz & McNair, 2004; Short, 2007b).

Discursive and Theoretical Research

Alongside and intertwined with this comparative research and explorations of lived experience of life in families parented by non-heterosexual parents is a body of critical and discursive research by psychologists and others which locates and critiques the discourses and assumptions that people, including parents, researchers, psychologists, and others, use when discussing families, and in particular, gay and lesbian-parented families.

In her extensive work on lesbian and gay parenting, Clarke elaborates some of the ways in which lesbian and gay parents are expected to conform to a model of parenting that privileges heterosexual families. In particular Clarke (e.g., 2000b, 2000c, 2002) demonstrates how the notion of sameness (i.e., that lesbian and gay parents are 'just like' heterosexual parents) works to promote parenting by heterosexual people as the 'gold standard'. This theme of sameness thus discounts the potential differences that parenting by lesbian and gay people may engender, and the implications of this for challenging heterosexism within parenting practices. Similarly, Clarke and Kitzinger (2004) suggest that this denial of difference encourages lesbian and gay parents to adopt either a defensive or apologetic framework when talking about their parenting practices. They suggest that this promotes a 'second best approach', whereby lesbian and gay parents have to prove their ability to parent 'as well as' heterosexual parents. Clarke (2001) also suggests that this encourages lesbian women and gay men to minimise their political and personal opinions, and instead to accept parenting practices that they themselves may have found oppressive.

Malone and Cleary (2002) suggest that research on parenting by lesbian and gay people often compartmentalises their experiences in order to dispel myths about homosexuality. Yet, as they suggest, this may only serve to reinforce the priority that is given to heterosexual parents, by encouraging lesbian and gay parents to deny the aspects of their sexuality or relationships that may shape their parenting practices. Malone and Cleary also suggest that the dismissal of sexuality in research on parenting by lesbian and gay parents works to promote a model of the 'perfect lesbian or gay parent', which discourages lesbian and gay parents from speaking out about the negative experiences of parenting they may have.

This 'desexualising' of lesbian and gay parents is also reported in research on lesbian and gay adoption and fostering. Hicks (1996; 2000) reports in his research on foster care assessment in the UK that lesbian women and gay men are encouraged to downplay their political views, and to outline the ways in which they can provide care that is 'just as good' as that provided by heterosexual foster parents. This results in a mentality whereby lesbian women and gay men are considered to be 'substitutes' for 'real families'. This point is explored in research by Riggs (2004; 2005; 2006a; 2007b), which suggests that the foster care system in Australia is structured around a set of assumptions about what constitutes a 'real family', namely, the white, middle-class, heterosexual-parented family. Riggs (e.g., 2005) suggests that psychological knowledge is often used within the foster system to reinforce parenting by heterosexual people as the norm, and thus to implicitly position lesbian and gay foster carers as deviant.

As a whole, recent psychological research on parenting by LGBT people has made a move away from explaining or proving the suitability of LGBT people as parents, and instead has sought to explore why such questions have been asked in the first place. Whilst such research is at times critical of psychological knowledge, it also recognises the utility of working within a psychological framework in order to promote social justice. In particular, this research suggests that the discipline of psychology needs to continue to respond to the experiences of LGBT people, and to do so by valuing these experiences, rather than imposing a set of beliefs based upon the experiences of heterosexual parents. Finally, this research has demonstrated the need for further research on parenting by LGBT people to examine parenting not only in regards to sexual identity, but also to explore the intersections of other identities such as those related to race, gender, class and ethnicity (Riggs, 2006b). Otherwise, it is suggested, research on LGBT parenting may run the risk of promoting a focus primarily on the experiences of white middle-class LGBT parents (Riggs, 2007c).

Specific Findings From Research on Parenting by LGBT People

As mentioned earlier, the primary focus of this review is research on planned same-sex families rather than the families of same-sex parents who had their children in prior heterosexual relationships. Earlier researchers and reviewers frequently orientated to and used the language of "no detriment" or "not disadvantaged" when reporting findings of no differences (and even when reporting indications of advantages or higher functioning by same-sex parents and their children). In recent years, seemingly partly on the basis of advances in the robustness of the body of research, reviewers have been more confident to state that not only has research indicated that parenting by same-sex parents is *not* poorer, but that it appears, in some aspects at least, likely to be somewhat better. Similarly, research has not only indicated that the outcomes of children of same-sex parents are *not* poorer, but that outcomes would seem to be likely to be at least as favourable (e.g., see Biblarz & Stacey, 2006; Coontz, 1997; Johnson & O'Connor, 2002; Kershaw, 2000; McNair, 2004; Millbank, 2003; Patterson, 2000; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001; Tasker, 2005; VLRC, 2007). Reviewers have also increasingly taken note of the links between positive parenting practices and children's experiences and outcomes. For example, summary statements from recent reviews include:

[S]ome new research suggests that lesbian and gay families are in some respects better for children than heterosexual families... Research on the division of parenting and household labour among lesbian co-parents and gay-co-parents has shown a distinct pattern of equality and sharing compared to heterosexual parents, with corresponding positive well-being for the partner's relationship with each other, and the child's adjustment. (Millbank, 2003, pp. 546-547)

What differences have emerged, however, suggest that gay and lesbian parents tend to be more responsive to their children, more child oriented, and more egalitarian in their sharing of the workload, characteristics associated with a more positive child outcome. (Johnson & O'Connor, 2002, p. 67)

Significant, reliable social scientific evidence indicates that lesbian and gay parents are at least as fit, effective, and successful as heterosexual parents. The research also shows that children of same-sex couples are as emotionally healthy and socially adjusted and at least as educationally and socially successful as children raised by heterosexual parents. No credible social scientific evidence supports a claim to the contrary. (Stacey, in Cooper & Cates, 2006, p. 34)

Some reviewers have emphasised that these positive findings exist despite significant discrimination remaining (e.g., Foster, 2005; McNair, 2004; Millbank, 2003; Parks, 1998; Patterson, 2000). Typical comments include:

[C]entral results of existing research on lesbian and gay couples and families with children are exceptionally clear. Beyond their witness to the sheer existence of lesbian and gay family lives, the results of existing studies, taken together, also yield a picture of families thriving, even in the midst of discrimination and oppression. (Patterson, 2000, p. 1064)

Lesbian couples are confronted by an environment that disavows their unions, challenges their right and fitness to parent, and denies them basic civil and legal protections to individual and family security. Yet, they have succeeded in creating nurturing, egalitarian families in which they are bearing and raising well-functioning, well-adjusted, and socially tolerant children. (Parks, 1998, p. 376)

Division of Care in Different Types of Parenting Couples

A predominantly equitable pattern of caring for children in planned lesbian-parented families, with the non-birth mother's level of involvement in parenting being higher than fathers generally undertake, and being on a par with that of the birth mother, is well-documented (e.g., see Baetens & Brewaeys, 2001; Brewaeys, Ponjaert, Van Hall, & Golombok, 1997; Chan, Brooks et al., 1998; Ciano-Boyce & Shelley-Sires, 2002; Dunne, 1998; 2000; Gartrell et al., 1999, 2000, 2005, 2006; McCandish, 1987; McNair, 2004; Millbank, 2003; Patterson & Chan, 1999; Short, 2007b; Steckel, 1987; Sullivan, 1996; Tasker & Golombok, 1998; Vanfraussen, Ponjaert-Kristoffersen & Brewaeys, 2003).

The research that has investigated this issue with gay male parenting couples has also found that they undertake parenting more equitably than heterosexual partners, although not as equitably as lesbian couples do (Johnson & O'Connor, 2002; McPherson, 1993; Patterson & Chan, 1999). Some research has found lesbian and gay couples both to be more egalitarian in their division of tasks than heterosexual couples usually are, with the level of equality actually achieved seeming to be greater between and possibly of more importance to lesbian couples than it is to gay couples (see Herek, 2006; Savin-Williams & Esterberg, 2000).

The difference between these patterns of caring for children and the predominant pattern of caring for children in families headed by heterosexual couples (in which the vast majority of the practical care of children is undertaken by the mother) is striking. For example, in his recent review, Flood (2003) reported that in heterosexual parenting couples, women continue to bear "the overwhelming responsibility" for child care and domestic work, and that men "share physical care of children equally in only 1-2 per cent of families, and are highly involved in day-to-day care in only 5-10 per cent of families" (p. viii; see also Craig, 2003; Golombok, 2000; Howard, 2003). For heterosexual parents who have separated, mothers also still undertake the vast majority of parenting, with more than one third of Australian separated fathers having no face-to-face contact with the children (Flood, 2003, p. viii).

Tasker & Golombok (1998) explored the role of the parents in three types of two-parent families (n=99) with children whose average age was 6 years: those parented by lesbian couples in which the children had been conceived via donor insemination, those parented by heterosexual couples in which the children had been conceived via donor insemination, and those parented by heterosexual couples in which the children had been conceived conventionally. In contrast to the reports of the mothers in both types of heterosexual-parented families, and most particularly with those in which the children had been conventionally conceived, the vast majority of the birth mothers in the female couples

reported that their partner was at least as involved in parenting as they were (Tasker & Golombok, 1998). Similarly, a study in Belgium of these three types of families (n=98), with children aged 4-8 years, also found that the non-birth mothers were more heavily involved than both types of fathers, and particularly, more so than fathers who were biologically related to their children (Brewaeys et al., 1997). Even in a study in which the participants had all conceived their children via donor insemination, (which hence included only couples who had undertaken significant planning to have their children), the female couples shared the task of parenting far more equally than did the heterosexual couples, and the non-birth lesbian mothers were more involved in caring for their children than were the fathers in the heterosexual couples (Chan, Brooks et al., 1998).

As well as being higher than male partners in heterosexual-parented families, the level of involvement of non-birth lesbian mothers in planned two-mother families in the care of their children has been found to be generally of the same level of the biological mother (e.g., see; Chan, Brooks et al., 1998; Dunne, 2000; McNair, 2004; McCandish, 1987; Millbank, 2003; Short, 2007b; Tasker & Golombok, 1998; Vanfraussen et al., 2003). For example, Vanfraussen, and colleagues found that "unlike fathers in heterosexual families, the lesbian social mother is as much involved in child activities as is the biological mother" (p. 78). In research in the US with 360 mothers from 180 two-mother families, which included step-families as well as two-mother families into which the children were born, it was found that in half of each family type, the mothers had egalitarian roles in caring for the children. In the other half, in which one mother undertook a larger proportion of the care, this was not related to being the birth mother rather than the non-birth or the step-mother (van Dam, 2004). Golombok et al (2003) also found no significant differences between lesbian co-mothers/non-birth mothers (i.e those who had planned the baby with their partner, and parented since the child's birth) and lesbian step-mothers in terms of their level of emotional involvement with their children. In some contrast, Australian researchers found that the step-mothers in lesbian-led families in their sample (n=21) were less likely than the co-mothers/non-birth mothers in planned two-mother families to share an equal role in parenting with the lesbian birth mother (Brown & Perlesz, 2007; Perlesz et al., 2006b).

Related to the way in which responsibility for parenting tends to be allocated differently in same-sex and different-sex couples, research indicates that in lesbian-parented families (and especially in families into which the children were born rather than step-families), the role of income earner is undertaken much more equally than it generally is by heterosexual couples. The predominant pattern found in recent research has been that both partners undertake less than full time paid work, or alternate the role of main income earner, so that both hands-on parenting and income-earning is undertaken more equitably (e.g., see Dunne, 2000; Gartrell, et al, 2005; 2006; Millbank, 2003; Patterson, Sutfin & Fulcher, 2004; Short, 2007b; Sullivan, 1996).

