

Beyond Choice

Family and Kinship in the Australian lesbian and gay 'baby boom'

Submitted by

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
AN AUSTRALIAN ‘GAYBY’ BOOM	4
<i>The gayby boom and family changes</i>	6
THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL RESEARCH FIELD	8
<i>Normalising tendencies</i>	8
<i>The pro-difference perspective</i>	10
RESEARCHING BEYOND NORMALISING AND PRO-DIFFERENCE	12
<i>From family units to family practices</i>	15
<i>Kinship</i>	17
<i>Gendered embodiment and reproductive technologies</i>	20
<i>Critical Humanism and culture(s)</i>	24
CHAPTER OUTLINE	26
CHAPTER ONE PARENTHOOD, CHOICE AND BIOLOGY	29
FAMILIES WE CHOOSE AND EURO-AMERICAN KINSHIP	30
INDIVIDUALISATION AND LESBIAN AND GAY KINSHIP	38
KINSHIP AND CHOICE IN THE ERA OF ASSISTED REPRODUCTION	43
<i>Inherited substance, identity and destiny</i>	46
FEMINIST DISCOURSE AND CHOICE	48
CONCLUSION	49
CHAPTER TWO THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT	51
ASSISTED REPRODUCTION AND PARENTING LAWS IN AUSTRALIA	53
<i>Eligibility for ART in Australia</i>	54
CONTROVERSY IN THE WAKE IN MCBAIN V VICTORIA	57
<i>Social and medical infertility</i>	59
<i>Identity registration of donors</i>	63
GAY MEN AND ART ELIGIBILITY ISSUES	65
<i>Semen donation to clinics</i>	65
<i>Surrogacy</i>	66
LEGISLATION GOVERNING FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS	69
<i>Adoption</i>	72
AUSTRALIAN LESBIAN AND GAY ACTIVISM	74
CONCLUSION	78
CHAPTER THREE DOING THE RESEARCH	81
SAMPLING	82
<i>Sampling and analysis</i>	85
FINDING PARTICIPANTS	86

<i>Locating myself</i>	87
THE INTERVIEWS	89
<i>Interviewing couples</i>	92
<i>The participants</i>	93
MAKING SENSE: NOTES ON ANALYSIS AND WRITING	96
<i>Reflexivity, analysis and writing</i>	98
POLITICAL AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	101
<i>Anonymity</i>	102
<i>The ethics and politics of visibility</i>	103
THE PARENTS AND PROSPECTIVE PARENTS	110
<i>The women</i>	110
<i>The men</i>	113
<i>Professional informants</i>	115
CHAPTER FOUR LESBIANS' RIGHT-TO-CHOOSE	116
SISTERS ARE DOING IT FOR THEMSELVES	118
<i>Great Expectations</i>	121
CAN LESBIAN FEMINISTS CHOOSE MOTHERHOOD?	124
<i>Feminist utopics and lesbian kinship</i>	126
<i>Reclaiming motherhood from the patriarchy</i>	129
CHAPTER FIVE CONCEIVING MOTHERS AND PARENTS	145
CONCEIVING CONCEPTION	147
INSEMINATION AND THE CREATION OF PARENTS	151
BIRTH	155
NAMING AS AN EQUALISING STRATEGY	156
CONCEIVING MOTHERS	159
<i>A parent is not always a mother</i>	163
SHARING MATERNITY	167
<i>Primary care of newborns or breastfeeding by the non-birth mother</i>	168
<i>Distributing genetic and gestational maternity</i>	171
CONCLUSION	174
CHAPTER SIX LESBIAN PARENTS AND PATERNAL CONNECTIONS	177
CLINICAL INSEMINAT	

