

## Same-sex relationships and family formation

APA Seminar: *The Australian Family: What does it look like in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,*

March 23, 2015

Dr Deb Dempsey

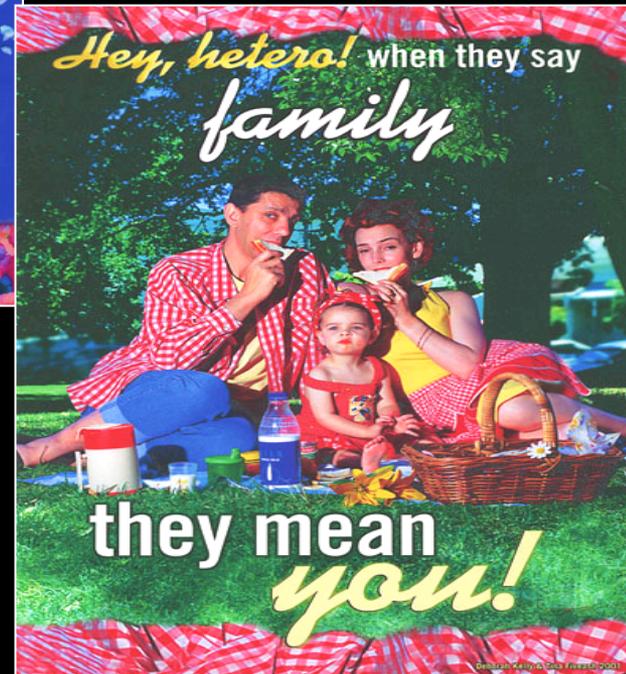
Faculty of Health, Arts and Design

**Swinburne**

▶ think forward



Deborah Kelly and Tina Fiveash, 2001, *Hey Hetero*, Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Arts Festival



## Between 2001 and 2015, a lot has changed...

- Lesbian and single heterosexual women have won right to use sperm banks and IVF in Victoria and some other Australian states
- The *Federal Family Law Amendment (de facto Financial Matters and Other Measures) Act 2008* now enables cohabiting same-sex couples legal protection under the Family Law Act with regard to child and property concerns
- Civil union schemes exist in four Australian states and the ACT in addition to this federal recognition of same-sex cohabiting relationships
- Lesbian couples in Western Australia, NSW, Victoria, ACT and Tasmania now have legal parenting rights from the time of a child's birth as long as the lesbian co-parent consented to the birth mother's donor insemination pregnancy

Marriage rights for same-sex couples yet to come...

Adoption rights also, in Victoria...

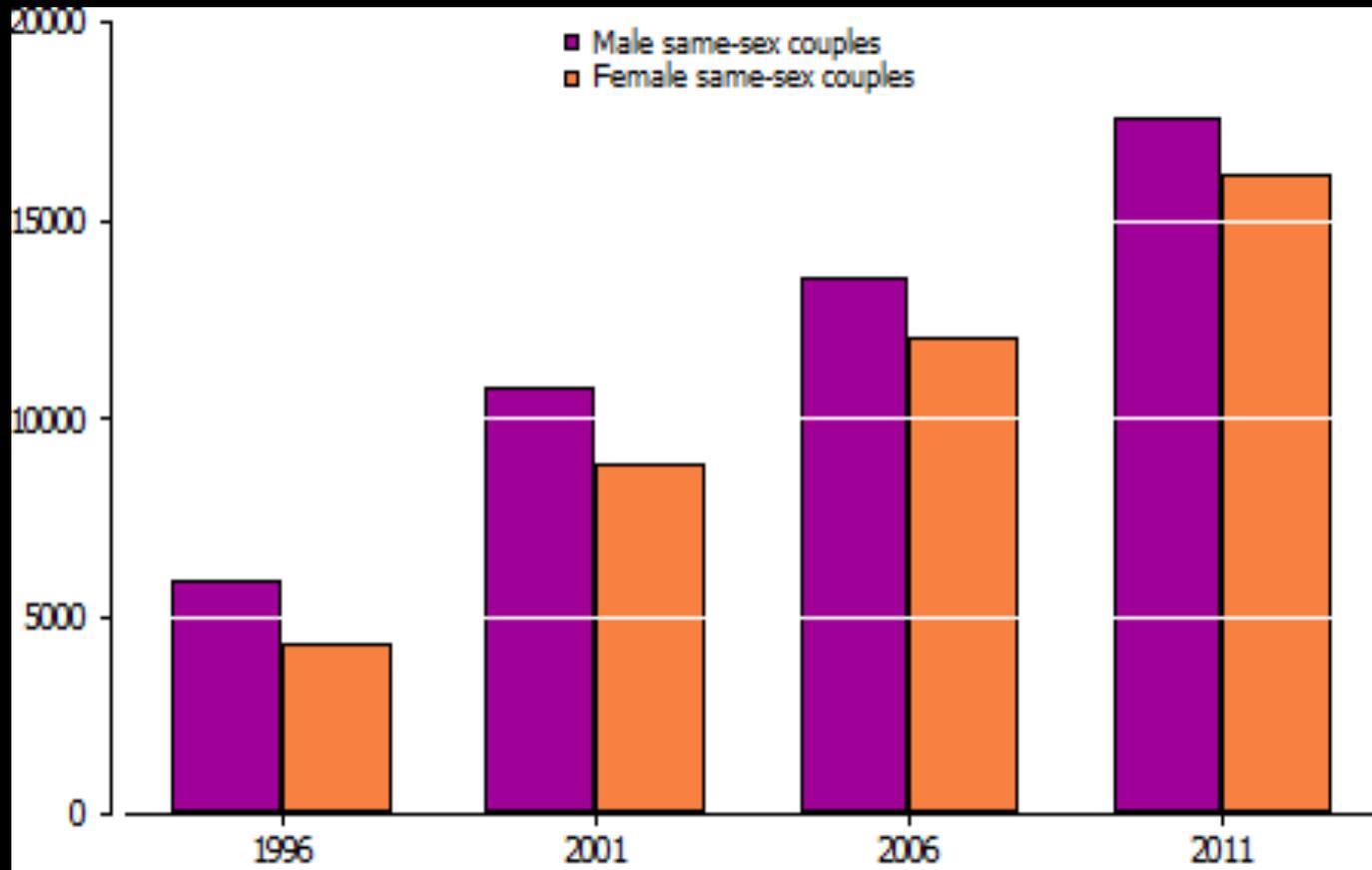
## Families of choice thesis:

- > Weston (1991) *Families We Choose*
- > Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001) *Same-Sex Intimacies*

**Key debate:** Assimilation to heterosexual couple and nuclear family norms or distinctiveness?

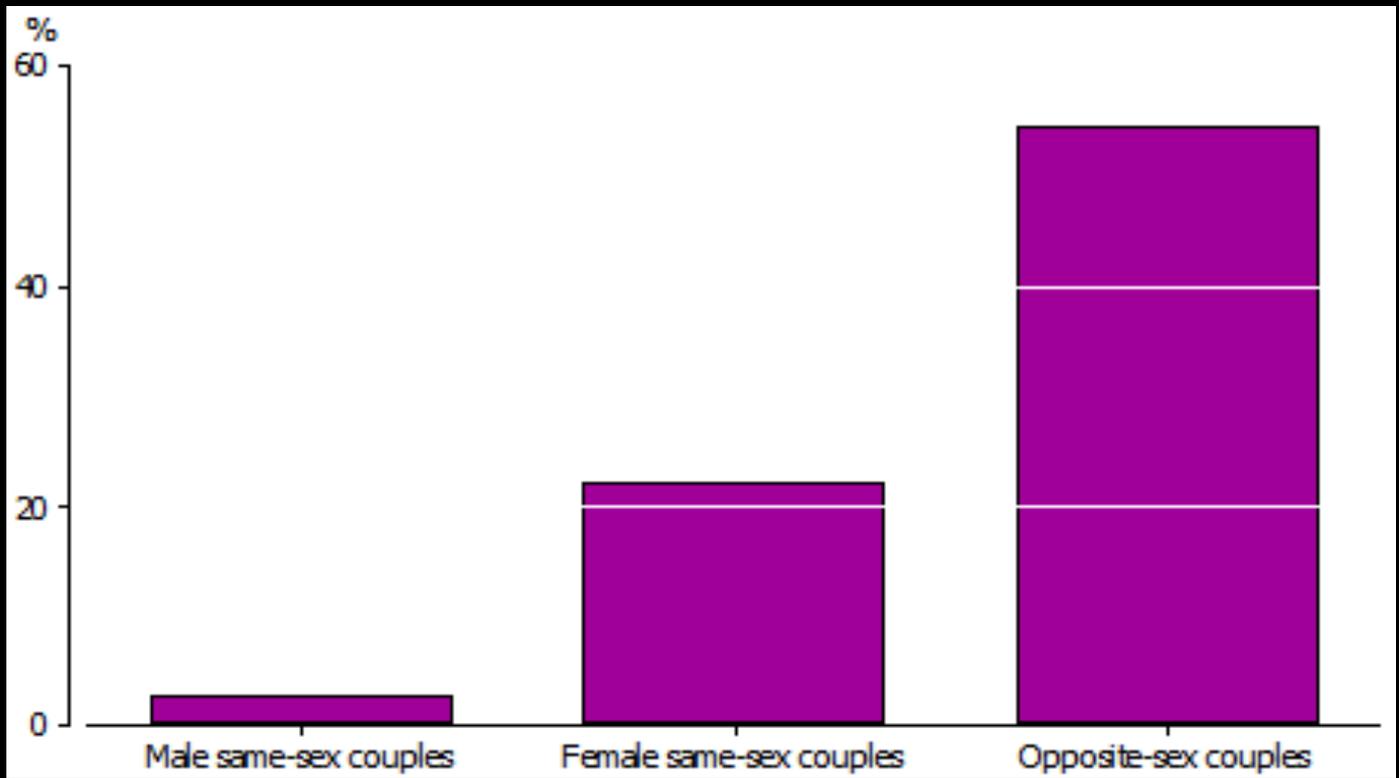
- > Importance of monogamy
- > Couple-based families or families of friends?
- > Cohabitation?
- > Two parents?