Parenting Practices and Quality

Given what we know about which parents usually *do* the day-to-day parenting in various couples, as well as the fact that parents in planned same-sex parented families often have to overcome many obstacles in order to become parents, it is perhaps not surprising that researchers who have compared lesbian mothers with heterosexual mothers and/or fathers, or with population norms, or gay with heterosexual fathers, have found either that there is no difference, or that the quantity or the quality of the parenting practices, attitudes, knowledge or skills being examined is higher for lesbian or gay parents (e.g., Brewaeys, 2001; Flaks, Ficher, Masterpasqua & Joseph, 1995; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001, and see below). Recent summary statements by reviewers on quality of parenting include the following:

Results of some studies suggest that lesbian mothers' and gay fathers' parenting skills may be superior to those of matched heterosexual parents. (APA, Policy Statement on Sexual Orientation, 2004)

[G]ay and lesbian parents show strengths in the security of attachment to their children; in their parenting styles, including how they discipline their children; in the quality of their own couple relationships; and in how they share the work associated with raising children and running a household. (Johnson & O'Connor, 2002, p. 171)

Parenting Practices: Lesbian Couples Compared to Heterosexual Couples

The most commonly found difference in this literature that is related to the overall quality of parenting is that between mothers (including heterosexual and lesbian, single and partnered) and heterosexual fathers in two-parent families (e.g., see Baetens & Brewaeys, 2001; Biblarz & Stacey, 2006; Brewaeys et al., 1997; Millbank, 2003; Patterson & Chan, 1999; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001; Vanfraussen et al., 2003). As reported by Stacey & Biblarz, "in these studies of matched lesbian and heterosexual couples, women in every category – heterosexual birth mother, lesbian birth mother, non-birth lesbian social mother – all score about the same as one another but score significantly higher than the men on measures having to do with the care of children" (p.175).

For example, Brewaeys and colleagues (1997) reported that in their study comparing 3 types of two-parent families with children 4-8 years, – heterosexual couples whose children were conventionally conceived, heterosexual couples whose children were conceived by donor insemination, and lesbian couples whose children were conceived by donor insemination (n=98) – "the quality of the interaction between the social mother and the child in lesbian families was superior to that between the father and the child in both groups of heterosexual families" (p. 1349)². Flaks and colleagues (1995) used the Briklin Parent Awareness Skills survey to compare 30 lesbian and heterosexual parenting couples on parenting awareness skills. They reported that the "lesbian couples had more parenting awareness skills than heterosexual parents... lesbian couples were more aware of the skills needed for effective parenting, better able to recognise problems in parenting and envisage solutions to them" (pp. 111-112), with the difference related to gender: "Both heterosexual and lesbian mothers demonstrated an awareness of parenting skills that was superior to that of heterosexual fathers" (p. 112). Vanfraussen and colleagues (2003) found that "unlike in lesbian families, where children showed no preference for either of their parents, the majority of the children in heterosexual families preferred discussing emotional things with their mother according to both parents and children" (p. 88).

Compared with heterosexual fathers (as well as with heterosexual mothers) lesbian parents have also been found to be less likely to use or to endorse the use of physical punishment (Gartrell, Deck, Rodas, Peyser & Banks, 2005; Gartrell et al., 2006; Golombok et al., 2003; Johnson & O'Connor, 2002); engage in more imaginative and domestic play (Golombok et al, 2003); and be less gender-stereotyped in their choice and approval of toys, games, and dress (Green, Mandel, Hotvedt, Gray & Smith, 1986; Hoeffler, 1981).

Researchers undertaking a longitudinal British study on planned lesbian-parented families have found that at the age of 10 years, the children in the 78 families had been sexually abused at rates "strikingly" lower than national rates, with none experiencing sexual abuse by family members (Gartrell et al., 2005, p. 523; Gartrell et al., 2006).

² Their sample of lesbian parents were those who accessed fertility services at the Fertility Department of the Brussels University Hospital, and the heterosexual couples were recruited from the Fertility and the Obstetrics department of a university hospital. The parents were matched as closely as possible with respect to the age of the biological mother, age of child and family size, and there were no differences between the groups in terms of proportion of parents who were religious, who lived in rural and urban environments, and on family size. The research instruments included standardised interviews with the parents (an adaptation of Quinton & Rutter, 1988). Twenty-seven of the interviews were checked by a second rater who was 'blind' to the family type. Measures used with children included the Family Relations Test, the Achenbach Child Behaviour Checklist, and the Preschool Activities Inventory.

Parenting Practices: Lesbian Mothers Compared to Heterosexual Mothers

Even though most studies have found that the quality of parenting tends not to differ between various types of mothers (such as heterosexual single, heterosexual partnered, lesbian birth mother and lesbian non-birth mother), some differences have been reported by researchers, and in each of these, lesbian mothers have been found to compare favourably with the comparison heterosexual mother group on the parenting skills or attitudes or quality being examined (e.g., see Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). For example, researchers who have compared lesbian mothers with heterosexual mothers (either directly or with population norms) found:

- lesbian mother/child dyads exhibited more expressiveness in their communication than a matched group of heterosexual mother/child dyads (Kunin, 1998);
- lesbian women who had had their children in a prior heterosexual relationship or who were step-mothers to their partner's biological children were rated as more child orientated in certain child-care situations and in their discipline techniques (Miller, Jacobsen & Bigner, 1981);
- lesbian mothers to be less gender-stereotyped in choice and approval of toys and activities (Green et al., 1986; Hoeffler, 1981); and
- lesbian mothers to be less likely to use or endorse the use of physical punishment (Gartrell et al., 2005, 2006; Johnson & O'Connor, 2002; Golombok et al., 2003).

These findings may relate to a range of factors, including: that lesbian women who become parents comprise a group of highly motivated parents; that lesbian mothers are more likely than many single heterosexual mothers to have actively chosen their particular family structure; that lesbian partnered women are more likely to have a partner who undertakes an equitable share of parenting than are heterosexual partnered women; commitment to feminism; feelings of being under higher levels of scrutiny than heterosexual mothers are; and gendered expectations and patterns of relating (see Biblarz & Stacey, 2006, for further discussion).

The picture emerging is quite complex and more research is needed to explore it further. Some research seems to indicate that women parent somewhat differently according to whether they are parenting with a man or not, and whether they are being assisted in that parenting by the presence of an extra woman in the house. There also needs to be further research on sole lesbian-parenting by choice. In a study of what they termed 'fatherless families', researchers used "a battery" of standardised assessments with children, standardised interviews and questionnaires with parents and teachers to compare 113 families according to the presence or absence of a father. The 'fatherless families' included single heterosexual mothers, and single and partnered lesbian mothers, all of whom had been parenting their children with no father or father-figure since the first year of their child's life, and the 'father present' families were the families of heterosexual couples. It was found that "children raised in fatherless families from infancy experienced greater warmth and interaction with their mother, and were more securely attached to her" (Golombok et al., 1997, p. 783). When the lesbian mothers were compared with the heterosexual single mothers, it was found that the lesbian mothers interacted more with their children. This is perhaps not surprising, given that the 'lesbian mother' group included partnered as well as single mothers, and that unlike single women, partnered lesbian co-parents are likely to have a partner who shares the tasks involved in raising children, including earning an income.

In a follow-up study when offspring were adolescents, although the difference between the 'lesbian' and the 'single heterosexual' mothers was not found, there was still a difference between the mothers in the 'fatherless family' group as a whole when compared to the mothers parenting with a male partner: "children in fatherless families experienced more interaction with their mother, and perceived her as more available and dependable than their peers from father-present homes" (p. 1407), and "perceived their mothers to share more interests and activities with them" (MacCallum & Golombok, 2004, p. 1413).

Parenting Practices: Parenting by Gay Fathers

A study using self-report measures with a sample of 33 gay and 33 heterosexual fathers found that although the two groups rated themselves as similar in terms of level of intimacy and involvement in the children's lives, the gay fathers reported that their behaviour was characterised by greater responsiveness and warmth, more reasoning, and more limit setting than did the heterosexual fathers (Bigner & Jacobson, 1989). Gay male couples have been found to share parenting more equally and with less of a polarisation in levels and type of interactions than heterosexual couples, although to a lesser extent than female parenting couples do (Biblarz & Stacey, 2006; Johnson & O'Connor, 2002; McPherson, 1993). Biblarz & Stacey (2006) concluded, "numerous qualitative studies offer evidence that when two (gay) men co-parent, they do so in a number of ways that seems closer, but not identical, to that of two (lesbian) women than to a (heterosexual) woman and man" (p. 35).

Positive findings about intentional gay parenting couples would seem likely to be related not just to the different patterns of organising family life that arise when both members of a couple are of the same gender, but to the fact that gay men who choose to parent need to have a high level of motivation to parent, along with the range of skills required to successfully apply and be assessed for adoption or fostering, to negotiate co-parenting arrangements with women who want to conceive, or to organise surrogacy. Further, they are choosing to parent in a situation in which there is not another person who can be assumed to be likely to take on a greater proportion of the day-to-day parenting tasks.

Satisfaction with Shared Responsibility and Patterns of Parenting Practices

Perhaps, given the above, it is not surprising that researchers who have examined the question have found lesbian mothers to be more satisfied than heterosexual partnered mothers with their partner as someone to co-parent with (e.g., see Bos et al., 2004). It has been noted that this satisfaction, as well as the practical situation underlying it, may be a protective factor for lesbian birth mothers, given that burden and dissatisfaction with inequitable division of labour following the birth of a child are risk factors for post-partum distress (Ross, 2005). Related to this, lesbian parents report being aware and pleased about the patterns of shared responsibility in caring commonly enacted by lesbian couples compared to heterosexual couples, and about strengths often experienced in their ability to communicate and effectively negotiate family-related distribution of tasks (e.g., Dunne, 2000; Perlesz & McNair, 2004; Short, 2007b). In his review of the couple literature, Kurdek reported that "nearly all available evidence indicates not only that gay men and lesbians, are, on average, satisfied with their relationships, but that their level of satisfaction is at least equal to that reported by spouses from married heterosexual couples" (2005, p. 252). Kurdek (2007) reported that satisfaction with the division of household labour within lesbian and gay couples is related to relationship satisfaction and to relationship stability.

As well as the documented greater commitment to equitable parenting practices, and relatively high levels of satisfaction, other factors that may underlie equitable parenting practices and both support and be supported by them include common characteristics of lesbian couples that have been reported in the literature, including high levels of intimacy, cohesion, commitment to equality, co-operation, and communication (e.g., see Dunne, 2000; Kurdek, 1998; 2001; Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986; Patterson, 1995a, Patterson, 1998; Tjaden, Thoennes & Allison, 1999). For example, comparing two-parent lesbian and heterosexual couples, using a measure of dyadic adjustment, Flaks and colleagues (1995) found that the lesbian parenting couples scored higher "in every area of dyadic adjustment" (p. 112). Compared even to heterosexual couples conceiving at a clinic (a more cohesive group of parents than the general population), lesbian couples seeking donor insemination at a clinic reported greater cohesion as a couple than did the heterosexual couples seeking donor insemination at the same clinic (Jacob, Klock & Maier, 1999). Hence, as Stacey & Biblarz (2001) summarised, "lesbian co-parents may enjoy greater parental compatibility and achieve particularly high quality parenting skills... the evidence suggests that two women co-parenting may create a synergistic pattern that brings more egalitarian, compatible, shared parenting and time spent with children, greater understanding of children, and closeness and communication between parents and children" (p. 175). As previously noted, gay male

couples also have been found to share caring for children far more equally than heterosexual couples, and to be satisfied with that equality (McPherson, 1993). These characteristics and practices may underlie the fact that the evidence to date suggests that same-sex parenting couples have similar rates of relationship dissolution as heterosexual parenting couples. For example, Gartrell and colleagues (2006) explored the issue of relationship stability of parenting couples. They compared the relationships of lesbian mother couples in their sample (n=78) with those mothers' married heterosexual sisters. They reported that "stereotypes about relationship brevity in lesbian couples were not substantiated when the NLFS mothers were compared with their married heterosexual sisters who had children" (2006, p. 187).

