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AFFECTIVE AND INTIMATE LIVES

> The traditional family ... is clearly losing the monopoly that it for so long enjoyed. Its quantitative significance is declining with the spread of new lifestyles which do not usually aim at living alone but seek ties of a different kind: for example, cohabitation without a marriage certificate or without children; a single-parent family, 'conjugal succession' or a same-sex partnership; weekend relationships and part-life companionship; living in more than one household or between different towns. So, more and more intermediate forms, before, alongside and after the family, are appearing on the scene: these are the contours of the 'post-familial family'.[1]

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the families in which participants grew up – their family of origin and then the families they themselves formed as adults – that is, their current family. And secondly, it examines their relationship status, that is, whether they were single or in a couple relationship. The overwhelming majority were born and raised in nuclear families and two grew up in extended families.

When describing their current family, more than half referred only to their birth family, about one quarter cited their couple relationship as their family, and a relatively small number said that they had formed a 'family of choice'. In terms of relationship status, a substantial majority ($n = 29$) were in couple relationships from 1 or 2 years to more than 40 years, and 14 were single, ranging from between 1 or 2 years at the time of interview to those who had

1 Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2002) *Reinventing the Family: In Search of New Lifestyles*, trans. P. Camiller (Cambridge: Polity Press), p. 10.

been single all of their adult life.[2] As shown below, participants' relationships included a variety of forms – from common law (or de facto) to civil union, civil partnership and marriage.

In order to give some context before discussing these findings, the next two sections provide a brief outline of the principal features firstly of households and family and how these contributed to understanding the household or family settings of gay people and secondly of the couple relationship and its bearing on those that gay people established for themselves.

HOUSEHOLD AND FAMILY

Two terms that sociologists and historians frequently use when examining domestic accommodation arrangements in human settlements are household and family. The term 'household' is used to describe a range of different domestic accommodation settings including solitaries, nuclear families and extended families. As the name implies, 'solitaries' refers to a single-person household,[3] while the ubiquitous nuclear family refers to the arrangement where a conjugal couple and their children live together under one roof. The extended family, meanwhile, can comprise different generations related by birth, more than one married couple from the same generation,[4] or, in earlier times, include farm workers or servants unrelated by birth to other household members.[5] It is used also to describe accommodation arrangements where two siblings or two relations of another sort live together.[6]

Because of its ubiquity and persistence, a brief word about the nuclear family is called for here. Sociologists and historians maintain that from the beginning of the modern period, that is, the sixteenth century in Europe, its principal features have been as the approved site for sexual relations between adults,[7] for

2 See Appendix 2.

3 Wall, R. in collaboration with Rodin, J. and Laslett, P. (eds.) (1983) *Family Forms in Historic Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 2, 47.

4 Sennett, R. (1992) *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company), p. 177.

5 Wall, *Family Forms*, pp. 45, 128–129, 212.

6 Wall, *Family Forms*, pp. 128–129.

7 Elias, N. (2000, 1939) *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, trans. E. Jephcott with some notes and corrections by the author and edited by E. Dunning, J. Goudsblom and S. Mennell, Revised edition (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd), p. 138; Muchembled, R. (2008) *Orgasm and the West: The History of Pleasure From the Sixteenth Century to the Present*, trans. J. Birrell (Cambridge: Policy Press), p. 24.

the reproduction and care of children,[8] the transmission of property through inheritance,[9] the care of the elderly and avoidance of loneliness[10] and the creation of identity and a 'shield of privacy'.[11] As the quotation at the head of the chapter suggests, however, the nuclear family is now one of many household types that exist and are available to people in advanced western societies, for, as its author Beck-Gernsheim argued, increased individualization in advanced western societies has been seen as the cause of rising divorce rates[12] increased acceptance of single parenting, same-sex coupling in many forms, and living alone.

Household or Family Settings of Gay Men

Gay men's involvement in household or family formation has included roles as varied as: husbands and fathers in heterosexual relationships including marriage; co-parenting as partners or single men with lesbian couples or heterosexual couples; anonymous sperm donors in artificial insemination programmes; and finally, as partners themselves in couple relationships.

As husbands and fathers, there are early examples of gay men and lesbians marrying in 1960s in order to pass as heterosexual married couples,[13] of men with same-sex preferences marrying in order to provide heirs, secure transfer of property or for social status or who married because of social pressure but then separated from their wives or de facto partners and came out later in life.[14] In the last instance, depending on the age when they separated from their previous wife or female partner, they could themselves establish their own household – also known as a blended family or a family of choice (see below) –

8 Stone, L. (1977) *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson), pp. 21–22.

9 Simmel, G. (1999, 1895) 'On the Sociology of the Family', trans. M. Ritter and D. Frisby in M. Featherstone (ed.) *Love and Eroticism* (London: SAGE Publications), p. 289; Shorter, E. (1976) *The Making of the Modern Family* (London: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd), p. 15.

10 Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, pp. 21–22.

11 Shorter, *Modern Family*, pp. 205, 5; Ariès, P. (1973, 1960) *Centuries of Childhood* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books), pp. 397–398.

12 Beck, U. and Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2008) *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and Its Social and Political Consequences* (London: SAGE Publications), pp. 94–96.

13 Dank, B. M. (1971) 'Coming Out in the Gay World', in *Psychiatry*, 34: 180–183.

14 Plummer, K. (1995) *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change and Social Worlds* (London: Routledge), p. 153; Robinson, P. (2008) *The Changing World of Gay Men* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 30–31.

with a male partner and children from their previous heterosexual relationship and/or their partner's previous heterosexual relationship.

The co-parenting arrangement is a relatively more recent development occurring when two same-sex attracted couples agree to be co-parents, that is, when a lesbian couple and a gay couple between them conceive and give birth to a child.[15] Whether or not the two couples and their progeny are living together under the same roof, the family they create could be known as an alternative family or family of choice (more below).