ION AND DONOR ANONYMITY	178
<i>A desire for information</i>	181
THE 'KNOWN DONOR'	185
<i>The known 'father' or 'parent'</i>	188
PATERNAL 'RELATEDNESS' AND PATERNAL 'RELATIONSHIPS'	192
<i>The invented father</i>	194
PATERNAL LINKS	196
<i>Clinical inseminations and troublesome links</i>	198
PATERNITY POLITICS	200
CONCLUSION	206
CHAPTER SEVEN CONCEIVING DONORS, FATHERS AND PARENTS	209
WHY GIVE SPERM?	212
THE 'KINDLY UNCLE'	216
<i>An invented father</i>	218
'A FATHER RATHER THAN A SPERM DONOR'	219
'MORE OF A SPERM DONOR THAN A FATHER'	221
GAY MEN AND 'NEW' FATHERHOOD	222
GAY MEN AS RESIDENT PARENTS	227
<i>Establishing parental equity within male couples</i>	229
<i>Bonding and the de-emphasis of motherhood as nurture</i>	233
<i>Care, stigma and ambivalence</i>	238
CONCLUSION	243
CHAPTER EIGHT NEGOTIATING KINSHIP AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS	244
FINDING AND ESTABLISHING REPRODUCTIVE RELATIONSHIPS	246
<i>The emotional asymmetry of maternity and paternity</i>	248
WRITTEN AGREEMENTS	258
<i>Standard agreements</i>	259
<i>Social solidarity agreements</i>	260
<i>Co-parenting agreements</i>	261
<i>Resisting written agreements</i>	263
SOME LIMITATIONS OF NEGOTIATED KINSHIP	266
<i>'Re. Patrick': a dispute about the familial status of the paternal relationship</i>	266
<i>Limitations of risk management</i>	270
<i>The problem of trusting in love or friendship</i>	273
<i>Thwarted kinship and gendered expectations</i>	276
CONCLUSION	280
CONCLUSION BEYOND CHOICE	283
FRIENDSHIP AS KINSHIP AND PARENTHOOD	287

NATURE, RE-FORMULATED KINSHIP AND NUCLEARITY	289
THE CHALLENGE FOR ACTIVISTS, LEGISLATORS AND POLICY-MAKERS	290
REFERENCES	297

Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AIFS	Australian Institute of Family Studies
ARCSHS	Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University
ART	Assisted reproductive technology
FAR	Fertility Access Rights Lobby
FSA	Fertility Society of Australia
ICSI	Intra-cytoplasmic sperm injection
GIFT	Gamete intra-fallopian transfer
HIV/AIDS	Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
IVF	<i>In-vitro</i> fertilisation
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
PLP	Prospective Lesbian Parents Group
VGLRL	Victorian Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby
VLRC	Victorian Law Reform Commission
GLRL	Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby (New South Wales)

Transcript notation

I:	Introduces interviewer's speech in indented quotations
David:	Introduces participant's speech in indented quotations
—	Marks self-interruption or change of tack in sentence
[pause]	Non-verbal cue or words added by author to make context clearer
...	Deleted words
(oh, really?)	Interviewer's interjections

Abstract

Planned parenthood within the lesbian and gay communities attracts considerable attention internationally among researchers, the media, and law and policy-makers. This Australian study situates the phenomenon—also known as the ‘gayby boom’—within the contemporary Australian socio-legal setting and the more international historical and political contexts of Gay and Women’s Liberation. It investigates how beliefs about nature, kinship, the sexed and reproductive body and political ideologies of family intersect in lesbians and gay men’s decision-making and stories of living their lives as parents. Two fields of intellectual enquiry are generative: the interest in *families of choice* and *family practices* within sociology and the post-modern anthropological critique of Western kinship in the era of assisted reproduction.

This is a qualitative study informed by a critical humanist approach. It is based on in-depth and key informant interviews conducted with 20 lesbians and 15 gay men (parents, ‘donor/dads’ and prospective parents) as well as 7 people engaged in legal, health or therapeutic support to prospective and current parents. Also incorporated into the analysis are a range of other primary sources, including a substantial media debate, submissions to an assisted reproduction law reform process and primary documents supplied by participants such as parenting agreements and letters.

The study argues for the need to look beyond unitary concepts such as families of choice when theorising lesbian and gay parenthood. It is important to consider the historical, political and biographical conditions that make some notions of relatedness and decisions about having children seem more feasible, and indeed, natural than others. It explores how various notions of biological relatedness remain important in the formation of parent/child relationships, and the extent to which lesbians and gay men rely on strategic appeals to choice and biology in enacting families. Continuing constraints on who is eligible for clinically assisted reproductive technology in Australia lead to imaginative and harmonious, yet also fraught reproductive relationships.

Statement of Authorship

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

All research procedures reported in the thesis were approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee, La Trobe University.