Research on the Children of Gay Men and Lesbian Women

As with research on parenting in diverse families, comparative research has been undertaken to explore aspects of children's experiences in diverse families, and to investigate claims made, including by courts and legislators, that growing up in a family other than one with heterosexual parents who are partnered and co-resident will have a negative impact on children. Research focusing on the children of lesbian and gay people sits amongst the extensive body of comparative research about other family types such as those of single parents and step and blended families. This increasingly large body of academic comparative research does not support negative assumptions about the experiences or outcomes of children of lesbian mothers. According to Professor Judith Stacey, and in keeping with the conclusions of other academic reviewers of the literature, there is not "a single social scientist conducting and publishing research in the area of children's development who claims to have found that gay and lesbian parents harm children" (cited in Cooper & Cates, 2006, p. 29). The studies conducted to date indicate that although there are usually no differences found between the children of lesbian women and the children of heterosexual women in most of the areas that have been investigated, some differences exist, and when they do, they usually favour children of lesbian women. In their recent review Biblarz & Stacey (2006) report that for every finding of differences between the children of same-sex parents and the children of heterosexual parents, there have been approximately four findings of no differences between groups.

As the body of research has matured and grown, reviewers have more clearly indicated that differences have been found, and that nearly all of these are positive. For example, McNair (2004) reported that:

A range of rigorous studies has shown that children in lesbian families do at least as well as children in heterosexual families... There is sound evidence of equal or more positive outcomes for children born into families with non-biological parents, same-sex parents and through surrogate arrangements. These apply both to children's emotional, social and psychological developments, and to parenting styles and family functioning. (p. 7, p. 9)

Psychological Well-Being and Behaviour

A large number of studies have compared such things as the characteristics, behaviours, emotional and psychological health, gender orientation, sexuality, academic achievement, social relationships, popularity and self esteem of children of lesbian parents with children of heterosexual parents (e.g., see reviews by Anderssen, Amlie & Ytteroy, 2002; Brewaeys & Van Hall, 1997; Fitzgerald, 1999; Kershaw, 2000; McNair, 2004; Millbank, 2003; Parks, 1998; Patterson & Chan, 1999; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001; Tasker, 1999; 2000).

Examples of studies that have reported no differences in their samples according to the gender mix or sexuality of the children's parents include no differences in: cognitive ability (e.g., Kirkpatrick, Smith & Roy, 1981; Green et al., 1986; Flaks et al., 1995); social competence and level of behavioural problems (Patterson, 1994); psychiatric rating (Kirkpatrick et al., 1981); and self-esteem (Huggins, 1989). Recent controlled studies in the US, the UK and Europe with children in intentional lesbian-parented families have found no difference in such things as anxiety, psychological adjustment, and school adjustment (e.g., MacCallum & Golombok, 2004; Vanfraussen, Ponjaert-Kristoffersen & Brewaeys, 2002;

Wainright et al., 2004). For example, in their study involving early adolescent children from what they termed 'father-present' families (two heterosexual parents, n=38) and 'father-absent' families (which included 25 families of lesbian mothers and 38 families of single heterosexual mothers), MacCallum and Golombok (2004) found no differences in psychological adjustment as measured by a battery of standardised measures, including a standardised interview with the mothers, interviews with children using the Child and Adolescent Functioning and Environment Schedule (1991), completion of the Social Adjustment Inventory for Children and Adolescents (1987) by the children, and completion of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (1994) by mothers and teachers. Using the Child Behaviour Checklist, Gartrell and colleagues (2005, 2006) found no differences in psychological adjustment between children in planned lesbian-parented families who were conceived with sperm from a known donor and those who were conceived with sperm from an unknown donor.

Some studies have found fewer indications of behavioural or emotional problems in children with two mothers compared with either direct comparison groups of children with heterosexual parents or with population norms (e.g., Flaks et al., 1995, Golombok et al., 1997; Brewaeyts et al., 1997; Vanfraussen et al., 2002). Gartrell and colleagues (2005) found that the girls in their sample of children born into planned lesbian-parented families had externalising behaviour scores significantly below the norm. Children in mother-only families were rated more highly by researchers on a measure of attachment and security of attachment than those in a family with one mother and one father (Golombok, et al., 1997). In a Spanish study comparing 28 families of children of either gay fathers or lesbian mothers, with children aged 3-16, with two samples of classmates with heterosexual parents, researchers reported that "boys and girls growing up in homo-parental families have average to above average scores in academic and social competence and self-esteem" (Gonzalez, Morcillo, Sanchez-Angeles & Chacon, 2004, p, 327). Various researchers have found that their samples of children of lesbian mothers were rated by the children themselves, their parents and/or by their teachers as less aggressive, more 'loveable', affectionate, joyful, sociable, responsive, broad-minded, tolerant, empathic, less aggressive, less domineering, less negativistic, more verbal and more protective to younger children than children of heterosexual parents (e.g., see Patterson, 1994; 1996; Steckel, 1987; Vanfraussen et al., 2002). For example, an anonymous survey of 107 teachers found that they believed that the children of gay and lesbian parents were more mature, tolerant, and self-reliant than other students (Bliss & Harris, 1999).

Although the majority of findings of the comparative research indicate possible advantages or are positive for the children of gay and lesbian people, not all are in agreement. In contrast to Flaks and colleagues (1995), who found no differences in teachers' ratings between children of female and children of heterosexual couples, Belgian researchers Vanfraussen and colleagues (2002) who gathered information from children, parents and teachers found that the teachers rated the children of lesbian women as having more attention and behaviour problems than the children of two heterosexual parents. The researchers noted that this was somewhat out of keeping with the teachers' other ratings of the children, and this was not indicated in the ratings completed by either the children or the parents. An Australian study by Sarantakos (1996) of 174 children born into heterosexual relationships and later parented by their heterosexual married parents, or by co-habiting heterosexual parents, or by lesbian or gay step or blended families, found that although children being parented by lesbian or gay couples achieved slightly better in social studies and were regarded as more polite and reserved, children parented by married couples scored higher in language, maths and sport. Reviewers have pointed to the fact that this study is at odds with the body of evidence on children parented by lesbian women and gay men, but is somewhat consistent with other studies that compare children who have experienced family conflict with those who have not. Like the author himself, these reviewers have urged caution on how to interpret the findings of the study (e.g. APA, 2005; VLRC, 2007).

In a US study, children of lesbian mothers rated themselves as having a higher level of general well-being, feeling more joy and contentment, and more comfortable with themselves than a comparison group of children of heterosexual parents, but also rated themselves as having more emotional reactions to stress, such as feelings of anger and anxiety (Patterson, 1994). These findings may indicate that the children of the lesbian women actually had lives which they experienced as more joyful and pleasing, and that they actually experienced more stress in their lives, or, as Patterson suggested, possibly that the children of the lesbian mothers more readily acknowledged emotions.

In the first data collection of a UK longitudinal study about what the researchers term 'fatherless' families (n=113), 6 year old children of single (heterosexual and lesbian) mothers and children of lesbian-couple parents rated themselves as less cognitively and physically able than children with a mother and a father (Golombok et al., 1997). The researchers suggested that given this is unlikely to be the case (as noted above, some researchers have compared the IQ of children according to the sexuality of their mothers and found no differences), this finding may be related to stigma. Interestingly, in a follow-up study (n=101 families), no differences were found between those who had a father and those who did not in this area when children were approaching adolescence (MacCallum & Golombok, 2004). The researchers suggested that this change over time may relate to increasing recognition and acceptance of family diversity in society.

Behaviours and Preferences Commonly Believed to be Gender Related

Some research into gender and sexuality in relation to having a gay and/or lesbian parent has been undertaken. This has partly been to explore the concern, expressed by some in the public arena, that a child who grows up without one mother and one father will be less likely to conform to normative gender and sexual behaviour. Many have pointed to the offensive nature of this kind of concern and challenged the assumptions within it. However, given the importance of the arenas in which these concerns arise and the deleterious effects they have on people's lives, many have also attempted to deal with these concerns within the terms, language, and framework of the concerns, and explored whether children of gay and lesbian parents will, in fact, be more likely to be either gender 'atypical' or other than strictly heterosexual. For those who are interested in this information, the following is provided; however, it is important that psychologists be aware that it is counter to people's well-being and offensive to many to assume that heterosexuality and stereotypical gender expression is preferable or superior to non-heterosexuality and less common forms of gender or gender expression.

Many findings of no differences between groups of children on various measures in some way related to gender and gendered-behaviour have been reported (e.g., Brewaeys et al., 1997; see reviews by Kershaw, 2000; McNair, 2004; Tasker, 2005). However, some differences have been found between children parented by same-sex parents and those parented by heterosexual parents that indicate potentially favourable or advantageous differences for the former. In general, the theme of these differences is to be less rigidly sex-typed than children who live with heterosexual parents. Researchers have found the sons of lesbian women in their samples to be more self-aware, more adept at communicating their feelings, more sensitive to others, more thoughtful and measured, less physically aggressive, less 'sex-typed' in their choice of toys and games, and to exhibit more empathy for people than the comparative groups of sons of heterosexual parents (Brewaeys et al., 1997; Drexler & Gross, 2005; Green et al., 1986; Sarantakos, 1996; Vanfraussen et al., 2002). Drexler, who has compared boys raised by lesbian couples and boys raised by heterosexual couples, has reported differences along these lines, and particularly, that boys of lesbian mothers demonstrate relatively higher levels of sensitivity and relationship orientation than do boys who are parented by a male/female couple (Drexler, 2002; Drexler & Gross, 2005). In the UK study comparing 'father-present' and 'father-absent' families (n=101 families), early adolescent boys who had been raised from infancy by mothers only (either single heterosexual or lesbian women, or female couples) were found to rate themselves at the same level on a scale of 'masculinity' as did boys who had a father, and more highly on the 'femininity' items (MacCallum & Golombok, 2004).

Some researchers have found daughters of lesbian mothers to have higher aspirations to non-traditionally gendered occupations and somewhat less 'sex-typed' play (Green et al., 1986; Steckel, 1987). Research undertaken on sons of divorced gay fathers suggests that such fathers also promote some flexibility in adherence to stereotypical gendered behaviours and ways of relating (Bigner, 1999).

In terms of sexual orientation, the research is fairly scant. Findings seem to suggest that offspring who were raised by a same-sex attracted parent may feel more comfortable to either consider the possibility of having a same-sex relationship, to have one, to feel more comfortable with their sexuality, and/or more able to discuss issues of sexuality with their parents (see Golombok & Tasker, 1997; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001; Tasker, 2005, 1997).

Quality of Peer Relationships of Children in LGBT-Headed Families

Comparative and explorative research has been conducted in regards to the social and peer relationships of children of lesbian and gay parents. This has been undertaken largely in response to the view that children will suffer because of the discrimination that their parents face, and it has thus been deemed necessary to evaluate the view that children who do not have both a mother and a father will suffer socially as a result. Many researchers who have looked at such things as the popularity, friendships, and peer experiences of children of lesbian mothers compared to children of heterosexual parents have found no differences between groups in their sample according to the sexuality or gender of parents (e.g., Golombok, Spencer & Rutter, 1983; Golombok et al., 1997; Gonzalez et al., 2004; Green, et al., 1986). UK researchers found that children from planned lesbian-parented families, single parent families, and two heterosexual parents did not differ in their levels of peer relationship problems, as measured on standardised interviews and questionnaires (MacCallum & Golombok, 2004). Researchers from the UK Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children found that even though lesbian mothers reported that their children experienced a slightly higher (not statistically significant) level of difficulty with peers than the heterosexual parents did, the children themselves reported difficulties at the same level as did the children of heterosexual parents (Golombok et al., 2003). In keeping with this, children born into 78 lesbian-parented families via donor insemination were found to be well-adjusted and to relate well to their peers (Gartrell et al., 2000). Research on a United States nationally representative sample found that adolescent children of same-sex parents felt more connected with their school than did children of heterosexual parents (Wainright et al., 2004). In some contrast, and possibly related to children being subjected to some prejudice, the 107 teachers who responded to the anonymous survey by Bliss and Harris (1999) indicated that even though they regarded such children as more mature, tolerant and self-reliant than other children, they saw them as experiencing more problems in social interactions.

Negative Peer Experiences Related to Heterosexism and Prejudice

Although the quality of peer relationships seems to be generally similar, it seems that many children of same-sex parents, like their parents, experience homophobia and discrimination. As Lindsay and colleagues (2006) note, "children share the stigma of their parents' sexual orientation" (p. 1067). Researchers from the National Lesbian Family Study found that by 5 years of age, 18% of the children in their sample of 78 lesbian-parented families had experienced some form of discrimination or homophobia from peers or teachers (Gartrell et al., 2000), and that by the age of 10 years, this had risen to 43% (Gartrell et al., 2005).