While artificial (or alternative) insemination might or might not be used for co-parenting, it has itself a long undocumented history as a means of parenting and fatherhood, perhaps as long as the history of insemination. In more recent times, there is evidence both of an alternative insemination boom in the USA in the 1980s and also documented evidence of its practice from the 1930s in the USA.[16] Adoption and foster parenting are other family options for gays and lesbians.[17]

While anthropologists and historians might possibly categorize them as comprising households, couples who live together without children or other relatives are regarded also as constituting a family and, in doing so, are similar in some ways – but not for inheritance purposes – as two siblings living together under one roof. As is shown below, at least one participant said that he regarded his husband and himself as a family.

As well as the everyday parenting experiments just outlined, there is a slightly more formalized family type known as the 'family of choice', which is peculiar to gays and lesbians. The term was first coined in San Francisco in the 1980s to denote an alternative family type comprising, 'friends, lovers, or children, in any combination'.[18] By the late 1990s, the term as well as the idea behind it had become part of an accepted family form among historians of sex and sexuality, with an equivalent status among same-sex people as that which applied to the birth family: 'For many non-heterosexuals the term "family"

15 See discussion below in Family of Choice section of 57-year-old participant's account of his and his partner's experience of raising their son and co-parenting with a lesbian couple.

16 Regarding date of first report of artificial insemination, no mention was made of it in a detailed study of gay and lesbian life in the San Francisco Bay area in the late 1960s: Bell, M. P. and Weinberg, A. P. (1978) *Homosexualities: A Study of Diversity Among Men and Women* (Melbourne: The Macmillan Company of Australia). For reference to alternative insemination boom in 1980s and evidence of one woman's views on it from 1930s, see Weston, K. (1997) *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (New York: Columbia University Press), pp. 167–168; lesbian baby boom, USA, pp. 168–169.

17 Weston, *Families We Choose*, p. 167.

18 Weston, *Families We Choose*, p. 27.

embraces a variety of selected relationships that includes lovers, possibly ex-lovers, intimate friends, as well as blood relatives, and is as real as the family of origin'.[19]

THE COUPLE RELATIONSHIP

The couple relationship is not only, when conducted on its own and without children, one of the many family or household forms but also, when the couple lives under one roof with children related by birth, the central feature and at the heart of the nuclear family. From the middle of the twentieth century, when changes in contraception, divorce, education and employment liberated women from the dominant male culture,[20] and began to upset gendered assumptions about the private and public spheres, alternatives to the fixed, idealized and relatively permanent form of the couple relationship as marriage became more available.

These alternatives included, for example, the common-law or de facto relationship, successive relationships, also known as serial monogamy, or co-existing relationships in the form of polyamory. Despite the alternatives to it, marriage did not lose its attractiveness, however, as is evident in the high rates of remarriage that continue to counter-balance high rates of divorce.[21] The image that 'family' offers is still one of the emotional security for the raising and caring for children as well as other advantages in the form of a reduced fear of abandonment and greater security for making long-term financial commitments in, for example, property and private transport.[22] Data on domestic violence, however, suggest that the image of the family as source of emotional security is not always the case in reality,[23] and the data on

19 Weeks, J. (2000) *Making Sexual History* (Cambridge: Polity Press), p. 219.

20 Muchembled, R. (2008) *Orgasm and the West: The History of Pleasure From the Sixteenth Century to the Present*, trans. J. Birrell (Cambridge: Policy Press), p. 34.

21 Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Normal Chaos*, pp. 171, 175.

22 Cherlin, A. J. (2004) 'The Deinstitutionalization of American Marriage', in *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66: 855.

23 Sardinha, L. and Nájera Catalán, H. E. (2018) 'Attitudes Towards Domestic Violence in 49 Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Gendered Analysis of Prevalence and Country-Level Correlates', in *PLoS One* 13(10): e0206101. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0206101 accessed 15 November 2022.

marital satisfaction suggested that men continue to find marriage more advantageous than do women.[24]

Sociologists such as Bauman, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, Giddens, and Sennett argue that growing commercialization and individualization in advanced western countries has transformed intimacy into an exchange relationship,[25] such that there is a growing number of people who no longer marry as couples once did, that is, for life and in order to pass on wealth or property, but in the hope of attaining a very personal goal of finding themselves.[26] The function of the couple relationship, as formalized in marriage or less formally as 'a relationship',[27] must now provide in some settings for the emotional and sexual needs of each partner and endures only for as long as it continues to meet the needs of both partners.[28] Critics of this new style of relationship with its 'use-by date' observe that while it could suit middle-class, urban, professional people without children, it would not suit couples who want to raise children.[29]

Gay Couple Relationships

Slightly less than two millennia before the political agitation for same-sex marriage in the late twentieth century, there were examples of formalized same-sex unions in ancient Rome that were roughly comparable to heterosexual marriage in that they were, 'publicly recognised … entailing some change in status for one or both parties'.[30] There is evidence also of same-sex

24 Regarding men's happiness in marriage, see: Dobrowolska, M., et.al. (2020) 'Global Perspective on Marital Satisfaction', in *Sustainability* 12(21): 8817. https://doi.org/10.3390/su12218817 accessed 15 November 2022.

25 Bauman, Z. (2001) *The Individualized Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press), pp. 156–157; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Normal Chaos*, p. 7; Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press), pp. 88–89; Sennett, *The Fall*, pp. 8–10.

26 Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Normal Chaos*, p. 172.

27 Giddens, A. (1992) *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Cambridge: Polity Press), p. 58.

28 Bauman, Z. (2001) *The Individualized Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press), pp. 156–157; Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, pp. 88–98.