Signed:

Date:

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Introduction

WANTED

We are looking for a
Woman who is
interested in having a
child for a gay couple.

Please call 087 766 334

to get together and
discuss further.

**This Ad Could
Change Your Life...**

Long-term lesbian couple are
looking for a man to help them
create a family. Not looking for
a day-to-day Dad, but hoping for
some level of involvement with
the children.

This is a big step, but if it
sounds like it could be you, give
us a call for a coffee and a chat.

2387 390 920

In June 1998, these display advertisements appeared side-by-side in the *Melbourne Star Observer*, one of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) newspapers published in Melbourne, the capital city of the state of Victoria, Australia. Neither ad mentions parenthood; however, the gay couple referred to in the ad on the left want to be parents, as do the lesbian couple in the ad on the right. In both cases, the couples require the practical support of a third party in order to have a child.

The advertisements captured my imagination. I wondered who placed them and whether they had much luck in attracting respondents. Did women really volunteer to have children for gay men? What did the lesbian couple mean by ‘help’? What kinds of parental relationships did the parties negotiate? How did these relationships work over time? In 1998—unlike in 2005—it was common for child-free, Australian, inner-urban lesbians like me not to know personally many lesbian mothers who parented within their lesbian relationship. Gay fathers were an even rarer proposition. However, requests in the LGBT classifieds—particularly by lesbians—for ‘donors’ or ‘donor/dads’ were becoming more of a regular occurrence.

Further investigation revealed similarities between the scenarios suggested by the advertisements. Both gesture towards subversive procreative practices that, to this day, have dubious legal status in the state of Victoria. The gay men's ad, inviting a woman to 'have a child for' a gay couple, appears to propose a surrogacy arrangement. Local legislation places severe restrictions on advertising for a surrogate mother, whether for payment or free of charge. With regard to the advertisement on the right, insemination at home would seem the most likely means to pregnancy. Someone assisting this insemination outside the setting of a registered fertility clinic potentially incurs a legal penalty of up to four years imprisonment in Victoria. The clear illegality of advertising for a surrogate mother and questionable legality of insemination at home indicate the respective practices share a degree of social disapprobation.

Strong asymmetries emerge also when consideration is given to the relationships and practices suggested by the advertisements. I have shown the ads to a number of friends, family members and colleagues over the past few years and invited their responses. Hochschild (2001) would call this a *cultural Rorschach test*: a way of finding out where the perceived boundaries lie between acceptable and transgressive social practices at any given time. Invariably, the men's ad aroused the most controversy and a large degree of scepticism that any woman would ring their number and volunteer. No one accepted that women easily bear children then give them to others to raise, except in situations of extreme emotional hardship or socio-economic disadvantage. The men's advertisement seemed to violate the naturalness of the mother/infant relationship. It raised the spectre of male exploitation of women as 'breeders', particularly among lesbian and heterosexual women. Respondents tended to assume that money would have to change hands for a woman to contemplate this arrangement, which raised the unpalatable idea of treating children as if they were commodities.

Not everyone approved of the lesbian couple's ad. For some men and women—heterosexual, gay and lesbian—it raised an uncomfortable prospect: that of a child being brought up without a proper father. Nonetheless, the women's request was generally believed far more reasonable and achievable than the men's. Several people deemed it 'only natural' that lesbians would want to have children, because, after all,

‘they are women’. This perspective conflated motherhood with womanhood. No one ever doubted that a man—especially a gay man—would eventually ring ‘to help them out’ and several jokes were made about gay men’s sexual voraciousness. Some lesbians commented on the degree to which gay men ‘waste’ their sperm, yet may still be ‘stingy’ when asked to give it to lesbian and single heterosexual women who want to have children.

Responses to those advertisements revealed a host of popular beliefs about very basic differences between the male and female couples’ chances and desires for children, despite sharing a stigmatised sexuality. They exposed the extent to which physiological differences between men and women in reproductive function lead to perceptions of political and emotional differences with regard to reproductive motives, and differing degrees of natural connectedness to children. Even more so than the advertisements themselves, these assumptions captured my attention and interest.