In an Australian study, even though having lesbian parents was seen as somewhat "cool" by the teenage years, 44% of the grade 3–6 children (aged 8-12 years) had experienced teasing, bullying or derogatory language in relation to their family, and in grades 7–10 (aged 12-16 years), 45% had been bullied (Ray & Gregory, 2001). Such behaviours "ranged from verbal abuse, teasing, and joking to physical and sexual violence" (p. 8). Examples of the homophobic and stigmatising behaviour experienced by Australian children of lesbian mothers involve peers, teachers and school principals, and research indicates that such experiences have made it harder or more anxiety-provoking for some children to talk about their families with their peers or at school, that some are more reluctant to have

children to their home to visit, and that they, like their parents, develop a range of strategies to prevent being stigmatised, discriminated against, or treated poorly (Lindsay et al., 2006; Perlesz & McNair, 2004; Perlesz et al., 2006a; 2006b; Ray & Gregory, 2001; Sarantakos, 1996). Such difficulties have been reported to be less likely to occur in inner-urban, cosmopolitan areas, and in areas where there is a visible presence of families parented by same-sex couples, including in the school.

Early research conducted with adult offspring of gay men reported that they had fears that their peers would assume they themselves were gay or lesbian and react negatively (Bozett, 1987). One fifth of divorced gay fathers in Wyers' sample (cited in Tasker, 2005) reported that their children had experienced instances of prejudice and discrimination relating to their father's sexuality. Green (1998) reported that some of the 18 offspring of transgender parents who participated in his research indicated that they had been teased, but that this was fairly transient and had resolved. In research that involved an audit of a specialist clinical service, it was found that the children of transsexual parents had experienced some difficulties with peers (Freedman et al., 2002).

Recent research indicates that experiences of stigmatisation can have a negative effect on adjustment and well-being. In a longitudinal study on the children of lesbian couples who had conceived their children by donor insemination (either at home or in a fertility clinic), there was an association between having experienced homophobia or stigmatisation and higher scores on the Child Behaviour Checklist (Gartrell et al., 2005). Another study with 76 adolescents aged 11-18 years with lesbian mothers found that those who perceived greater levels of stigma had lower levels of self-esteem in five of seven areas compared to children who perceived less stigmatisation (Gershon, Tscann & Jemerin, 1999).

Research indicates that children of lesbian or gay parents, like their parents, use a range of strategies in an attempt to lessen the likelihood that they will be treated in a discriminatory or prejudiced way, including being selective in talking about and/or letting people know about the sexuality of the parents in the family or the family structure, or not correcting people's incorrect assumptions about the family, and seeking out contact with other children and families who have same-sex parents (e.g., Barrett & Tasker, 2001; Bozett, 1987; O'Connell, 1993; Ray & Gregory, 2001; Perlesz et al., 2006b; Lindsay et al., 2006; Vanfraussen, et al., 2002). However, researchers who have explicitly compared the amount of victimisation or teasing experienced by the children of lesbian parents and by the children of heterosexual parents have found no differences (see Anderssen et al., 2000; Golombok & Tasker, 1994; Tasker & Golombok, 1997; Vanfraussen et al., 2002; Wainwright & Patterson, 2006).

Issues Pertaining to Sperm Donors and Children

As this review of literature on LGBT-parented families has focused primarily on children conceived within the context of such families, it is important to highlight the complexities associated with the use of donor sperm, and the implications of this for children.

Knowledge of Donor Identity

As McNair notes, (2004, p. 60), donor-conceived children of same-sex parents "are not any different to any other donor child in that some will want to know [the donor's] identity and others will not". Some evidence suggests that children, like their parents, can find it complex and not necessarily appealing to know about or to know their donor. Just as many adopted people have no interest or no inclination to find out about or to meet their biological parents (e.g., Roche & Perlesz, 2000), this would seem to be the case with children who are donor-conceived. For example, less than a quarter of the donor-conceived offspring able to do so have to date contacted the Sperm Bank of California to find out the identity of the man who donated sperm for their conception since this became a possibility in 2005, and few have actually contacted or organised to meet the donor, even though the majority of the offspring are aware that they were donor-conceived and that they are able to find out the identity of the donor if they so choose (Sperm Bank of California, 2007). A Belgian study of children 7-17 years old who had been conceived at a fertility clinic by lesbian women, found that 54% did not want to know

any information about their donor, 19% wanted to know only non-identifying information, and 24% wanted to be able to find out identifying information about their donor (Vanfrauseen et al., 2002). However, unlike heterosexual couples who have conceived their children with assisted reproduction and in the large majority do not tell the children that they are donor-conceived (e.g., see Golombok, Brewaeys et al., 2002; Golombok, MacCallum et al., 2002), it seems that almost universally, same-sex parents do tell their children (e.g., see McNair, 2004).

Level of Contact and Relationship with Known Donors

Research indicates that the role of a known donor in the families of lesbian women is usually fairly limited, with the man being seen as a donor rather than as a parent, and contact with him usually being scant or, in many cases, non-existent (e.g., see Almack, 2005; Dempsey, 2005; Dunne, 2000; Gartrell et al., 1999; 2000; 2005, 2006; Gross, 2005; Haines & Weiner, 2000; Hare & Richards, 1993; McNair, 2004; Patterson, 1998; Short, 2006; 2007b). For example, in the Bay Areas Family Study which included 37 families of lesbian parents, the majority had conceived with sperm from a clinic. Of the 27% who had conceived with the sperm of a known donor, more than half had had no contact in the previous year, and less than one third had seen the man twice or more (Patterson, 1998). Patterson reported that "sperm donors were not usually regarded as family members of the nuclear or extended families of lesbian mothers or their children, even though the biological connections were acknowledged" (1998, p. 171). In the U.S. National Lesbian Family Study of 78 families, 27 children had been conceived with the assistance of known donors (Gartrell et al., 2005, 2006). The majority of these children did not have contact with the sperm provider (13% saw their donors regularly, and 14% occasionally).

In Australia, a survey of women at the 2000 Sydney Lesbian Parenting Conference (at which most of the mothers would have conceived their children at a time where access to fertility clinics by women who did not have a resident male partner was either very or totally restricted, depending on where the women lived) found that 68% had conceived outside the clinic system with a donor known to them and 8% with a donor not known to them personally. Of these, 31% had no contact, 33% had 'some contact', 22% had 'regular' contact (e.g., babysitting), and 13% had 'extensive' contact with the known sperm provider. The majority described the relationship as one of "friendship" (see Millbank, 2003, pp. 560-561). A survey with Victorian lesbian women indicated that 34% of the donors were unknown, 8% were known to the lesbian parents but not to the child, 18% were known to the lesbian parents and the child but not involved with them, and in 40% of families, there was some level of involvement, ranging from infrequent to frequent (reported in McNair, 2004, p. 61). In recent research with 56 Australian lesbian women, approximately half had conceived or were conceiving their children with the sperm of a known donor (either at home or in a fertility clinic). In only a very small minority of those was the sperm provider regarded as a member of the family or as a parent, or provided any care for the children or any other element of a parenting relationship (Short, 2006; 2007b). Evidence to date suggests that approximately 50-70% of children who have been born to lesbian women in Australia have been conceived with the sperm from a known donor, and that up to a quarter of children who have been conceived by lesbian women in Australia have some contact with the sperm provider (Millbank, 2003). In considering this, it is important to bear in mind that in many cases the known donor is a friend of the mother(s), or a family member of the non-birth mother – which is why he was asked to donate the sperm – and that the contact between the women and the men continues within this prior pattern and relationship.

A number of recent research studies on the daily lives of lesbian women indicate that fear of conflict or actual conflict (with regard family and parenting arrangements, and conceptualisation of the family, between lesbian mothers and sperm providers) are not uncommon (e.g., Almack, 2005; Clarke & Saffron, 2006; Dempsey, 2005; Dunne, 2000; Gross, 2005; Ross, Steele & Sapiro, 2005; Ripper, 2007; Short, 2007b). Indeed, over the last ten years, courts in Australia, Canada, England, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Scotland, the USA, and possibly other countries, have dealt with conflicts between lesbian mothers and known sperm providers. However, in an Australian study that involved both

lesbian mothers who had had their children in a prior heterosexual relationship and those who had had their children as lesbian women, McNair and colleagues (2002) reported that levels of satisfaction with the relationship and with the level of contact was fairly high. For instance, of the 81 lesbian parents in Victoria (including both those with children from previous heterosexual relationships and those with children born into same-sex relationships) who reported on their relationship with their children's donors and/or fathers, 82% were very satisfied or satisfied with their arrangements, whilst fewer than 20% were not satisfied, and "there was no statistically significant difference between levels of satisfaction with 'fathers' as opposed to satisfaction with 'donors'" (p. 45). Perlesz and her colleagues (e.g., 2006a; 2006b) also found that the majority of the lesbian parents in their research (in a sample that included families with children born in previous heterosexual relationships and those with children born into same-sex relations) spoke positively about arrangements with fathers and the small number of donors in the study. It should be noted that whatever the level of satisfaction or perceived conflict or actual conflict that exists for any particular family with same-sex parents or with same-sex attracted parents, negotiating family relationships in the current legal, policy and discursive context is understandably complex.

Within the current social, legal and political framework, gay men are restricted in their pathways to intentional, planned parenting, and are limited to the following alternatives: engaging the services of overseas surrogate programs (which are extremely costly and inaccessible to most); fostering (although some agencies still have discriminatory policies excluding lesbian women and gay men which makes this more difficult); or they enter into a co-parenting arrangement with a lesbian couple or single woman. These negotiations are often complex and require a high level of communication and understanding between all adult parties involved, and for some this can be challenging and can lead to difficulties and conflict.

Conclusions

This review has provided an overview and summary of the main bodies of research about parenting by LGBT people, and located the research within the broader family studies field, which it is both informed by and informs. In keeping with the broader family studies literature, the literature discussed here indicates that the family factors that are important for children's outcomes and well-being are family processes and the quality of interactions and relationships. The research indicates that parenting practices and children's outcomes in families parented by lesbian and gay parents are likely to be at least as favourable as those in families of heterosexual parents, despite the reality that considerable legal discrimination and inequity remain significant challenges for these families. Of particular importance, this review has provided information that can assist psychologists to take an informed approach to some of the important debates that will continue to arise in Australia, as people in same-sex parented families and others advocate the removal of the remaining discrimination in laws, public policies, and social attitudes. Like many other expert and professional bodies, the APS is committed to contributing the knowledge of psychology in the public interest, and to fostering a social environment in which all children and their families experience support, recognition, and are valued, and in which discrimination and prejudice have no place.

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SPEAK NOW

AUSTRALIAN PERSPECTIVES ON SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

EDITED BY

VICTOR MARSH PhD

WITH A FOREWORD BY

THE HON. MICHAEL KIRBY AC, CMG

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Legal recognition of same-sex couples in the countries of the world:
a chronological overview—*Kees Waaldijk*

CONTRIBUTORS

Dennis Altman is Professor of Politics and Director of the Institute for Human Security at Latrobe University and a prominent public intellectual. Among his myriad publications, his groundbreaking book *Homosexual: oppression and liberation* (1971) influenced the politics of gay liberation across the world.

Dennis Altman laments the loss of the radical critique that was central to the early gay and lesbian movement.

Barbara Baird is Associate Professor and head of women's studies at Flinders University in South Australia. She has researched the history and contemporary cultural politics of abortion, and changing discourses of sexuality in Australia.

Barbara Baird locates historical precedents for the political and social significance of same-sex partnering, from colonial times up to the present.

Andrew Barr is the first openly gay Member of the ACT Legislative Assembly and the first to serve as a Minister in an Australian Government. He is currently Deputy Chief Minister and Treasurer of the ACT. His partner, Andrew Toms, works in the rag trade.

Andrew Barr shares the experience of his own partnership ceremony, to provide a sense of the human element in this highly politicised issue.