29 Cherlin, 'The Deinstitutionalization', p. 858.

30 Boswell, J. (1995) *The Marriage of Likeness: Same Sex Unions in Pre-Modern Europe* (London: Harper Collins), pp. 80–7.

marriage ceremonies conducted with the approval of the church in Medieval Europe and until the sixteenth century.[31]

During the HIV-AIDS epidemic of 1980s and 1990s, the frequently documented experience of the next of kin taking precedence over a dying man's partner at his end of life underlined the importance of formalizing gay couple relationships and added impetus to movements in favour of same-sex marriage that had already begun with the lesbian baby boom and early experiments in gay parenting.[32] Before the passing of same-sex marriage legislation in advanced western countries, the changes mentioned in the previous section – which were already taking place in heterosexual couple relationships – meant that from the 1990s there appeared to be very little or no difference between relationships conducted by heterosexuals or homosexuals.[33] Gay common-law (or de facto) relationships had existed since the late 1980s: in Denmark, for example, registered partnerships – equivalent to marriage for same-sex couples[34] – were introduced in 1989.[35] Marriage equality was legalized between 2004 and 2017 in the countries the men lived who were interviewed for this book, often in stages, namely with the passing of legislation to legalize registered partnerships or civil unions and then later with the same for same-sex marriage.[36]

31 Boswell, *Marriage of Likeness*, pp. 262–264.

32 Chauncey, G. (2004) *Why Marriage? The History Shaping Today's Debate Over Gay Equality* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books Group), p. 3; Hekma, G. (1999) 'Same-Sex Relations Among Men in Europe, 1700–1990', in F. X. Elder, L. A. Hall and G. Hekma (eds.) *Sexual Cultures in Europe: Themes in Sexuality* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), pp. 99–100; Weston *Families We Choose*, pp. 168–175.

33 Weeks, *Sexual History*, p. 214.

34 Reid, K., de Waal, M. and Zimmermann, R. (2015) 'Intestate Succession in Historical and Comparative Perspective', in Reid, et.al. (eds.) *Comparative Succession Law: Volume II: Intestate Succession* (Oxford Scholarship Online), p. 503. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198747123.001.0001.

35 Bech, H. (1997) *When Men Meet: Homosexuality and Modernity*, trans. T. Mequit and T. Davies (Cambridge: Polity Press), p. 270.

36 For dates when registered partnership or civil union were introduced in Canada, United Kingdom, New Zealand and when same-sex marriage was legalized in all states of the USA, see: Reid, de Waal and Zimmermann, 'Intestate Succession', p. 503; for account of the passing of marriage equality legislation by the Australian federal government, see: Zimmerman, T. (2022) 'Menace, Brinkmanship, Joy: How Marriage Equality Made It Through Australia's Parliament', in *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/nov/15/menace-brinkmanship-joy-how-marriage-equality-made-it-through-australian-parliament accessed 15 November 2022.

Controversies associated with the campaign for same-sex marriage legislation included resistance from conservatives who disapproved of its challenge to their view of the immutable nature of marriage as the bedrock of traditional society,[37] as well as from GLBT activists and scholars who were concerned that same-sex marriage would set up a hierarchy of relationships, normalizing and valorizing marriage and that it would strengthen the impulse to homo-normativity.[38] Scholars argued also that the public debates did not allow for a more detailed investigation of contemporary relational arrangements.[39]

Gays, lesbians and their supporters who favoured same-sex marriage argued that its legalization would bring them improved tax, inheritance, next-of-kin, and insurance benefits,[40] greater impetus for monogamy and permanence in relationships, that is, 'enforceable trust', and security for those who wanted to have children, as well as an opportunity for the symbolic and material celebration of their union and greater opportunity for personal growth.[41] It has been argued also that the passing of marriage equality legislation was for 'non-heterosexual communities' a final step away from an identity focus to a focus on intimacy,[42] that is, that marriage equality legislation occurred in many advanced western countries because the gay liberation movement had succeeded in establishing citizenship equality and thus prepared its way. The next section examines the data on participants' family settings. And the section after that discusses their relationship status.

37 Frew, C. (2010) 'The Social Construction of Same-Sex Marriage in Australia: Implications for Same-Sex Unions', in *Law in Context*, 28(1): 78, 84.

38 Homonormativity is a term first used to describe the dominant values of western, gay culture by Lisa Duggan in her 2003 work, *The Twilight of Equality? Neo-liberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press).

39 Donovan, C. (2004) 'Why Reach for the Moon? Because the Stars Aren't Enough', in *Feminism and Psychology*, 14: 24, 25–28; Herdt, G. (2009) 'Gay Marriage: The Panic and the Right', in G. Herdt (ed.) *Moral Panics, Sex Panics: Fear and the Fight Over Sexual Rights* (New York: New York University Press), pp. 174, 191–192; Stacey, J. (2004) 'Marital Suitors Court Social Science Spinsters: The Unwittingly Conservative Effects of Public Sociology', in *Social Problems*, 51: 1, 135.

40 Nussbaum, M. C. (1999) *Sex and Social Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press), p. 201.

41 Cherlin, 'The Deinstitutionalization', pp. 851, 853–854, 857.

42 Weeks, J., Heaphy, B. and Donovan, C. (2001) *Same Sex Intimacies: Families of Choice and Other Life Experiments* (London: Routledge), p. 164.

PARTICIPANTS' FAMILY SETTINGS

This section is devoted firstly to the family background of the participants, that is, the type of family in which they were raised and is referred to as the family of origin; and secondly the type of family that they themselves established, which is referred to here as their current family. Between each of these is a sub-section devoted to an examination of the stories of a small group who experienced family estrangement. All participants were asked the same question, namely, 'Would you briefly tell me the story of your family relationships?' And their answers provided the data for this section of the chapter.

Family of origin is the family into which they were born or in the case of adopted children the family into which they were brought and then raised. Current family could include any members of their remaining family of origin and any family that they themselves created with children who they or their partner/husband fathered when in a previous relationship with a female or adopted, or the family which they created as a matter of choice – their family of choice – comprising, as mentioned above, friends, siblings and others designated family members.