This study investigates connections between beliefs about nature, the sexed and reproductive body, legislative and policy considerations, and political ideologies of family and parenthood in a particular time and place, among a historically recent and somewhat marginalised group of parents. It examines the symbolic and social discourse and practice of family-making from the perspectives of those having children and from those who comment on their decisions. This is with a view to articulating the relational assumptions about parental and familial relationships informing the various positions. The study situates lesbian and gay planned parenthood within the historical context of the Gay and Women’s Liberation Movements and within the contemporary Australian social, legislative and policy context.¹ A strong contention is that it is inappropriate to draw a firm intellectual or

¹ Lesbian and gay is used throughout this study, despite its limitations, in preference to other possible terms such as ‘queer’ or ‘non-heterosexual’. Queer was rejected because very few older adult lesbians, gay men or bisexuals actually self-identify as queer (e.g. VGLRL 2000, 2001). Identifying with a category that conveys sexual fluidity appears much more characteristic of same-sex attracted people under 25 (see Dempsey, Hillier & Harrison 2001). Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001) note also that many of their lesbian, gay and bisexual participants were uncomfortable with queer as a description of their sexuality. ‘Non-heterosexual’ is the term these authors use as the most neutral, while conceding some reservations. I retain usage of lesbian and gay rather than non-heterosexual so as not to reify the category heterosexual by reinstating it as the ‘norm’, keeping in mind there is no ideal solution to this particular linguistic conundrum.

social boundary between lesbian and gay, and heterosexual parenthood or families, for to do so is to obscure the complex interpenetration between the lived experience of straight and gay—the constant flow of psychic and social traffic between homo and hetero experience.

An Australian ‘gayby’ boom

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (hereafter, ABS) 2001 national Census data collection provides some indication of the number of same-sex couples with dependent, resident children. According to these figures, there are 9,840 gay male couples and 8,312 lesbian couples in Australia—less than one per cent of the total population of cohabiting couples.² Close to twenty per cent of lesbian couples and less than five per cent of gay male couples have at least one dependent child living with them. Many of these children are likely to have been born in the context of heterosexual relationships, and the discrepancy between men and women with resident children is indicative of the general tendency for dependent children of divorced or separated parents to live with their mothers (de Vaus 2004).³

The phenomenon known internationally as the lesbian and gay *baby boom* (Weston 1991)—more recently dubbed the *gayby boom*—has only escalated in Australia in the past few years, on the basis of available evidence. Since the late 1990s, support groups for prospective lesbian and gay parents have proliferated in major capital cities. *Rainbow Families* conferences have become yearly, well-attended events. Medical practitioners report seeing increasing numbers of self-identified lesbians seeking information about pregnancy options (see McBain 2000; McNair 2002). An Australian market research company, Significant Others Consulting, has surveyed

² The figures obtained in ABS data are believed to underestimate the proportion of lesbian and gay couples in the population because of the manner in which questions about sexuality were asked (see de Vaus 2004). Smith (personal communication, 2003) estimates the number of lesbian couples in the Australian population at 28,144 and gay male couples at 41,535, a four-fold increase on the census data. These figures were obtained after weighting sample data obtained from the Australian Study of Health and Relationships, a national probability sample of 19,000 Australians aged between 16 and 59. Despite the numeric discrepancy, de Vaus (2004) contends that the underestimates in national census data are unlikely to distort the actual patterns in the data, such as proportions of those with children.

³ According to de Vaus (2004), 87 per cent of Australian children of separated or divorced parents live with their mothers.

readers of a Sydney-based magazine *Lesbians on the Loose* (LOTL) periodically since 1992. Each survey has found around 20% of lesbians have or live with children, with numbers intending to have children or more children increasing from 15% in 1992, to 20% in 1995, and to 22% in 1999 (LOTL 1996, 2000).