Michael Carden is a biblical scholar with numerous published essays on the Bible, sexuality and religion, and he is on the editorial board of the e-Journal *Bible and Critical Theory*. His book, *Sodomy: A History of a Christian Biblical Myth*, was published by Equinox Publications.

Michael Carden revisits church history to show how the 'institution' of marriage evolved and argues for a broadening of recognition to include other kinds of relationships.

Rodney Croome, AM, is an honorary lecturer in sociology at the University of Tasmania and co-author of *W... v... v...*

spokesperson for the Tasmanian Gay and Lesbian Rights Group, Rodney fronted the successful campaign to decriminalise homosexuality in Tasmania, taking the case to the United Nations.

Linking the current struggle to earlier government controls over who could marry whom, Rodney Croome argues that infringement of the freedom to marry is part of a broader ideological vision in which marriage is manipulated to discriminatory, ideological ends.

Elaine Crump moved to Australia from the midlands of England in 1970. After completing matriculation, she joined the Navy as a radio technician and since then has enjoyed careers in commercial radio, business machine maintenance, computer hardware, and data communications and has postgraduate qualifications in professional accounting.

Elaine's story about marrying 'across state lines' underlines the importance of the social recognition accorded by marriage, rather than 'civil partnerships'.

Sharon Dane arrived in Australia with her parents at the age of 16. She was awarded a PhD in Social Psychology at the University of Queensland. Her area of research interest is the relationship between social inclusion and psychological well-being. Sharon is currently employed as a social scientist at a leading research organisation.

Sharon Dane details research findings on the types of relationship recognition actually preferred by same-sex attracted people across Australia.

Michelle Dicinoski is a writer of poetry and creative non-fiction which has appeared in journals, newspapers, and anthologies, including *The Best Australian Poems*, *The Australian Literary Review*, and *Meanjin*. Michelle is working on a memoir called *Ghost Wife* which examines same-sex marriage, belonging, and the ghostly family histories that haunt us.

Michelle Dicinoski provides a personal account of travelling to Canada to marry her US partner in Toronto.

Luke Gahan is studying for a PhD in Sociology at La Trobe University while working part time at the Australian Research Centre

Convenor of Australian Marriage Equality and has remained committed to marriage and parenting equality for same-sex couples.

Luke Gahan's experience of love, marriage and divorce shows that same-sex couples can face the same difficulties as their opposite-sex counterparts.

Paula Gerber is a senior lecturer at Monash University Law School and a Deputy Director of the Castan Centre for Human Rights Law. On the Board of the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, she is an expert on international human rights law, with a particular focus on same-sex families and children's rights.

Paula Gerber (and Adina Sifris) analyse some of the crucial legal issues when same-sex partners are also parents.

Evelyn Gray studied biology at University in the UK and qualified as a primary teacher before coming to Australia in 1971.

Evelyn Gray makes a personal plea for the partnerships of both of her daughters to be treated with equal respect.

Ryan Heath is speechwriter for the Vice President of the European Union, Neelie Kroes, and the most senior Australian to work there. Previously, he was Assistant Director at the UK Cabinet Office, and a political adviser to Peter Garrett and Kevin Rudd. Ryan has written extensively on social issues for Australian and British publications and founded The Gay Marriage Blog in 2010.

As a political aide in Australia, the UK and Europe, Ryan Heath has gained more than a glimpse behind the scenes of public performance and private political realities.

Lynne Hillier is a social psychologist and Principal Research Fellow at the Australian Research Centre in Sex Health & Society (ARCSHS) at La Trobe University. Her research over the last 17 years has focused on the marginalisation of young people, particularly same-sex attracted youth, and the ways that techniques of domination (such as homophobia) can lead to negative health outcomes.

Lynne Hillier's long-term research, published as the Writing Themselves In reports, has provided unique insights into the health

Crusader Hillis and Rowland Thomson own the legendary queer bookshop Hares & Hyenas, which acts as a de facto community centre and referral service for many of its users, supporting the work of transgender, Indigenous, disabled, multicultural and other fringe artists and writers from the queer community.

They have been together for over 30 years but Crusader Hillis asks why you would bother to get married when you have the respect of your family, your friends, your neighbours and your work colleagues.

Walter Jennings runs the Australian operations of a global public relations consultancy. Originally from New Jersey, he has been with his (Italian) Australian partner for more than twenty years and they are raising an adopted (Chinese) child.

Walter Jennings recounts some of the complications of a relationship that has refused to stay within conventional, and national, boundaries.

Tiffany Jones has written for diverse media including *LOTL* magazine, *Sextures*, *The American Journal of Sexuality Education* and—her grandma's fave—*Dolls, Bears and Collectables*. She is completing her PhD on constructions of GLBTIQ students in Australian education policy, at the ARCSHS (La Trobe University). She is now a Post-doctoral Research Fellow at EFPI, Charles Sturt University.

Tiffany's personal story recalls painful (and comic) memories of a high school crush that led to unexpected but welcome outcomes.

The Hon. Michael Kirby, AC, CMG has had a remarkable national and international career as a distinguished jurist. He came out in *Who's Who in Australia* in 1999, naming Johan van Vloten as his long-term partner. While President of the International Commission of Jurists he encouraged that organisation to give more consideration to human sexuality as an aspect of human rights and, as an Anglican, he has expressed disappointment at his church's stance on gay rights.

Michael Kirby's illustrious career as a jurist has been informed by his personal experience as a gay man, and we look forward to the publication of his memoirs.

Benjamin Law is a Chinese Australian humorist noted for his

crikey.com and *The Monthly*, among others, his collection of personal essays about growing up gay on Queensland's Sunshine Coast, *The Family Law*, has further expanded his audience.

From Law's richly comic accounts of life in a distinctly white-bread region of Australia we excerpt his droll account of the awkwardness of being gay in a predominantly straight world.

Rev. Dorothy McRae-McMahon has been a staff member of the NSW Ecumenical Council, minister of the Pitt Street Uniting Church, Sydney, and National Director for Mission of the Uniting Church. In 1997, she came out publicly as a lesbian. Since retiring she has continued to participate in the struggle of the church and community, in Australia and internationally, to build an inclusive society.

Recognised with many awards over the years for her contribution to the spiritual life of the community, Dorothy McRae-McMahon offers a moving personal testimony.

Victor Marsh is a writer, editor, researcher, lecturer, former television producer and student of comparative religion, who has taught meditation in a dozen or so countries. A research advisor at the University of Queensland, he also teaches writing and cultural studies at Southern Cross University. His critical study of Christopher Isherwood, *Mr Isherwood Changes Trains*, was published by Clouds of Magellan in 2010.

Paul Martin is Principal Psychologist, Centre for Human Potential, specialising in LGBTI mental health for over twenty years. Paul runs national workshops for psychologists and counsellors on working effectively with gays and lesbians and is an organisational consultant for corporations and government departments.

Paul Martin writes about the insidious effects of shaming, weaving together his personal story of coming to terms with his sexuality and his professional experience as a psychologist.

Alyena Mohumadally and her partner Catherine Roberts are practising lawyers, ostensibly from different sides of a prominent ethnic divide—Alyena is a Pakistani Australian who inherited

Once vehemently opposed to the very concepts of marriage (a patriarchal institution to be dismantled) and motherhood (see previous brackets) Alyena and Cat are now married and raising a son together.

Chris Morgan is an academic and writer and lives in northern NSW.

Chris Morgan's personal account of his family networks shows how the complexity of lived human relationships simply cannot be contained under a single umbrella.

Wayne Morgan is a senior lecturer at the ANU College of Law. He (with others) instigated the teaching of law and sexuality courses at Melbourne University Law School and now teaches such a course at the ANU. He was a consultant to the Tasmanian Government in the drafting of the Tasmanian civil union legislation. He publishes in the areas of sexuality theory, anti-discrimination and relationship recognition.

Wayne Morgan traces the recognition of same-sex relationship as it developed from the feminist lobbying of the 1980s, through de facto law reform and the current debate, to look beyond the privileged ideal of coupledom.

Rev. Nathan Nettleton is an ordained minister with the Baptist Union of Victoria and has been pastor to the congregation in South Yarra since 1994. He has been engaged in dialogue on the place of homosexual people in the churches since his involvement on the Baptist Union's 1997 Taskforce on the topic. He lives in Melbourne with his wife and their 13 year old daughter and two dogs.

While Nathan Nettleton does not speak for the wider Baptist church, here he provides a rationale for the equal recognition of same-sex marriages contributing to, rather than undermining, the institution of marriage.

Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli is Senior Lecturer in the School of Health and Social Development at Deakin University, Melbourne. Her primary areas of interest are cultural, gender, sexual and family diversity and their various permutations. Twice winner of a Lambda Literary Award, Maria is also an External Faculty Member of Saybrook University, San Francisco, the Honorary Patron of PFLAG

Member of AGMC Inc (Australian GLBTIQ Multicultural Council).

Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli argues that to widen the framing of marriage to include same-sex couples simply doesn't go far enough, for simply re-inforcing the unduly privileged status of pair-bonding doesn't accommodate the true diversity of human partnering.

Kerryn Phelps, AM, was the first female president of the Australian Medical Association (AMA) where she fought for many public health and social issues. Known through her work as a health journalist, she and her wife Jackie Stricker-Phelps have worked for legal equality for same-sex relationships since their marriage in New York in 1998. Prof. Phelps was honoured in the 2011 Queens Birthday honours list, being made Member of the Order of Australia for 'service to medicine, particularly through leadership roles with the Australian Medical Association, to education and community health, and as a general practitioner'.

While initially a somewhat reluctant public spokesperson for same-sex partnerships, Kerryn Phelps has worked long and hard to bring them the equal respect they deserve. Her stirring speech to open the 2011 Mardi Gras in Sydney directly challenges the Prime Minister's view that marriage is only between a man and a woman.

Damien W Riggs is a lecturer in social work at Flinders University. He publishes in the areas of critical race and whiteness studies, gender and sexuality studies, and parenting and family studies (and the intersections of these three areas). Titles include *Priscilla, (white) queen of the desert, Becoming parent: Lesbians, gay men, and family*, and *What about the children! Masculinities, sexualities and hegemony*.

Damien Riggs draws our attention to the often-ignored racial dimensions of the national conversation.

Donald Ritchie is a writer and criminologist, living and working in Melbourne. Donald was a finalist in the 2008 Mardi Gras short story competition and had a story published in the *Australasian Anthology of Short Stories* by Spiny Babbler. He is currently writing a novel.

Donald Ritchie describes an encounter with Customs and Immigration that brought home to him the importance of the

Wendell Rosevear, OAM, is a Fellow of the Royal Australian College of GPs and runs a busy medical practice in Brisbane. Known for his counselling work in prisons, he lobbies nationally to generate understanding about drugs, addiction and recovery, sexual assault, relationships, and suicide prevention.

Wendell Rosevear believes passionately in the value of each person, including those in prison for violent crimes. Here he identifies some fundamental shifts in understanding that promote healing at the personal and social level.

Lulu Shapiro is a former nurse now working in recruitment for the health sector and she also works with the long-term unemployed. Her partner, Jannine Lockyer, a sales and marketing expert representing national and international organisations in development and sales roles, is currently owner-operator of a recruitment agency.

Many people can no longer accept that to be in a same-sex partnership precludes having and raising children. Lulu and Jannine share insights from the real world of a very human family.

Adiva Sifris is a senior lecturer at Monash University Law School who previously practiced in Family Law and she has a particular interest in same-sex parenting. Her publications include the book *Children and the Lesbian 'Homo-nuclear' family: A Challenge for Australian Family Law in the New Millennium* and she co-edited the collection of essays *Current Trends in the Regulation of Same-Sex Relationships* (2011) with Paula Gerber.

Adiva Sifris and Paula Gerber analyse some of the crucial legal issues when same-sex partners are also parents.

Peter Tatchell is an Australian-born human rights campaigner, based in London. He is coordinator of the Equal Love UK campaign, which in February 2011 filed an application in the European Court of Human Rights to overturn Britain's twin bans on gay civil marriages and heterosexual civil partnerships.

Peter Tatchell here argues to extend the 'marriage' model so that it might embrace a variety of supportive, caring relationships.