Family estrangement is not peculiar to gays and lesbians but frequently occurs if parents or other family members refused to accept their sexuality. Earlier research suggested that difficulties with family members was a relatively common experience for gay men from the Baby Boomer generation, namely those who came out following the injunction to do so during the gay liberation era.[43] About a fifth of the sample recounted stories of uneasy, unhappy or traumatic relations with their family of origin or other family members, from whom they were estranged.[44] Whether or not family estrangement influenced decisions concerning wills and beneficiaries is discussed in the next chapter.

Participants' Family of Origin

Almost all participants referred to their family of origin when telling the story of their family. The vast majority were born and grew up in a nuclear family. A small handful had experience of extended-family-life and blended-family-life, and one man was adopted by his older brother and sister-in-law when his

43 Robinson, *Changing World*, pp. 46–52.

44 Eight participants or slightly less than one fifth of the sample were estranged from their family of origin or family members.

parents died. In the following section, the participants' accounts are discussed of their experience of various types of families of origin, that is, the nuclear family, the blended family or the extended family.

Nuclear Family

A participant with an uncommon experience of nuclear-family-life was the oldest in the sample, 88-year-old Atticus from California. And it was he whose oldest brother and sister-in-law adopted him as their child after the death of his parents:

> I was the last one of the seven ... My mother was in her 40s when I was born. She passed away when I was three years old and my father six months later ... I was then adopted by my oldest brother who was 21-years old. He had been married a year and found out that his wife could not have children. He was actually placed [as] my legal guardian and then within a couple of years they legally adopted me. My brother and sister-in-law became my mother and my father and I treated them as such my whole life.

The remaining 39 participants who were born and grew up in nuclear families had these characteristics: two had no siblings and were an 'only child'; 11 were the youngest child; nine were the oldest child; one was the first born of triplets; and two came from large families where they had seven or more siblings. Aside from mention of their siblings, other features of family relations that arose in the interviews were, in order: parents' relationships, both harmonious and troubled; divorce and re-marriage; relations with nephews, nieces and cousins. Participants' focus on these experiences of the nuclear family tended to support one of the arguments made in the previous section on the principal roles of the nuclear family, namely, for the reproduction and care of children and as the approved site for sexual relations between adults.[45]

Blended Family

There were two men with experience of blended families: one from the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) who was in his 80s and one from England in his 50s. The older gave a short account of three stepsisters who lived abroad and the second of affectionate family relations which continued after his parents divorced and remarried: 'I am very lucky to have two step-sisters and

45 Shorter, *Modern Family*, p. 205.

their related-extras and a stepmother because Dad remarried … There is very happy energy in visits to … where the rest of the family still lives' (Ellis, 56, London).

Extended Family

The two men who grew up in extended families were from the ACT and both were in their 70s. The first, Edward (aged 77) explained that his father, who was illegitimate, had been brought up by his great-grandmother and that then Edward's grandmother was influential in his own upbringing as a child in Queensland:

> My maternal grandmother was very important and like a lot of grandmothers actually kind of brought me up. You know, she'd read to me in the afternoons or actually I'd read to her because I knew what the story was and I remembered it and she went off to sleep.

Like many Queensland families, Edward's family took in US servicemen during World War II.[46] And these he remembered for the positive effect that their presence in the family home had for his self-confidence: 'We had Americans sleeping on the veranda and that was Queensland. There were people everywhere and I was accustomed to adults talking with me and I talking with them'.

For the second man who grew up in an extended family, it was also the feminine influence of the additional relative who shared his parents' house with them that he remembered. In his case, it was his mother's cousin whose affection he recalled when describing his family relations: 'My mother's cousin lived with us. She was a single lady … loving and caring and … a surrogate grandmother because of her kindness' (Lewis, aged 74, ACT).

In both cases, the men found in their extended family something akin to, 'a sharing, a mutuality, a kind of protection often unknown to persons in a nuclear family'. And not the 'oppressive chains' which Sennett and Cobb argued can occur elsewhere and at other times in extended families.[47]

46 For US presence in Australia during World War II, see Macintyre, S. (2004) *A Concise History of Australia*, 2nd ed. (Port Melbourne: Cambridge University Press), pp. 192–196.

47 Sennett, R. and Cobb, J. (1993, 1972) *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (New York: Alfred Knopf), p. 107.

Estrangement

Family estrangement can take many forms and occurs for a variety of reasons. In the sample of men interviewed for this book, eight were estranged from family members. Some were estranged from their entire family, a slightly smaller number from their parents, while a handful from their siblings. Homophobia was often but not always the cause of the estrangement. All were in their 50s and their accounts varied from stories of intense estrangement to relatively casual experience of the same.

Where the experience was intense, it occurred because of their parents' refusal to accept the men's' sexuality and all had to leave home once their parents knew that they were gay. The pain that some experienced from their estrangement could be explained by the emotional exclusivity which it has been argued is fostered in the nuclear family: 'its members feel that they have much more in common with one another than they do with anyone else on the outside—that they enjoy a privileged emotional climate they must protect from outside intrusion, through privacy and isolation'.[48]

The first man with experience of intense estrangement was an Australian expatriate who lived in Europe and left his family home after the death of his mother.

> I knew from age 17 that my family would not be looking after me. I knew very clearly. It was the death of my mother . . . when I realized that the other three surviving members of my family stuck together like glue and that my connection to the family was actually my mother. In the years later, they realized that. They realized that they [had] created the triage that I was not a part of and I was the younger sibling. (Damien, aged 52, England)

Later in the interview, Damien explained that the homophobia of his father and his brother-in-law was the reason for his estrangement. Recalling memories of Christmases when his mother was alive and he was a teenager, he related how his brother-in-law would make homophobic jokes associating homosexuality with paedophilia and then recalled how, when as an adult and with a long-standing male partner, he came out to his father: 'It did not go well because my brother and sister did not want that and tried to stop me repeatedly'.