# Fig. 1: Numbers of same-sex couples in Australia 1996-2011



Source: 2011 Census of Population and Housing, Catalogue 4102.0, Australian Social Trends, July 2013.

# Fig. 2 Percentage of couples with resident children, Australia 2011



(a) Includes all dependent and non-dependent children in the family.  
Source: 2011 Census of Population and Housing, Catalogue 4102.0,  
Australian Social Trends 2013.

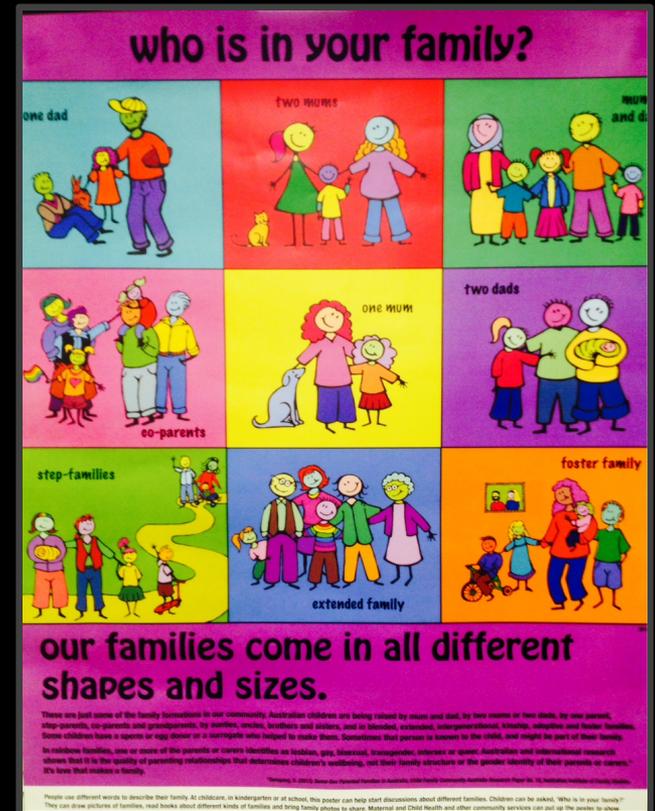
Community surveys indicate 11% of Australian gay men and 33% of lesbians have children (includes non-resident children)

# Diversity in Australian same-sex parented families

Cohabiting couple based families numerically

dominant in community surveys. Many variations:

- ◆ Children conceived or adopted in prior heterosexual relationships
- ◆ Couples and singles who have children through foster care/permanent care arrangements
- ◆ Children born to lesbian couples (usually DI or IVF, known or anonymous male donor)
- ◆ Children born to gay male couples (usually surrogacy)
- ◆ Sole-parented families (often women, DI or IVF)
- ◆ Multi-parent models (co-parenting lesbian and gay couples, lesbian couple and non-resident 'donor-dad')
- ◆ Blended and step variations of the above



*A resource kit for early childhood services, primary schools and the rainbow families who use them.*