Yantra de Vilder is a composer and sound artist who has worked in

eclectic blend of musical talents encompasses composition, arranging, direction, conducting and performance. A versatile collaborator and consultant, Yantra is Creative Director of Labyrinth Studios.

Yantra de Vilder found that a lot of conflicting feelings were stirred up when she decided to tie the knot with her partner, Suzanne.

Zenith Virago is a celebrant, consultant, educator, facilitator, speaker and author who has been working in Byron Bay and beyond for over fifteen years. As a celebrant, she offers support for weddings and commitment ceremonies, and consults on natural and holistic approaches to dying, death and funerals.

Zenith Virago testifies to the blessings that accrue when same-sex partners have their relationship honoured and celebrated before their communities of family and friends.

Kees Waaldijk is Professor of Comparative Sexual Orientation Law at Leiden University in the Netherlands. Writing about homosexuality and the law for many years, he was responsible for major comparative legal research projects, and involved in influential test cases and legislation on same-sex partnership, parenting, and marriage in the Netherlands and North America.

Kees Waaldijk contributes an important record of the legislative steps taken when governments decide to acknowledge marriage equality.

Deb Wain is a poet, short story writer, freelance writer and marriage celebrant, with a passion for our environment.

When marrying her husband, Deb Wain was shocked to hear that the celebrant was required by law to assert that marriage could only be between a man and a woman.

Tim Wilson is an international public policy analyst who serves as Director of the Intellectual Property and Free Trade Unit at the Institute of Public Affairs. A commentator on TV and radio, he is regularly published in journals and newspapers, including the *Wall Street Journal* and *The Australian*. In 2009 *The Australian* recognised him as one of the ten emerging leaders of Australian society.

Tim Wilson proposes a new model of recognising unions that would give equal respect to the civil rights claims of same-sex couples wishing to

marry, while acknowledging the long history of practices associated with marriage within conventional religious settings.

Tim Wright is a committee member of Australian Marriage Equality and a former convenor of Equal Love. An adviser to Australian Democrats leader Senator Lyn Allison from 2006 to 2008, he interned for US Congressman Dennis Kucinich in 2009. Voted one of Australia's twenty-five most influential gays and lesbians, he currently works as the Australian director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons.

Tim Wright describes how legislation that cut across the basic principles of equality that he was studying at law school inspired his move into political activism.

FOREWORD

The Hon. Michael Kirby, AC, CMG

A surprising decision

This book tackles a topic which, at the time of publication, is one of the hot button issues of Australian politics. Whether the legal status of marriage, provided in the *Marriage Act 1961* (Cth) should be opened up to be equally available to same-sex couples as to opposite sex couples.

This possibility is a relatively recent idea. The old common law cases excluded it. So, it was held, did early statutes, reflecting the common law, enacted throughout the English-speaking world. When, in the 1990s, in New Zealand, a lesbian couple challenged their exclusion from marriage by a local registrar, it caused no real surprise to me to read that the Court of Appeal of New Zealand had unanimously held that the local statute had to be read in the light of the common law and past practice, so that marriage was not available to the applicants¹. The New Zealand judges went further. The applicants had sought a declaration that unavailability to them of the legal status of marriage amounted to impermissible discrimination, contrary to the New Zealand *Bill of Rights Act 1990* (NZ). The majority, at the time, also rejected this argument. But in a ringing dissent, Justice Thomas held that, of course, the exclusion of the lesbian couple from the legal status of marriage (effectively because of their sexual orientation) was discriminatory, thereby triggering an obligation on the part of the New Zealand Parliament to consider its human rights obligations in the matter. I remember at the time thinking that Ted Thomas must be losing his marbles. Marriage was for opposite sex couples. It was not, and could not be, for gays.

My reaction, as recently as 1998, as a homosexual man in a very long-term relationship with my partner, may indicate the basic conservatism of my legal values and the power of the legal culture in which I was raised². It is perhaps a reason why reformers in this field need to be understanding of the fact that perceiving a new potentiality in old institutions is bound to elicit resistance.

¹ *Quilter v Attorney-General (NZ)* [1998] 1 NZLR 523 (NZCA); [1998] 3 LRC 119.

Particularly on the part of conventional, older, religious people who often find thinking afresh to be unpleasant and uncongenial.

Fifteen years of change

Yet, whereas hesitation and even hostility might have been a natural reaction for a lawyer to the idea of same-sex marriage in 1998, it is much less understandable today:

- In Australia and in most advanced common law countries, the old, inherited English law that criminalised even consensual, adult, private same-sexual activity has now gradually been repealed (the last Australian jurisdiction being Tasmania in 1997). These provisions have now been replaced by laws forbidding discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and many equalising financial and like benefits enjoyed by same-sex individuals and couples³;
- From the late 1990s, statutes began to be enacted, 'opening up' the status of marriage to same-sex couples. The process began in the Netherlands in 2001. But it quickly spread to Belgium, Scandinavia, Spain, Argentina and several states of the United States of America, most recently New York. The sight of so many happy same-sex couples proudly displaying their marriage certificates began to burn into the consciousness of millions of people in the countries of reform and in other countries. It began to seem less exceptional and less heterodox; and
- Court decisions in countries such as Canada, South Africa and in American states such as Massachusetts, California and Iowa began to apply to marriage legislation the principles of equality expressed in their national and state constitutions. Wending its way through the courts of the United States, towards the Supreme Court, is a challenge to a finding by a federal judge (who turned out himself to be gay) that denial of equal access to marriage in that country was contrary to the implied requirements of the federal constitution.

The rear-guard of Australian politics

In Australia, no express constitutional provision for individual equality or non-discrimination exists and none has yet been implied by the High Court of Australia⁴. On the contrary, taking a leaf out of the wedge politics so successfully pioneered in the United States of America by President George W. Bush, the Howard Government piloted through the Australian Parliament in 2004 an amendment to the *Marriage Act*, defining 'marriage' as confined to an exclusive union for life between a man and a woman; forbidding any other form of marriage to be recognised by the courts of Australia; and prohibiting recognition in Australia of marriages legally entered between same-sex couples in countries overseas. These provisions were supported in the Australian Parliament not only by the Coalition government, but also by the main Opposition party at the time, the Australian Labor Party. Moreover, all of the major parties were not only opposed to the facility of 'marriage' for same-sex couples. They were also opposed to 'civil unions' or 'civil partnerships' between same-sex couples, supposedly on the ground that such arrangements 'mimicked' marriage and endangered that institution so important to society. Enactments of the Australian Capital Territory legislature providing for civil unions, and later civil partnerships, were disallowed by the Federal Parliament during the Howard Government. And it was made clear that such legislation would not be tolerated by the Rudd Labor Government when it came to power in 2007.

Bereft of a foothold for a constitutional challenge, and frustrated by the seeming unanimity in the major political parties, activists, both homosexual and heterosexual, began to urge nothing less than new federal amending legislation providing for marriage equality. This movement quickly became an effective one, picking up support from the Australian Greens, a political party which won the balance of power in the Australian Senate at the federal general election of 2010. As well, many young people began to rally to the cause, through the online organisation *GetUp!*. And also at demonstrations, protests and conferences, and through media releases and political initiatives. An obstacle to their campaign was the repeated declaration of the new Labor Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, that she did not support same-sex marriage.

This stance by Australia's first female Prime Minister was the more surprising to the campaigners for marriage equality because Julia Gillard was an avowed atheist and was herself unmarried, living in the official residence of the Prime Minister with an opposite sex partner, thereby flouting past traditional morality. Members of the Federal Parliament were urged to consult their

constituents on the issue. *The Australian* newspaper, of the publishing house of our erstwhile and thrice married citizen, Rupert Murdoch, conducted an unrelenting campaign against same-sex marriage. At the time of the publication of this book, the topic is scheduled to be debated late in 2011 at the National Conference of the Australian Labor Party.

In the Federal Parliament, meanwhile, the Opposition parties appear mainly antagonistic to the idea, as do several powerful union and party members on the Labor side. However, the debate in Australia is inexorably moving towards resolution of some kind. And it is into that discourse that this book is now introduced. Anyone who reads it will obtain a useful perspective of Australian viewpoints, for, against and uncertain about same-sex marriage. Here, is a snapshot of opinions whilst the debate is still unfolding. The editor, Victor Marsh, is to be congratulated on gathering together so many diverse and well-written contributions.

Marriage enthusiasts and acceptors

Most of the chapters are written by marriage enthusiasts. Amongst the latter are Barbara Baird; Andrew Barr and his partner Anthony Toms; Elaine Crump; Sharon Dane; Luke Gahan; Evelyn Gray, Lynne Hillier and Tiffany Jones; Walter Jennings, Benjamin Law; Paul Martin, Alyena Moommadally and Catherine Roberts; Donald Ritchie; Lulu Shapiro and Jannine Lockyer; Adiva Sifis and Paula Gerber; Zenith Virago; and Deb Wain.

There are powerful essays by religious, non-religious and anti-religious commentators, including two by practitioners of religion, the Rev. Dorothy McRae-McMahon and the Rev. Nathan Nettleton, only the first of whom are homosexual. Paul Martin underwent what he calls an 'extended immersion in fundamentalist Christianity, and the "Ex-gay" movement'. Several chapters are written by, or of, prominent Australians who identify with the sexual minorities, such as Dennis Altman; Andrew Barr; Rodney Croome; and Kerry Phelps. Other contributors are not so well-known but they do have a powerful personal story to tell.

Several chapters confess to being late converts to the cause of marriage equality for same-sex couples, including the editor himself, Victor Marsh. One or two of the writers were (and perhaps still are) inclined to prefer a complete change to Australia's relationship laws so as to provide a basic civil union for all people who wish to make the commitment: leaving 'religious marriage' to those who are believers or more traditionalist in their views.

Wayne Morgan and Deb Wain tend to this opinion. They hanker for the

union should be universally available at the town hall or registry office, with marriages in churches as an 'add on' for those who want them. However, the days for civil unions or civil partnerships as true alternatives to full marriage, if ever they were to be acceptable in Australia, seem now to have passed. In that sense, the Howard and Rudd Governments' rejections of the Australian Capital Territory civil unions and civil partnerships laws may have done the marriage equality cause an unintended favour. Now, the idea of relationship recognition, legally separate from, but equal to, marriage would not appear to be tolerable to most of the advocates of equality. It would be like trying to sell the separate but equal notions about segregation or schools for black children in the United States upheld by the Supreme Court in 1896 in *Plessy v Ferguson*⁵, after the fundamental idea of full equality and desegregation had been upheld in that country after *Brown v Board of Education*⁶ in 1954. Or after the Supreme Court in 1967 had struck down the laws against miscegenation which had earlier prohibited marriage between people of different races in that country⁷.

Marriage skeptics and hesitants

For me, the most interesting chapters of this book are those written by the marriage skeptics. These include Dennis Altman; Michael Gordon; Chris Morgan; Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli; Damien Riggs and the well-known international Australian-born gay activist, Peter Tatchell. Peter Tatchell confesses that, personally, he does not much like the notion of 'marriage'. He and others of his persuasion see the ardour for marriage amongst young same-sex couples as a trifle disquieting. It is as if the proponents feel unhappy about separate identification as gays and lesbians and desperate to have all the features of a heterosexual existence so as to be swallowed up in full invisibility amongst the great majority.

Nonetheless, Peter Tatchell and others of this view eventually recognise the established benefits that marriage brings, not only to the individuals involved but also, through stability of relationships, to society as a whole. I did not read any of the marriage sceptics in this book as opposing its availability for those same-sex couples who desire it and are prepared to accept its obligations. Only a few of the marriage sceptics seem willing to broach directly the sensitive topic of multiple and serial sexual partnerships that are now an undoubted feature both of straight and gay long-term relationships. Why, if this is so, should same-sex

couples now opt for an institution whose promises are so out of keeping with much modern practice and reality and often tainted by patriarchal considerations (such as the still common symbol of a male member of the family handing a female to a male member of another family)?