A New South Welshman with experience of fairly intense estrangement was Christopher (aged 52). His family belonged to a fundamentalist religious organization that rejected homosexuality. Brought up in a sect that forbade contact

48 Shorter, *Modern Family*, p. 205.

with the outside world, he decided at 19 to excommunicate himself in order to protect his parents from the scandal and ostracism:

> When I excommunicated myself, I stayed at the family home with my mother for another couple of years [until] I decided … to jump on a plane and go to the other side of the world and create a new life and find myself.

After returning to Australia, his family situation deteriorated when his brother removed him as their father's executor and replaced him with his wife. When Christopher objected, his brother and sister-in-law took the case to court:

> And brought it all forward knowing full well that I could not get any legal help. I tried everything. I could not get legal aid because legal aid said that it was out of their parameter. I needed a barrister and a lawyer and could not do that, whereas my brother had it all because it was paid for from my father's bank account.* They slayed me in there.
>
> [* Being an executor and with the support of the family's solicitor, Christopher's brother was able to draw on their father's assets to fund the court case.]

While he was able to continue seeing his father, the conflict with his brother and sister-in-law seriously affected Christopher's mental health reviving memories of previous traumas associated with his religious upbringing. He has since recovered and is now actively involved in publicizing the practices of homophobic religions.

The remaining men whose experience of estrangement was more casual still had limited association with their families of origin. In the case of two men – Gideon, aged 70 from New South Wales and Anton, aged 45 from England – their parents' divorces caused estrangement from one of their parents and some of their siblings, while others were estranged from a parent or a sibling who could not accept their homosexuality or their male partner. In the case of the final example – of having no relations with family members – no reason was given other than a peripatetic childhood:

> Blood relatives … have never been an important part of my life. I moved around quite a bit as a child, living in rural areas in Australia, and so close relationships never really developed. (Johann, aged 52, England)

These eight men, whose family relations were broken or non-existent for various reasons, comprised a unique group. Because of the centrality of kinship in the decisions that people make about bequests and inheritance,[49] the

49 Bourdieu, P. (1992) *The Logic of Practice*, trans. R. Nice (Cambridge: Polity Press), pp. 165–168.

beneficiary decisions that they made are compared in Chapter 2 with those that others made whose relations with their family of origin were continuing and/or relatively harmonious.

Participants' Current Family

As mentioned, participants were asked to briefly tell the story of their family relationships. When doing so, more than half referred to their family of origin (also known elsewhere as birth family), slightly less than a quarter said that their couple relationship was their family, and a small group referred to theirs as a family of choice. In the following section each family type is discussed in order.

Family of Origin

In the stories told by those who referred to their family of origin as their current family,[50] it was noticeable that none in a couple relationship made mention also of his same-sex partner. Solely focusing on the family of origin could suggest that feelings of shame about a gay relationship or a very strict understanding of family, which, in the case of the men aged 55 and over, had been shaped four or five decades earlier, did not or could not include in it a place for a same-sex partner. Noticeable also was that the single men who focused on the story of their family of origin could have been omitting any reference to their place in another person's family of choice, again because of a strict understanding of family.

My suspicion is that the reason any mention of same-sex partner was omitted from their family story could be explained by an understanding of family shaped by dominant images, in the case of those over 55, accumulating from decades earlier. In the interviews with those in couple relationships and those who were single, I allowed the participants to relate the story of their family relations without interruption. The question of what if anything was omitted from their family stories might have been resolved had I asked the men in couple relationships whether they regarded their partner as part of their family and the single men if they belonged to someone else's family of choice.

50 Twenty-seven participants regarded their family of origin as their current family.

Couple Relationship[51]

Those who said that they and their partner comprised their family came from all five deciles represented by the sample.[52] And their understanding of couple as family included a man in his late 80s who had had two relationships of 17 years each and a third and possibly final relationship which ended after 29 years when his partner died.

As well, there was a man in his mid-60s who because he had 'no surviving biological family' regarded his partner and himself as his family, and three men in their 50s whose views are represented here by Jonathon from England (aged 53) who said that in addition to his family of origin: 'I think of [my partner] and me as a family'.

Family of Choice

A small group spoke of family of choice when speaking about their current family.[53] Some used the term itself during their interview while others used synonymous phrases such as, 'logical family', 'second family' and 'family of friends'. Four were from North America and one from New Zealand and they were aged in their 50s, 60s and 70s. Only one participant had created with his civil-union partner and a lesbian couple a family of choice that included a child, which in their case was conceived by them.

By contrast to the previous sections on participants' current family, a fairly detailed account is provided here of the experiences of a comparatively small group of men. And the reason being that they represented a relatively new social experiment and challenge to the dominance of the heterogeneous family of origin.[54]

North American participants used logical family and other synonymous terms when speaking of their family of choice. Their views are represented here by this account from Joel (aged 74) from California:

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51 The argument in this section concerning the couple relationship as a family type is slightly different from one that I made elsewhere, largely because here it relies on the full and complete sample, see: Robinson, P. B. (2022) 'Gay Inheritance Decisions: Family of Choice or Family of Origin?', in S. Brun and M. Blidon (eds.) *Mapping LGBTQ Spaces and Places* (Switzerland: Springer), pp. 711–722. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-03792-4.

52 The 11 participants who regarded their couple relationship as their family were aged 40, 50, 60, 70, 80.

53 Five participants said that they belonged to a family of choice.

54 For more on family of choice as social experiment, see Weeks, *Sexual History*, pp. 216–220.

> I have my family here, my family of friends. I do not have a partner at this time and am not sure if I want or care to have one at this point. I do have a housemate and his boyfriend who are here, who are at least part of the [social] bubble in terms of the Virus thing [Covid-19]. I have lots of friends from . . . [a social support] group and some from the bowling, some of them from the . . . tea dance. My favourite activity with my family of choice is the tea dance on Sunday afternoons, which is not held at this point. I consider myself blessed with a pretty tranquil and understanding biological family and a very deep, happy, joyful friend-family here.