The Australian gayby boom is inclusive of a wide array of familial configurations. Lesbians rear their children as single parents, in the context of their couple relationship and with male friends. Some women become pregnant using sperm donated anonymously through reproductive medicine clinics in those states where this is legal. Others negotiate semen transfer with known heterosexual, gay or bisexual men whom they conceptualise variously as ‘sperm donors’, ‘known fathers’ or (more rarely) ‘co-parents’ (see Borthwick & Bloch 1993; Wakeling & Bradstock 1995; McNair et al. 2002).⁴ Although sexual intercourse is well-documented as a means to pregnancy in the older literature on planned lesbian parenthood (see Borthwick & Bloch 1993; Kuijpers & Vlotman 1995), self-insemination at home, using a needle-free syringe, has become the most popular way for Australian lesbians to get pregnant (McNair et al. 2002).⁵ Gay men may have children in the context of a same-sex relationship through a commercially contracted surrogate mother overseas. Single men or gay male couples may also seek the assistance of a female friend or acquaintance who agrees to give birth to a child. Both of these practices remain relatively rare. More frequently, men will negotiate semen transfer, and a varying degree of ensuing involvement with the child, with a lesbian couple or single woman hoping to become pregnant.

⁴ Throughout this study, I utilise the terms ‘semen transfer’ ‘semen provider’ (following Daniels 1998) and ‘biological father’—depending on context—in preference to semen donation or donor because these terms do not impute inevitable social detachment between men giving sperm and the children born. Although provider is not ideal in that it has paternalistic overtones of breadwinning, it does, as Agigian (2004) suggests, leave more open the question of motivation and the status of negotiated paternal relationships with children.

⁵ Self-insemination describes the insertion of semen, using a needle-free syringe, into the vagina of the woman intending to conceive. This phrase is used in preference to its many documented variations (e.g. alternative insemination, alternative fertilisation) in keeping with popular usage among Australian lesbians and the health practitioners supporting them. The political implications of these ways of referring to the insertion of semen are explored in more detail in Chapter Four.

Although having and raising children in unconventional family configurations is becoming more possible and popular in Australia, it remains deeply controversial. A prolonged media debate raged for two entire months in 2000 after Leesa Meldrum, a single heterosexual woman, was awarded the right to join the *in-vitro* fertilisation program in Victoria. Lesbian parents and would-be parents were castigated in this debate for a variety of reasons: from daring to raise children in fatherless families to queue-jumping and wasting taxpayers' money by receiving donor insemination and IVF for social rather than medical reasons. They did, however, have their supporters, as is the case when social surveys pose questions about same-sex relationships and practices. The 2003 Australian Social Attitudes Survey found that 43% of adults regarded a same-sex couple with children as a family, compared with 99% for an unmarried heterosexual couple with children (cited in de Vaus 2004: 86). Kelley (2001) found Australians hold polarised views: people tend to be either 'unambiguously censorious' or 'unambiguously tolerant' of same-sex relationships and practices (p. 15).

The gayby boom and family changes

As an international Western phenomenon, the gayby boom cannot be viewed in isolation from other change in Western family relationships. In recognition of this, Stacey (1996) has declared intentionally planned parenthood among lesbians and gay men as: 'the pioneer outpost of the post-modern family condition, confronting most directly its features of improvisation, ambiguity, diversity, contradiction and flux' (p. 142). Demographic trends in a number of Western countries, including those of the United Kingdom (UK), the United States (US) and Australia, demonstrate some strong similarities. While the two-parent heterosexual nuclear family is still popular, and most children are born in the context of heterosexual relationships, increasing numbers of children are deliberately planned and raised by single parents, usually mothers. In Australia, this occurs in the presence of gradual increase in social tolerance for, and economic support available to, single parents (de Vaus 2004). De facto relationships among heterosexual couples, often including children, have become popular. Divorce rates are high, and step-parenting and re-marriage increasingly characterise the experience of heterosexual adults and many of their

children. Gay and lesbian parented families have proliferated in tandem with, and as a consequence of, these other changes.

Furthermore, since the 1960s, human reproduction in the developed West has become far more malleable than ever before in history. A more permissive and consumerist (rather than God-fearing) orientation has allowed the technological developments that greatly facilitate control over sexuality and reproduction to flourish (see Melucci 1989). One consequence has been the separation of sexuality from reproduction, the other side of the coin of which is the separation of reproduction from sexuality (Giddens 1991). Two major technological developments have facilitated this latter separation: first, the invention of the female contraceptive pill in the 1960s; and second, the increasing proliferation and public uptake of the New Reproductive Technologies throughout the 1970s.