A small number of essays in this book reveal the writers as marriage hesitants. There is mention of the usual 'floodgates' argument, that same-sex marriage will lead on to legalising polygamy and to other subversive relationships. Tim Wilson insists that religious people should not be forced to perform the marriage of same-sex couples, contrary to their understandings of holy scripture. I did not read any of the contributors to say otherwise, at least in the case of ministers of religion. And so far as strong opponents of same-sex marriage relationships are concerned, although their writings are not collected in this book (which is a pity), several instances of acute hostility, recounted in these pages, show the animosity that the very idea occasions in the minds of otherwise decent fellow citizens. A particularly graphic instance of this hostility is told in the story of the neighbour "Bob", described in the powerful chapter written by Michelle Dicinovski.

Some of the strongest marriage enthusiasts, who are themselves gay, seem determined to insist on complete life-long sexual exclusive behaviour and to demand sanctions against adulterers and fornicators, just as the Old Testament proclaimed millennia ago. Happily, none of the adherents to this view appears to urge the Biblical death penalty for such behaviour. Otherwise, there would be a lot of dead bodies around Australia and some of the enthusiasm for marriage might evaporate.

Chaos and trajectory change

The editor's arrangement of the chapters by the accidental alphabetical feature of the author's surname means that the reader moves from one chapter to the next not knowing the degree of enthusiasm, scepticism, hesitancy or opposition that will be encountered. This gives the book a kind of chaotic quality. But also a degree of excitement as the reader comes to understand the diversity of opinions that exist and the contours of the issues that stand to be resolved. There is precious little attention in these pages to the special considerations that may arise in marriage as it applies to bisexual persons, transsexuals, intersex, and the residual category of 'queer' people. Overwhelmingly, this is a book about the mainstream homosexual couple, who are knocking on the door demanding from the mainstream heterosexual couples' institutions full equality, equal dignity and true respect.

Growing up in an Australia of the 1950s, a land that seemed to delight in visceral witch hunts against homosexuals, the debates in this book show, refreshingly, the ways in which human beings can adjust their thinking. The greatest dynamic for this change is scientific knowledge; empirical evidence; and the sheer ordinariness and normality of the lives of most long-term homosexual couples that makes denial to them of marriage (if they want it) now seem perverse, irrational and unkind in a secular country such as Australia.

In a decade or so when this debate is behind us, and marriage in Australia has been opened up, as elsewhere, to same-sex couples who are willing to accept its privileges and obligations, we will look back on this book as a curiosity. It will be a record for our successors to read, consider and inwardly digest. It will join the earlier books on the White Australia Policy (which lasted until 1966); the denial of Aboriginal land rights (which lasted until 1992) and other changes that came about slowly and often reluctantly in our continental nation.

The spirit of clear-eyed law reform is somewhat dormant in Australia just now. The most that we can hope for is that, almost accidentally, we will stumble, in fitful moves, towards a greater sense of the equality and dignity of all our citizens that is presently denied by a diminishing, although still determined, minority who hate and fear same-sex realities. The task of all of us, gay and straight, is to quieten that hate and overcome that fear. Just as we earlier did in the case of Asian Australians and Aborigines.

And then, perhaps, we can turn our attention to our other irrational hates and fears, including of the comparatively tiny trickle of refugees who arrive in boats claiming refuge. The challenge is never-ending. But the duty is to get right every decision made on the way to full civil equality in a truly civilised society.

MICHAEL KIRBY

Sydney

1 October 2011

'ON MY 50 YEAR ANNIVERSARY I WANT A LETTER FROM THE QUEEN'

Lynne Hillier and Tiffany Jones

When I first really came to accept the fact that I am gay, I was afraid that I would miss out on things: wouldn't be able to get married, raise a family, etc. Things I'd really wanted to do. Now I realise that's all nonsense. I can still—and will—get married to someone of my choice, and raise children with them. Being gay really is no different from being straight. And I can't wait to marry the man of my dreams and build a life with him :) (M 761)

Research in Australia consistently reveals that around 10% of young people are sexually attracted to people of their own sex or unsure about their sexual attraction. This figure remains fairly constant over a range of studies with young people in rural and urban areas, in every state and territory and from a range of ethnic backgrounds (Hillier et al. 1996; Lindsay et al. 1997; Smith et al. 2003; Smith et al. 2009).

In terms of research specifically with same-sex attracted young Australians, three national studies have been carried out: in 1998, in 2004 and in 2010. Titled *Writing Themselves In*, (*Writing Themselves In Again* in 2004 and *Writing Themselves In 3* in 2010) the research documents these young people's hopes, their dreams and their daily realities with over 5000 of these young people now having shared their stories with us. The first *Writing Themselves In*, in 1998, appears to have been a world first and described a minority group that was enduring high rates of homophobic abuse at school, at home and in the community, with one in five never having spoken to anyone about their sexual difference. These young people were having a hard time with little support, even from home. In 1998 there was little positive visibility in the media and the community of same-sex relationships or queer people in general and those that were visible were embedded in negative publicity or in films where the gay or lesbian person is tragically killed off before the end. Young people were living in hostile environments and had difficulty imagining a happy future because there

The 1998 and 2004 reports were used to inform a range of initiatives around Australia, including funding applications, curriculum materials, health promotion resources and social support groups and much was done nationally to train service providers, including teachers. The research has also informed education and Government policy as part of social change. In 2011, much has changed since the first *Writing Themselves In* report from 1998. However, the research trends are in two opposite directions: the first, an increase in homophobic abuse and the related negative health outcomes and the second, a trend to young people being more likely to be out, refusing to bow down, getting support, feeling better about their sexuality and resisting negative discourse.

There have also been societal shifts over the last 12 years in the direction of equity, visibility and support for sexual difference. The increased development of a human rights agenda relating to sexual health (Gruskin 2006; WHO 2006) has meant that same-sex attracted young people are now regarded as having the right to good health and wellbeing including up to date sexual health information and the right to an education devoid of discrimination and abuse. While various relationships bills were sporadically introduced in most Australian states by 2004, the *Same-Sex Relationships Equal Treatment General Law Reform Bill* passed through the Australian Senate in 2008, reforming 58 federal laws in order to promote equity for same-sex couples. Visibility in the media now normalises same-sex attraction and provides positive images of a gay life. There has been an increase in positive media visibility of alternate sexualities (for example, *The L Word*, *True Blood*, *Glee*, *Modern Family* and *Ellen*), and also in Australian television shows specifically (for example, openly gay contestants on *Australian Master Chef*, same-sex kisses on *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* and Aurora's Australian *Queer* TV program on Foxtel).

It might then be assumed that queer young people now live in safe, inclusive environments at school, at home and in the community. Unfortunately this is not the case. The 2010 *Writing Themselves In 3* clearly demonstrates an increase in reported rates of homophobic verbal and physical abuse, with severe impacts on young people's mental health and wellbeing. Moreover, the same-sex marriage debate continues and there have been growing campaigns for and against the rights of queer people to marry.

To understand this contradiction in the 2010 study, between apparent improvements and deteriorations in these young people's lives, one needs to reflect on the origins and entrenched nature of homophobic beliefs. Homophobia is an edifice that has taken many centuries to construct. It has

psychiatry and psychology and organised religion. Homophobic abuse is fuelled by five main clusters of beliefs, which have remained consistent over the three studies. They are listed below with young people voicing their lived experience:

1. *Same-sex love is a sin.* This belief was created by the church and young people mentioned it often:

I spoke to the priest because I was really scared that I would be committing a sin by being gay. I was informed that to be gay was OK. I just couldn't have sex with someone of the same sex 'cos that was a sin. (Rebecca, 21 years)

2. *Same-sex love is a mental illness.* This belief was created in the past by Medicine, Psychiatry and Psychology.

Stupid sick poof. You are worthless to society. You are better off killing yourself. (Noah, 15 years)

3. *Same-sex love is unnatural and abnormal.* Young people were constantly told that they were weird, freaks and that there was something wrong with them:

It was a huge rollercoaster ride of emotions for me not knowing if I were normal, acceptable etc. Growing up in a small rural community where homosexuality was seen and is still seen as 'abnormal' hurts. (Daniel 17 years)

4. *Same-sex love is a phase.* Perhaps created by Freud but used to deny or belittle those feelings.

My father dismissed it as a 'phase' and encouraged me to keep it to myself. (Goodness knows what the neighbours would think!) (Alisa, 17 years)

5. *People who love people of the same sex will live miserable lonely lives, never having children, families or lasting relationships.*

I probably could adopt kids when I'm an adult but of course there would be a lot of adversity to overcome and I wouldn't be able to have kids of my own flesh and blood. In reality—unfortunately—I see myself becoming a lonely old man. (Jared, 15 years)

As well, in Australia in the not too distant past, same sex love was a crime punished by jail and the figuration of the 'homosexual as criminal' was a strong and pervasive construction. In many countries it remains a crime today that is punishable by death. However, in all westernised countries these laws have been rescinded, some—for example, Tasmania—as recently as 1997.

In regard to the main homophobic beliefs mentioned above, most of these institutions, including our legal system, psychology and psychiatry and many parts of the church, have recanted their homophobic beliefs. However, we should never assume that we can remove lingering homophobic discourse entirely in a decade and much of it remains in force today. On a positive note, while there has been no change in the content of homophobic beliefs meted out to young people over the 12 years that we have been conducting this research, we have observed marked changes in the ways that young people manage and resist homophobic discourse. Exciting new ways to think about, to reproduce, reform and sideline homophobic beliefs have emerged and this has produced powerful new ways of dealing with homophobia. More and more as the years go by, young people resist all types of homophobic belief; however, the focus of this chapter is on only one—the denial of children and marriage, how these young people manage it, and how this has changed over the three studies. In 1998, young people were told, and believed, that they would be childless, and marriage rarely came into the picture. Only one young woman, Jill, mentioned wanting a child while still accepting without resistance that she would never be able to marry:

When I told my mum we both cried; she was disappointed, she was worried about me not being able to get married and have a family. I told her I still wanted to have a child. (Jill, 21 years)

In 1998, the dominant belief of the young people was that misery, loneliness and childlessness were the price they would have to pay for their sexual attractions. Dean was typical:

What do you say to your parents when you are an only child and know that they aren't going to have any grandchildren as such? I tell you what; I'm shitting myself over that one. I think I'll wait a while—like after I've moved out of home. (Dean 21 years)

In 2004, only six years later, young people were beginning to talk about having children and they had many ideas about how they would manage it. Marriage was not mentioned often, though some did include thoughts of marriage in their narratives. Donna and Ryan are two examples:

I'm proud of being gay and I do want to get married to a woman and raise two beautiful children with the help of my best friend Sam and his sperm. (Donna, 18 years)

I plan to get married, whether it is allowed by law or not. I will still have a ceremony; I plan to have children, a family and a wonderful life with my husband until the day we both die. (Ryan, 18 years)

Many people responded with the 'lonely miserable life' image when young people disclosed their same-sex attractions to them, but no one used it more than parents. Parents punished their children by promising them a miserable life as a same-sex attracted person and they emotionally blackmailed them by describing the unhappiness they were bringing to the family in terms of family honour and, more particularly, the loss of future grandchildren. In 2004, Andre was typical:

My parents said I'd never find someone, that I'd always be alone and unhappy and that by telling them that I was gay I'd made them depressed. Sometimes I worry about being completely alone later in life because I am gay. (Andre, 17 years)

In 2010, despite having this belief about misery and loneliness thrust on them, it was becoming clear that same-sex attracted young people were refusing to submit. They mentioned marriage and children often and had worked out many new creative ways to see themselves in the future with husbands, wives and children.

Of the 3134 young people who filled out the survey in 2010, around twenty percent mentioned marriage and/or children. There had been no reference to marriage and children in the survey and these responses were unsolicited. Marriage came up for these young people in a variety of ways. There were some examples of negative impacts of the discourse of marriage exclusion at which young people expressed anger or sadness. But there were also many examples of more direct resistance from young people, which saw them threaten to reject the nation of their birth, reject the inaction of their government and reject notions of 'equality' that do not include equal marriage rights. A further response to marriage exclusion has been the reinvigoration of a discourse of direct activism and protest amongst young people who demand change. Finally, many young people expressed the desire to be like everyone else and have the 'Australian dream with all the trimmings'. These different themes in the responses are explored below.