While not supplanting or replacing his family of origin, it is clear from this account that Joel's family of choice enhanced his social life especially during the social restrictions and personal privations of the Covid-19 pandemic.[55]

Two men with definitive examples of a family of choice were Toby (aged 64) from Canada and Carter (aged 57) from New Zealand. Each has a slightly different version. Toby explained how his family began with his spouse:

> We are in a common-law relationship and we have an extended family that includes . . . one of my representatives [with enduring power of attorney] and we have other really good friends. [My partner] and I have also been heavily involved in LGBT refugee resettlement and we have been responsible for the resettlement of gay young men to Canada and we have a number of people like that in our family network.

After his partner, Toby populated his family of choice with others, namely the people whom he had appointed as his representatives,[56] as well as young men that he and his partner had assisted escaping violent homophobia in the Third World and were committed to looking after for the long term:

> We are in the process . . . of settling another couple of guys from Africa. One is 19 and one is 23. They are fairly young compared to some of the other people we have helped who have been in Canada for six years.

Elaborating on his and his partner's relations with the young asylum seekers, he explained as follows:

> We don't consider them sons or anything, they are just part of our family. We do not feel that we have to give them the standard family names. It does not matter. They are part of our family. And I know in fact that all of the feelings are mutual and how we would define ourselves.

55 https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019 accessed 20 April 2022.

56 The Canadian term, 'representative' roughly equates to power of attorney and guardian in Australia and some other jurisdictions.

Toby and his partner's decision not to use 'standard family names' strongly suggested that they believed that close affective support can exist *without* formalized family-relationship terminology. It could be argued, therefore, that avoiding the conventional nomenclature that is used to designate relationships in the traditional family was at the core of the original understanding of and rationale for family of choice.

Carter's experience reflected another early understanding of family of choice, for with his partner and a lesbian couple they together conceived and raised a son, all five together forming a family: 'He and I have an 18-year-old son with a lesbian couple based in Melbourne. He is our son. The mothers would count as family'. Like some other similar families of choice where urban professionals were involved,[57] Carter's family practices were carefully regulated:

> Because the mothers of our son are based in … [Australia] they are less integrated and are not going to regular family dinners here in [New Zealand]. Prior to Covid [-19] hitting, either [my partner] or I would make sure we were in … [Australia] on average each five or six weeks to see our son … and move into that family home with [his two mothers] … We have had an arrangement since [our son] was born where we have Christmases on a three-year cycle. We have one in Melbourne with his one set of grandparents, one in New South Wales with another set of grandparents and always every third year of the cycle one Christmas in … [New Zealand] and the mums come over. The mums are always over for important family events.

A common feature in co-parenting arrangements such as Carter and his partner have with their son's mothers is that time spent with each set of parents is agreed on and scheduled so that everyone knows in advance accommodation and social arrangements including visits and family focussed celebrations such as Christmas, Passover or Diwali. Given the geographical separation with which this family of choice must contend, arrangements such as Carter sketched would be possible only for couples with relatively high disposable incomes and flexible working hours.

While other researchers have queried the prevalence of the family of choice,[58] and while this research suggests that it is not a widespread understanding or practice among the gay men interviewed for this book, their accounts suggested a commitment to an alternative family form. And because of its rejection of the traditional family and relationship model and the ideological and practical appeal

57 For an example of the highly regulated co-parenting arrangements made by some professional gay and lesbian couples, see Robinson, *Changing World*, pp. 145–148.

58 See for example: de Vries, B., et.al. (2020) 'Advance Care Planning Among Older LGBT Canadians: Heteronormative Influences', in *Sexualities*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460719896968.

of being able to choose who are your close, intimate family members, the family of choice might yet persist and become more common.

One reason for the relative scarcity of the chosen family as a family form could be that, as a result of gay and lesbian experimentation with surrogacy, adoption and foster parenting and, since the 1990s, the increasing legalization of gay marriage, together with declining homophobia in some metropolitan centres of advanced western countries, gay-family formation now more strongly mirrors the heterosexual family norm and that gays and lesbians could see less need for the family of choice. The extent to which the change suggested by this preference was reflected in participants' decisions concerning their wills, other end-of-life instruments, and beneficiary decisions is discussed in Chapters 2 and 3.

PARTICIPANTS' RELATIONSHIP HISTORY AND STATUS

All participants were asked the same question, namely, 'Would you briefly describe your relationship status?' And their answers provided the data for this section of the chapter.

Of the 43 men in the sample, 29 were in common-law (or de facto) relationships or had been in one at some point, most often before formalizing their relationship by civil union, civil partnership or gay marriage or becoming single.[59] At the time of interview, 14 were single, eight were gay married, six were in civil unions or civil partnerships, and eight were formerly married or had previously been in a civil union or civil partnership. Of those who were fathers, four had children from a previous heterosexual relationship and as mentioned one had a child by surrogacy with his male partner and a lesbian couple.[60]

In summary, the most frequent relationship type was a common-law (or de facto) relationship, followed by single men and then men who were gaily married or in a civil union or civil partnership. The principal narratives used to describe or explain their relationships are discussed in order.

59 Cohabitation: in Australia the term de facto relationship is used for two people, gay or straight who have been cohabiting as a couple for 2 years or more (Section 4AA, Family Law Act 1975, Commonwealth of Australia). In other jurisdictions, the equivalent term is common-law partnership. In Canada, for example, a common-law partnership is said to exist when a couple has been cohabiting for 12 months of more, see: https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/operational-bulletins-manuals/permanent-residence/non-economic-classes/family-class-determining-spouse/assessing-common.html accessed 2 October 2021.

60 See Appendix 2.

Common Law, de facto

As mentioned, 29 or the vast majority of participants were in or had had experience of common-law or de facto relationships.[61] All of those who were married or in civil unions or civil partnerships had previously been in common-law or de facto relationships with the partner that they then married or joined in civil union or civil partnership. And, with the exception of three men who had been single all their adult life, the majority of men who were single at the time of interview had at some time been in a common-law or de facto relationship.