Now generally referred to as Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART), these processes include donor insemination, ovum retrieval, *in vitro* fertilisation (IVF), and traditional or gestational surrogacy. Donor insemination is very ‘low-tech’ on the scale of assisted reproductive procedures and as a practice is known to be at least two hundred years old (Bateman Novaes 1998). It has been performed successfully by doctors since at least the 1930s in the UK (McWhinnie 2001; Haines 1998). However, donor insemination became more widely acceptable and practised during the 1970s when social mores surrounding reproduction and sex became considerably more liberal. The development and uptake from the late 1970s onward of more technologically sophisticated medical procedures such as ovum retrieval, gestational surrogacy, IVF, and intra-cytoplasmic sperm injection or ICSI—in which a single spermatozoon is injected into the nucleus of an ovum—mean that it is now relatively commonplace for fertilisation and embryo formation to occur in the laboratory. About two per cent of births in Australia now occur as a result of an assisted reproductive intervention (de Vaus 2004).

Donor insemination and other ARTs arose as a means of remedying infertility for heterosexual couples (Wikler & Wikler 1991). However, the increasing potential of the conceptive technologies to separate biological parenthood from social parenthood has contributed to what Castells has called a: ‘whole new area of social

experimentation' (1997: 241). This has led to a situation where: 'childless heterosexual couples with the ability to pay high medical fees [are becoming] a highly specific historical category' of ART users (Farquhar 2000: 210). Clinicians providing assisted reproductive technology along with legislators and policy makers have, in many parts of the world and some Australian states, responded to single heterosexual women's, lesbians and gay men's political demands for inclusion as users of these technologies. In the process, many of the former givens about pregnancy, reproduction and the family are being reinvented.

The international social research field

Themes in the social research into lesbian and gay parenthood often reflect the political controversies about parenthood and assisted reproduction aired in the media. Existing international social research comes from two main disciplinary traditions, developmental psychology and feminist sociology. One thread in the literature asserts 'no difference' between lesbians and gay men, and heterosexuals with regard to parental suitability and children's development. This is often used to support the case for opening up access to assisted reproduction and parental rights to gay and lesbian couples (see McNair 2004). A newer tendency in the literature has emerged in which the differences observed between heterosexual and lesbian parents are valorised and accentuated.

Normalising tendencies

Bozett (1987) notes that discussions of homosexual parenting are couched generally in a framework of an 'ethical consideration for the well-being of the child' (p. 171). The predominant assumption is that parents who either identify as lesbian or gay or engage in homosexual practices, are potentially harmful to children's development or welfare. The logic underlying much empirical work by family therapists, social workers, psychologists and psychiatrists is that lesbian and gay parents should be researched in order to see if they are fit and their children should be researched in order to find out if they are normal: i.e., heterosexual, emotionally well-adjusted, intellectually able and appropriately masculine or feminine.

This body of research becomes understandable when considering it is loss of child custody that has often been at stake. The disclosure of lesbian or gay identity or practice was implicated in loss of custody in numerous cases in the US and UK throughout the 1970s and 1980s (see Hanscombe & Forster 1981; Bozett 1987; Pollack & Vaughan 1987). As a consequence of this, early studies on (mostly) lesbian mothers but also gay fathers, which began appearing in the North American literature in the mid-1970s, were largely concerned with two issues: first, the legal implications of coming out with regard to custody and access of children; second, the effects on children of disclosure of the newly found homosexual identity. The second stream of research was initiated largely by gay-friendly psychologists in the US in order to establish a body of expert discourse on which to draw for the aforementioned court cases (Bozett 1987).

More recently, psychologists have turned their attention to comparative studies between the donor insemination conceived children of heterosexual and lesbian parents. Numerous studies comparing the two groups have failed to return findings supporting poor developmental outcomes for children of lesbians (e.g. Brewaeys & Van Hall 1997; Golombok, Tasker & Murray 1997; Chan, Raboy & Patterson 1998). These studies have been used by lesbian and gay political lobbies and in the course of law reform consultations to support the cause of gay parents, on the grounds that their children are no different from children raised in heterosexual families (see Millbank 2002, 2003b; McNair 2004). The assumption is that no difference between the homosexual and heterosexual groups is a finding that supports the rights of lesbians and gay men to access assisted reproductive technology (heavily contested in many Western jurisdictions, including Australia) and the rights of gay men and lesbians to have equality with their straight peers within legislation governing parental status. Such comparative research remains controversial within the positivist research paradigms from which it emerges, primarily due to (arguably insurmountable) problems with small sample sizes and disputes over the comparability of the various groups of subjects (see Wardle 1997; Stacey & Biblarz 2001).