*Produced by the Rainbow Families Council, Victoria, 2014*

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

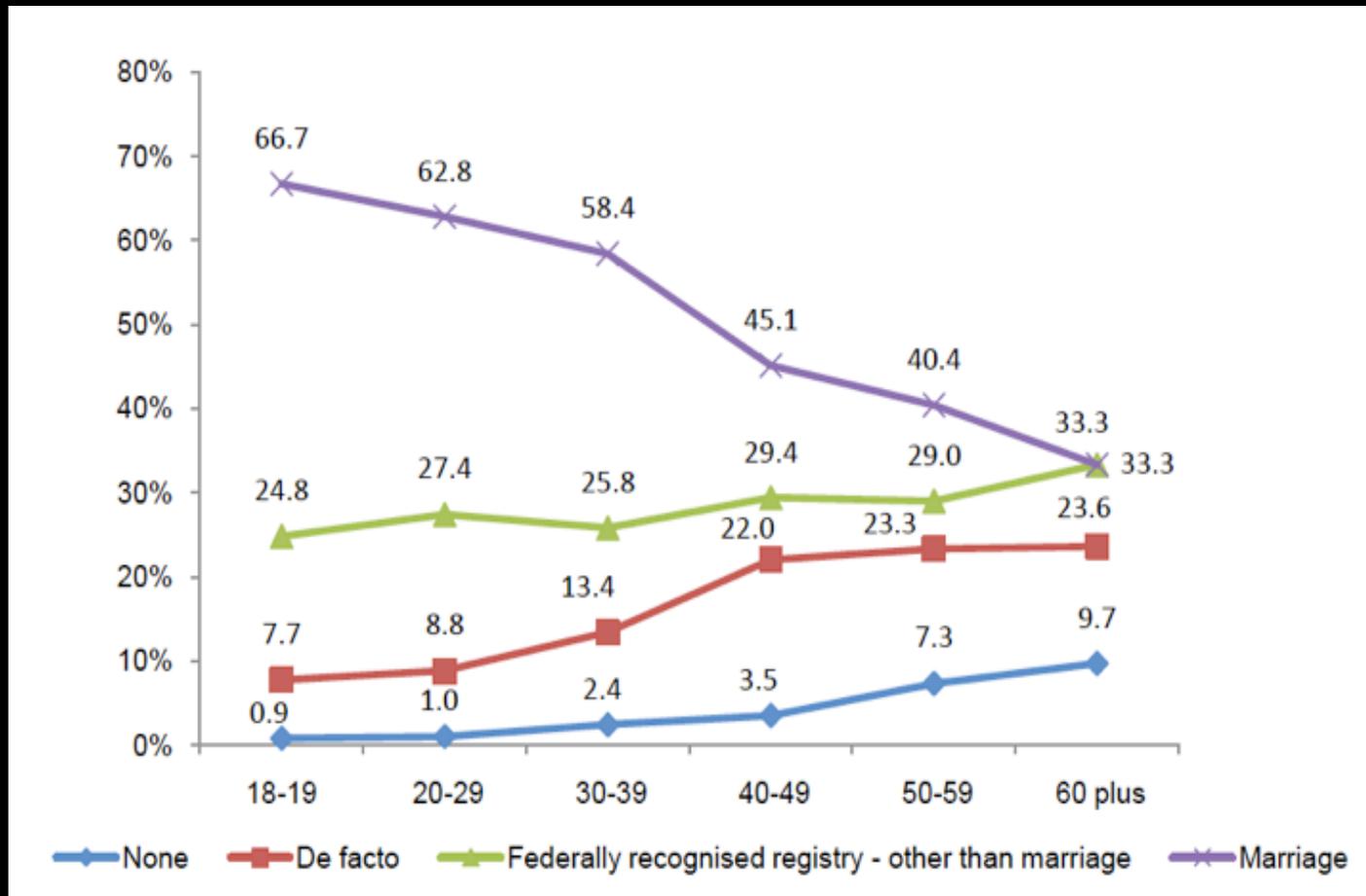
	PL2 2011 (16–89 years)	Census 2011 (15+ years) <sup>a</sup>
	%	%
Living with partner (with or without children)	47	59
Living alone	23	12
Housemate/group household member	22	5
Lone parent	4	6
Living with parents or relatives	17	17
Unrelated individual living in family household	2	1
Total	115 <sup>b</sup>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

<sup>a</sup>Persons in occupied private dwellings, excluding those who were not at home on census night

<sup>b</sup>Percentages do not add to 100 because the PL2 survey allowed for multiple responses

Source: Private Lives 2 Survey (Leonard et al 2012) and ABS Census 2011

**Fig.3. Personal preference for relationship recognition among LGBT adults by age (n = 1877)**



Source: Not-so-Private Lives Survey (Dane et al. 2010), p. 44.

## In closing...

Although marriage rights represent the final frontier to many Australian same-sex couples, it is important not to lose sight of the ways in which same-sex attracted Australians organize their personal lives beyond the cohabiting couple and nuclear family model that marriage assumes.

‘Pluralisation strategy’ needed  
(Richardson-Self 2012)



Alan Wright, left, and Joel Player became Australia's first same-sex married couple, at 12.01am on December 7 2013 in Canberra. Their marriage was later invalidated due to a Federal Government ruling on marriage

*Photo: Karleen Minney*

SWIN  
BUR  
\* NE \*

SWINBURNE  
UNIVERSITY OF  
TECHNOLOGY

[ddempsey@swin.edu.au](mailto:ddempsey@swin.edu.au)

**Swinburne**  
▶ think forward