Included in those with common-law or de facto relationships was a group of men who had no intention of entering any kind of legal arrangement and their views are represented here by the following extract from interview with Toby (aged 64) from Canada:

> We are not married and we never will be because for many years we weren't allowed to be and we didn't feel that it was for us. We know a lot of people who are married and are happily married but also, I know a few people who are unhappy and are into their second relationships or are single … After living together for decades, we just don't see the point. I am still not sure why people get married [*Laughs*]. It just makes life so complicated … not just for gay people but for straight people as well … It makes life so difficult.

By comparison, another group of affluent participants, who as young men had been opposed to gay marriage, were now contemplating it for 'tax reasons'. Their views are represented here by extracts from the interviews with two participants in their 50s.

> We have been together for … [29 years] never decided to get married, although we're thinking about it now because of tax situations. *Could you tell why marriage is financially beneficial for a couple like you?* Before we didn't look at it, but because we have been talking to estate planners and we are trying to re-do our will, they say that if you get married, then there are the tax advantages … We don't really believe in marriage as an institution … see it as a heteronormative institution and as we fought for rights to be [who we are] so like why join the normal society, do what the norms tell you? But again, like I said, if you get tax advantages [*Laughs*] that's a different story. (Eric, aged 59, Hong Kong)

61 For purposes of this research and book, the phrase, common-law relationship referred to a relationship where a couple has requested and been granted common-law status for their relationship and the term, de facto referred to the legal status that is assumed to attach to a couple relationships of 2 years' or more duration.

Like other gay men of his generation, the doubts that Eric and his partner held concerning gay marriage seem to have been influenced by the feminists' arguments from the 1960s and the 1990s.[62] They queried the social institution and its suitability for gays and lesbians. But, also like many financially secure men from their generation, its appeal in the 2020s appeared to lie in the improvement that being married would make to their disposable income, which sentiment the second participant echoed albeit with a certain degree of reluctance:

> We've been together about 21 years. With the discussion about marriage, we have more than a slight point of difference … [but] I think we ultimately will get married. It's unfortunate [but] we'll be getting married for pragmatic tax reasons. My earlier reason for not getting married was that [their homophobia meant] I could never share it with my family … Also, I saw the complexity of the gay community in the 1990s and what could be regarded as the "elastic edges" of what a relationship can be and those elastic edges felt a little bit incompatible with the institution of marriage. (Damien, aged 52, England)

Damien's family relations, which were discussed in the section above on estrangement, soured when his father, sister and brother-in-law excluded him after the death of his mother. Their rejection, together with what he observed of gay relationship practices – the so-called 'elastic edges', which in the 2020s might also be known as polyamory – influenced his views on gay marriage until, that is, his partner's growing awareness of the 'pragmatic tax reasons' for marriage.

Single

The group of 14 who were single at the time of interview included two participants in their 50s and one in his 70s who had been single all their adult life. Although they were not asked to explain their single status, among the reasons that they provided were that relationships could be messy, the ubiquity among their friends, both straight and gay, of people locked in what they regarded as unsupportive or damaging relationships, and that previous experiences in their family of origin meant that it was hard for them to develop or conceive of a supportive relationship with prospective partners.

62 For discussion of the reasons that men from this generation gave for opposing gay marriage, see Robinson, P. (2013) *Gay Men's Relationships Across the Life Course* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 127–143.

The remaining participants who had had some experience of relationships described those that were both relatively short but also as long as 10 years and, in the case of one man aged 70, of more than 25 years' duration and which came to an end when his partner died. When these men spoke about their single status, a common theme was the importance of friendship to them, which is represented here in the extracts from interviews with two who were in their 70s and one who was in his 40s.

> I consider friends more important than a one-on-one relationship with a partner or husband, now in my life. If I was given the choice of living alone in the woods with my love and not being able to socialize with friends, I would choose not having the partner and being able to socialize with friends as a higher priority for me. (Joel, aged 74, California)

> I figured out somewhere along the line that maybe "the relationship" that everybody talks about wasn't who I was meant to be. I seem to have a gift for friendship. Being intensely physically intimate with somebody for 35 years, I can't imagine [*Laughs*]. I have friends . . . and I always thought that my talent was friendship, maybe not being a lover. And that is fine. You could do a lot worse. (Harvey, aged 74, North Carolina)

> My "ex" and I are very close and we do spend traditional family time together . . . In a way, we have a sort of dispersed family life, which I think suits both of us quite well—when Covid [-19] isn't around. I have a very busy life, a very good group of close friends who I love spending time with and I have a busy job. (Anton, aged 45, England)

All three were unequivocal in their belief in the value of friendship. In the case of Joel from California, he preferred the company of friends to the idealized 'cottage in the woods' with partner, while Harvey from North Carolina was convinced of his 'gift for friendship' and did not regret the absence of a couple relationship. At 45, Anton had a busy social life and a busy job. His ex-partner was still part of his social life and like both Joel and Harvey seemed unperturbed that he was a single gay man. In Chapter 2, the single men's commitment to friendship is examined again in light of the extent to which they included friends as beneficiaries in their wills.