However understandable the impulse and need for comparative research, there are epistemological problems with this research approach. Warner (1999) would indeed characterise these comparative studies as engaged in a heterosexist and counter-

productive *pursuit of the normal*: i.e., that no difference is the only acceptable standard towards which lesbian and gay parents should aspire for their children. Stacey and Biblarz (2001) provide a courageous and thought-provoking discussion of normalising tendencies in the lesbian and gay parenting social research field. In the first instance, they find it remarkable that no difference findings invite little discussion or speculation on the part of psychologists when most Western theories of child development emphasise as pivotal parental sexuality and gender relations. In re-analysing twenty-five studies, they found some researchers had failed to discuss interesting—although statistically insignificant—differences, particularly those on the gender and sexual behaviour variables, presumably due to perceived political pressure to support the null hypothesis.

Notably, Stacey and Biblarz found evidence that children of lesbian and gay parents are more likely to explore same-sex sexual experiences even if they do not identify as lesbian or gay. They contend also that studies overall indicate: ‘lesbian parenting may free daughters and sons from a broad but uneven range of traditional gender prescriptions’ (p.169-70). Their claim is that there is no reason why no difference should imply deficits and be construed as the only good outcome, and that to do so is effectively heterosexist and a deterrent to ‘intellectual progress in the field’ (Stacey & Biblarz 2001: 159). Stacey (1997) also warns that empirical research refuting deficit hypotheses is unlikely to sway trenchant critics from their views, given their objections are ideologically driven. Such critics retaliate by claiming faulty methodology (see Cameron & Cameron 1996) or contend the children studied are not sufficiently mature to be showing symptoms of developmental disturbance (e.g. Wardle 1997; Cameron & Cameron 1996).

The pro-difference perspective

Conversely, contemporary feminist sociologists tend to portray lesbian couples who plan and embark on parenthood together as socially progressive exemplars of how heterosexual family relationships should be. A number of studies—implicitly or explicitly informed by feminist critiques of divisions of labour within the heterosexual nuclear family and based on self-report data—have been conducted with lesbian couples who have planned children in the context of their lesbian relationship.

Relative equity in divisions of labour between birth and non-birth mothers is said to be the rule rather than the exception (Dunne 1997, 1999; Sullivan 1998; Dalton & Bielby 2000). For instance, Dunne (1999) emphasises it is the lack of 'gendered scripts' in lesbian relationships that leads to greater egalitarianism in relation to the sharing of economic resources, and domestic duties including child-rearing. This, in turn, for Dunne, is believed to highlight how heterosexuality as an institution has negative effects on the enactment and structure of couple relationships.

While pro-difference studies are important and refreshing to the extent that they do not set out to test deficits in parenting or harms to children from the outset, such work may produce a reactionary discourse of difference that exaggerates distinctions based on a singular category—the heterosexual—versus another singular category—the lesbian. For instance, researchers espousing the value of difference can tend to see gender as something that is only expressed as inequitable difference within heterosexual relationships and assume gender is not also a relevant construct within lesbian relationships and households (see Oerton 1998 for a good discussion of this issue). On the contrary, Carrington (1999), in a study based on observational fieldwork as well as self-report data from lesbian couples, found that many lesbians employed in time-consuming and challenging paid work did far less domestic work than their partners and expressed guilt about this as it deviated from expectations of egalitarianism. The partners, in turn, often tried to conceal the disparity and recuperate the semblance of egalitarianism by giving their work-focused mate credit for household tasks they did not perform.

Assuming lesbian parenting leads to differences among the children of lesbians and that difference is good can also lead to some dubious strategies and claims by lesbian parenting activists/researchers, based on assertions rather than evidence. For example, Saffron (1998), in an article that sets out to demonstrate the advantages children experience growing up with lesbian mothers, asserts that the masculinity and femininity modelled by heterosexual parents is restrictive. She relies on self-report data from the children and their mothers to support this claim. This provides no evidence in itself that some of the advantages her participants discern are not also experienced by their peers with heterosexual parents. Saffron additionally implies that children only learn gender within the households in which they grow up rather than

from peers, the media and any number of other social settings—a very simplistic and sociologically discredited understanding of gendered subjectivity as a fixed *role* that is somehow imposed on children by their parents (see Connell 2002; Davies 1993). Feminist researchers in the burgeoning difference-is-good vein may also ignore the evidence that some heterosexual couples actively try and succeed in dividing labour and doing gender in less conventional ways (e.g. Van Every 1995).