I can't fall asleep because I dream of things I can't have

Many young people wrote about the harmful impacts of being excluded from marriage, including feelings of rage, insomnia and a complete lack of hope. Some expressed anger at their exclusion, like Jonas (16 years) who wrote:

I hate it that in Australia I cannot get married. It makes me very angry that I cannot get married, I cannot have a wedding. I don't want a 'civil partnership', I want a wedding.

Others expressed sadness around the lack of inclusivity. Joni (19 years) and her girlfriend wanted to have kids and have a life together, but reflected ... *it's hard to think I can't have that huge girly marriage that I wanted and that my kids might have a hard time at school.* Joni was sad thinking about all the little things they will miss out on that other couples will not. Ron (19 years) also expressed sadness: *I am saddened, however, by the state of politics. In Australia (especially Queensland) same-sex relationships are barely being considered as an issue worthy of discussion.*

There were also comments like Victor's (15 years), which showed how exclusion impacted on day-to-day experience: *I can't fall to sleep, for doing so brings dreams of things I can't have due to laws being put up. I really want this wedding in the future, and with my one and only.*

Angelo (20 years) explained that being excluded from having marriage and kids meant that his entire vision for himself and hope for his future had been shattered:

The main thing I still struggle with is purpose. Coming from a Catholic Italian family, having children is the ultimate goal. I still have that feeling. I often struggle with my life's purpose. Why do I bother waking up in the morning? If my own society won't acknowledge my relationship, disallow me from having kids and subconsciously view me as a second-class citizen, then why am I bothering with it all?

It is important to recognise that the young people in the study overall, through all three reports, had significantly higher rates of suicide, self-harm and negative health impacts than heterosexual youth and this was significantly associated with having homophobic beliefs thrust on them. The way that homophobia can impact on a young person's desire to live was aptly described by Tracey (20 Years), who wrote:

There's not really much to say aside from 6 years of depression. I feel that being treated like dirt re my sexuality added to my lack of self-esteem, depression, and definitely contributed to self-harm and

And for Stefan (19 Years), the deep sorrow that he felt over his family's reaction to his sexuality was enough for him to lose his desire to live:

My existence seemed to be a burden on my family growing up and when I came out to them it just seemed to create such an emotional strain. I thought maybe if I just went away that things might be alright for them again.

We will never know the full extent of the impact on young people who have chosen to end their lives rather than speak out about the exclusions they suffered. However, for those who made it through, it was not uncommon for young people to reflect on reminders of darker times:

It gets me down when people don't accept me for who I am. Now I'm learning to deal with it but as a result of this I know how many scars that I have to live with. (Patricia, 16 years)

Despite rising levels of homophobia, young people are demanding more than ever before. They want equal rights and they want marriage and children and they have much to say about it.

It makes me want to leave this country

Some young people rejected the culture of exclusion in Australia by rejecting Australia itself. Several of them fantasised about, or committed to definite plans, of leaving the country for a place where they can legally marry. Rolf (18 years) explained that whilst he really wanted Australia to legalise same-sex marriage and adoption, he also wanted these things to happen *all over the world*, and *wouldn't mind moving to a country where these things are offered (if the government still doesn't care about me in the future)*. Katherine (15 years) was one of the young people who had more solid plans of leaving:

I have plans in the future to move to Canada, a more gay-friendly country (plus it has snow!) and I reaaaally hope to get married and have children one day, a dream I have kept since childhood. I love kids and can't wait to be a mother :) I won't let my sexuality prevent me from doing that.

We were saddened to note that so many of the young people in this study—whose witty comments, humour and openness moved us greatly—did not see this country as supporting the kind of future they dreamed of, to the extent that they would leave the nation of their birth.

The government needs to move now

Some young people rejected marriage exclusion in Australia by placing responsibility fairly and squarely with federal and state governments. Karl (16

years) accused the government of homophobia: *I will not be able to experience things straight Australians enjoy because of the homophobic government.* Nicki (21 years) saw marriage as something the government was not allowing: *My hope for the future is that I find someone who I want to spend the rest of my life with and that we can get married and have children. I hope the government allows that.* Similarly, Felicity (18 years) saw it as a decision for government officials: *I LOVE BEING GAY. I hope that the future is full of rainbows in Australia, and the government decides to give us equal rights and opportunity. I want children. I want to marry. I want to be equal.*

Howard (18 years), like many in the study, had a strong belief in the onus on Australian governments to act on behalf of voters:

My hope in the future is that the federal government will stop watering down the ACT's rights to legislate for its own people; who have voted in those people knowing full well their policies for AT LEAST civil unions to create some kind of equality.

Others like Peta (18 years) were surprised marriage equality was still even an issue:

Same sex marriage and equal rights for everyone should have been worked out years ago, and I hope it is something we can look back at and realise we did the right thing by letting everyone be happy.

These SSAGQ (Same Sex Attracted Gay and Queer) young people all saw governments as standing in the way of them having to right to marriage.

Equality equals marriage rights

Many young people argued that a denial of marriage was a denial of equal rights, which must necessarily include the right to marry the partner of their choice. There was the sense that equal marriage rights was a pivotal issue that would signpost true equality. Natalie (21 years) believed that the change in marriage laws would bring a lot of other changes with it:

I, along with my friends from the gay community, look forward to the day where we have equal rights as heterosexual couples, can get married if we choose, and adopt children as well. I also hope that the Australian community as a whole becomes more tolerant and accepting of us and people from any other minority group.

Penelope (19 years) and Marcus (18 years), like many others, were not prepared to compromise: *Gay marriage. Not this civil union bullshit—the real deal. I want equality. I want equal rights. I want there to be no stigma for who I am.* Marcus argued that the Australian Government's approval of same-sex marriages is a

vital step that needs to be taken if we (the homosexual community) are to be accepted and considered as equals.

We found that young people were quite sophisticated in their understandings of the issue, with Howard (18 years) differentiating 'gay marriage' from equal marriage, which was less exclusionary of gender diverse young people:

I feel that, even if I am never married to a member of the same sex, it is an important step for maintaining and promoting rights. This extends to EQUAL marriage; not gay marriage, which may leave out other gender diverse peoples.

The vocabulary of rights, equality and freedom came across in both the young people's hopes for themselves as individuals and for their communities more broadly.

I want my voice and the voice of my peers to be heard

Every six years, with the advent of the new research, we have seen trends in the ways young people see their worlds and 2010 was no different. In this third study we were inspired by the spirit of activism and determination in these young people, something that was missing in 1998 and to a lesser extent in 2004. The gay-lib style discourse of direct activism and protest that had been popular in the late sixties and seventies has re-emerged amongst young people who now demand change, but with a different flavour. With changes in the law and in societal attitudes, the protestors are more likely to have police protection than to be arrested or abused by police, and there is a pleasure in sociality with peers and family rather than in anti-social behaviour. Young people are now more visible and more outspoken—they want to be heard.

In regard to marriage, Penelope (19 years), said: *I want to speak up. I want my voice and the voices of my peers to be heard.* Likewise, Lola (15 years) was committed to marriage activism: *I'm continuing to attend all the gay marriage rights and equal rights rallies and events that we have in Sydney.* Young people were protesting with, and without, their families' knowledge. Marisa (21 years) was lucky enough to have her mother with her on the march: *One of the best times this year was marching with my mum in the equal love protests.* On the street, in the press, on online forums, social networking sites and YouTube, there is a strong and highly sociable youth culture of activism on this issue. A third of all young people in the 2010 research discussed engaging in Internet activism.

Just like everyone else: I want that huge girly marriage

The wish to be treated just like everyone else was repeated over and over by these young people. Where gay liberationists in the activism of the past had called for an end to violence and discrimination by coming out in public and asserting pride in their difference, one of the most striking aspects of the youth backlash against Australian marriage exclusion is their assertion of sameness. However, this is not the sameness asserted by the politically conservative homophile activism that preceded gay-lib, where homosexuals made a point of downplaying their sexuality and representing themselves as discreet and virtuous. The sameness is more around sharing a wish for the clichés of the Australian dream of a happy marriage with all its trimmings and a banal but pleasant lifestyle. Adam (19 years) hoped for acceptance in the future, arguing that this included the hope:

for gay marriage to be legalised, for gay adoption to be legalised and for social equality between all different types of minorities. I think i will be waiting at least another 5 - 10 years for this to happen but then even that, i think, is optimistic; but i do have hope one day that sexuality will be like coffee, some people like it this way some people like it that way and no one could care less what way you like it just as long as they get it the way they want.

Alissa (19 years) wanted a conventional proposal—but from her girlfriend: *I want my partner to be able to get down upon bended knee and slide a ring on my finger.* Monty (17 years) wanted a traditional wedding, but with a twist: *I would like to have 1 child and have a traditional style wedding. I plan on living my homosexual lifestyle to the fullest and proudest everyday :-).* Joni was particularly disappointed that on my 50-year anniversary I don't get a letter from the queen.

Young people had clear ideas about their ideal mate. Charles, (19 years) wanted to marry a *successful and driven, educated, tall, hot blonde*—except that his blonde would be male. His white picket-fence dream included the classic middle-class travel ideal: *I want to see the world but not below 3.5 stars, and a son named Preston.* Colin (19 years) *looked forward to meeting Mr Right*—a phrase previously depicting heterosexual clichés. Beth (17 years), like anyone raised in a Jewish family, looked forward to finding that nice Jewish girl and hoped that their kids *will be accepted by others for having two mums.* Dean (17 years) wanted to finish school, go to uni, become a plastic surgeon, get married to a man, buy a house and settle down, have a child or two. Jenna (17 years) elaborated a plan that included love, a commitment, IVF or adoption, a baby, a family, a nice little family home and going to work every day like everyone else.

Bernard (17 years) had a similar dream for himself and a future, would-be husband:

I've already told people that it is my aim to settle down with someone in a committed and monogamous relationship and raise a family. I understand that there will be many issues in relation to adoption of children as well the legal recognition of our love and relationship, but I believe that as the Australian society changes and becomes more accepting of homosexuality, the law will also change to reflect this.

Toni (16 years) envisaged a world in which gender diversity won't limit the possibility of achieving a happy, safe, family-oriented lifestyle:

I hope in future, I'll find a beautiful woman to share the rest of my life with, and when the time comes, we can marry with ALL my family there and start a family of our own and our family can live in safety and in happiness. If my child is straight, okay, if my child is homosexual, okay! If my child is gender queer, okay!

These young people have a vision of sameness, but with a twist.

Some conclusions

Overall, it is clear that young Australian SSAGQ people are not sitting on the fence of the marriage debate. They are unapologetic about their existence and happy to take a stand. But unlike previous generations of gay liberationists and lesbian feminist radicals who fiercely and proudly asserted their differences from heterosexuals and bitingly critiqued the marriage construct, these young people do not espouse dreams of hanging out in inner-city gay ghettos, or dancing under the moonlight in segregated communities.

These young people want their chance at marriage and children and a letter from the queen on their golden anniversary. They believe their individual differences such as their sexual preference or gender diversity are just part of the norm. They want the same opportunity other Australians have: to do 'the marriage thing', but to do it differently this time around—enjoying some of the more harmless traditions, but casting aside those that are exclusionary or not to their tastes.

And while some of them are certainly struggling with the fact that some members of their societies and governments do not share this vision, others are taking a stand by threatening to leave Australia, making demands, speaking out, or even making plans for future possibilities they consider likely. Today, the main message from young people is that children, family and marriage are incredibly important to them. They believe they have a right to them, they see them in their futures, and they will not be denied them.

*I want to fall in love.
I want to be able to curl up in a warm bed with the woman I love and who loves me,
and to forget all those horrible discriminative people in the outside world.
I want to be able to go out to dinner with my partner
and not feel like the whole world is watching.*

I want my partner to be able to get down upon bended knee and slide a ring on my finger.

I want marriage, or a legal commitment ceremony.

I want to grow old with the woman I love without being labeled a freak.

I want to be able to feel all full of butterflies when I go on that first date,

I want to be seduced and fall in love with a lovely woman. (Sally 17 years)

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