Gay Married

The eight gay-married participants had all previously been in common-law or de facto relationships with their partner. They were aged in their 50s, 60s and 70s and were from Australia, England and North America. Among the reasons that they gave for getting married were firstly because it had been legalized and

was permitted, secondly to 'upgrade' a civil union or civil partnership, and thirdly because doing so assisted the participant's partner:

> We did not think about getting married at first but when the marriage for men came in here, we decided to do it. We got married in March 2019 … [and] by then, we had been together for nine years and we realised that we were committed. The bond between us is very close. (Rowan, aged 71, England)

> We got into a civil partnership together in 2008 … and then when the law changed in the UK to enable gay marriage, we basically did an "upgrade" but the main occasion was the civil partnership. That is when we had the party, that is when we had the photographs. The upgrade was a bureaucratic exercise. It was a pretty ordinary day; it was formalising something [*Laughs*]. We thought that as people had gone to such a lot of trouble to make gay marriage happen it would be a bit dismal not to show willingness and do it [*Laughs*]. For us, the key thing was the civil partnership, that was the joint commitment, the public declaration of relationship stage. (Wade, aged 66, England)

> We were married in San Francisco … after it became legal through the entire United States. We did it as a practical reason. He got a job with [the corporation] in New York and he said that it would just be easier in terms of the moving and all the relationship with [the corporation] if we got married. And I said, "Sure. That makes sense". And so, we got married. *Some of the upper levels of the corporate west are quite liberal and progressive*. Yes. Definitely. It was amazing the whole relationship with [the corporation] when we got married. It was just taken as a matter of course that I was going to make decisions because he did not want to deal with the move and those technicalities, and they just dealt with me. (Dorian, aged 70, New York State)

As gay marriage is normalized, it is likely that the proportion of gay married men will increase in interview samples such as the one recruited for this research. A common theme in the three extracts was how its availability made marriage such an easy step for the men to take. Dorian's experience was instructive because it underlined the speed with which corporations sometimes adapt to a certain type of social change such as in his case granting partner status and privileges to gay couples in line with or ahead of legislative change in jurisdictions where they conduct business.[63]

63 For more on privileges enjoyed by gay corporate professionals, see Robinson, P. (2017) *Gay Men's Working Lives, Retirement and Old Age* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 87–88, 96, 104, 150.

Civil Union, Civil Partnership

All six participants who were in a civil union or civil partnership had previously been in common-law or de facto relationships and provided two principal reasons for making a civil union or civil partnership. The first was because they wanted to formally recognize a long-standing relationship and the second for practical reasons, which – as in the case of two men with de facto or common-law relationships who said that were contemplating marriage – concerned tax or other financial and property matters. These are represented here in extracts from the interviews with two men who lived in England.

> We are civil partnered, so we have formal, legal connection … [and got] it fairly soon after it became permitted. But … we have never gone the final hog and gone in for marriage partly because we cannot quite see the difference; in fact, we do not want to confuse matters … We have been together for 35 years [and] we always called ourselves partners and termed ourselves partners to third parties who needed to know. (Kieran, aged 67, England)

From this extract, it is fairly clear that neither Kieran nor his partner wished to marry because they were content with calling and referring to each other as 'partner' and did not want to adopt or have to use the term, 'husband'.

The second man was brought up in Australia when his parents emigrated from England in the 1960s. Returning to the country of his birth with his Australian-born partner, he reluctantly agreed to a civil partnership. In the following extract, his very serious reservations about it are made clear, as well as a preference – unheard in the marriage-equality debate in Australia – to eliminate marriage and give all relationships an equal status.

> We have a civil partnership which we performed in the UK for extremely pragmatic reasons: to avoid inheritance tax. I am not a great fan of marriage, the institution, and my unpopular and controversial opinion about marriage equality is that the Marriage Act should be rescinded … It's always been about property and property rights and property law. In the last 150 years, it's been conflated with romantic love. They are not the same thing. There are all sorts of perks with this institution of marriage, principally related to property and money. True equality would be [to] get rid of this stupid, anointed institution, treat everybody, regardless of their partnership status … on a level playing field about their money, about their property, about their rights and who they want to leave it to. (Donovan, aged 55, England)

Formerly Married or Civil Partnered

Most of the seven in this group had previously been married to women. The one exception was a man in his 40s from London who had separated from his previous civil-union partner of slightly less than 10 years. Those previously married to women consisted of three in their 70s, two in their 60s and one in his 80s. They represented a sub category of same-sex attracted or bisexual men about whom much has been written and who married in the decades before the decriminalization of homosexuality and came out when it was safe to do so.[64]

If Swedish research on same-sex marriage and divorce is any guide, it could be reasonable to expect that, as more gay men from the countries represented in this study are gay married or enter into gay civil unions/partnerships, they are just as likely to experience similar relationship permanence as heterosexual couples.[65] In other words, rates of separation or divorce in gay marriages or civil unions/partnerships could over time mirror those for heterosexual marriage or civil union/partnership.

CONCLUSION

The findings from this chapter contribute to observations already made about the nature of gay friendship and relationships and gay men's level of interest in taking advantage of the opportunity to marry that came with the introduction of marriage equality in many advanced western societies.[66] They provided new insights also into the families that gay men came from and that they themselves created, one of the most notable of which was that, while the data revealed a variety of family forms – both in family of origin and in current family forms – they showed that only quite a small minority from the sample had created chosen families.

In this sample, the principal family form was the family of origin and more than half the participants referred to it as their current family, while slightly less than a quarter said that their couple relationship was their family. And, as mentioned, a fairly small group said that they belonged to a family of choice.

64 Robinson, *Changing World*, pp. 29–31; Robinson, *Life Course*, pp. 83–7.

65 Kolk, M. and Andersson, G. (2020) 'Two Decades of Same-Sex Marriage in Sweden: A Demographic Account of Developments in Marriage, Childbearing, and Divorce', in *Demography*, 57(1): 147–169. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13524-019-00847-6 accessed 17 November 2022.

66 See Robinson, *Changing World*, pp. 115–152; Robinson, *Life Course*, pp. 37–82, 100–144.

In terms of their relationships, the most frequent relationship type was by far the common-law (or de facto) relationship, followed at some considerable distance by those who were not in a couple relationship, that is, the single men, and then three comparatively small groups who were gaily married, those who were separated or divorced from their wives, partners or husbands, and then those in a civil union or a civil partnership. As kinship is central to the decisions that people make about bequests and inheritance,[67] it is reasonable to assume that participants' current family relations and relationship status will have some bearing on their beneficiary decisions, and these are examined in the next chapter.

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67 Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, pp. 166–167.

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