Herein lies a different problem that equally has the potential to hamper intellectual progress in the lesbian and gay parenting field; the *aristocratization* (Ponse 1978) of the difference for children lesbian parenthood represents. Stein (1997) memorably utilises the word she attributes to Ponse with reference to tendencies that developed within US-based lesbian feminist communities during the 1980s. Stein's claim is that lesbian feminism came to be viewed as an inherently superior and egalitarian way of life, which often served to suppress conflict and obscure very real differences between women in their relationships with each other, and in the collectivist workforces and organisations they created. In questioning the burgeoning literature valorising equity and positive differences within lesbian-led families, Gabb (2000) asks why stories of pain and unhappy families have begun to appear in biographical accounts of gayby boom families, whereas they are noticeably absent from recent research generated within universities. For instance, one controversy among lesbian parents in the US centres on the phenomenon of birth mothers denying access to their partners when relationships break up (Schulman 2000; Pepper 2000). Some lesbian mothers are willing to pull rank based on biological relatedness when partner relationships founder, despite research findings supporting more equalised divisions of parenting labour (see also Agigian 2004). Gabb herself (2001) has drawn attention to the flipside of this phenomenon in the UK. She claims birth mothers interviewed for her study were often left—literally and figuratively—holding the baby when relationships between ostensibly co-parenting lesbian couples ended.

Researching beyond normalising and pro-difference

How then can researchers side-step normalising and pro-difference perspectives and avoid entrapment in research parameters set by a reactionary political debate? One possibility, which this study pursues, is to explore lesbian and gay planned parenthood

with a view to articulating various discourses, ideologies and practices of kinship and family, looking for sameness and difference with the status quo. Rather than making claims to the deficits and/or benefits of particular institutional or gendered forms families with children take, this study explores the meanings and implications of various understandings of family and kinship: in effect, it seeks to dismantle *us* and *them*. How do lesbian and gay parents' understandings of family and kinship intersect with and/or reject dominant Australian legal and popular notions of these concepts? How is this reflected in the manner in which lesbians and gay men co-operate and collaborate in having children? What meaning is attached to biological relationships or how does biology continue to be implicated in decision-making about having and raising children? These are the questions that guide this study.

In order to explore these questions, in 2000 and 2001, I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with 20 lesbians and 15 gay men (birth mothers and non-birth mothers/co-parents, co-parenting male couples, and semen providers with varying degrees of social contact with their biological children). Prospective parents at various stages of attempting to conceive were also included, with some awaiting the birth of children. Participants' ages ranged from 23 to 58 and their children's ages ranged from newborn to 17. At the time of the interviews, all were resident in Victoria. Interviewees mostly lived in metropolitan Melbourne, although a few were from regional Victorian towns. Although there was some class and ethnic diversity among the group, most came from an Anglo-Australian, middle-class background.

Seven 'key informant' interviews with people engaged in legal, healthcare or therapeutic support to prospective and current lesbian and gay parents were also conducted. These interviews were included in order to obtain some historical detail about the rise and popularisation of planned parenthood among Australian lesbians and gay men in the absence of much published or archival primary source material locally. Interviews were supplemented with primary source material obtained from: biographies; reproductive health and parenting manuals produced for lesbians and gay men; a radio documentary; a legal transcript; a substantial media debate about access to assisted reproduction that occurred in Australia in July/August 2000; parenting agreements and letters supplied by participants; and submissions to a local law reform reference on Assisted Reproduction and Adoption.

The in-depth interviews were designed to elicit what Plummer (2001) calls *short, topical life stories*. I sought subjective meanings and experiences of family and kinship, given my interest in how women and men conceptualised, understood and negotiated procreative and parenting relationships as a politicised and historically new population of would-be or current parents. Three of the seven key informants were also prospective or current lesbian or gay parents who had co-ordinated self-help networks and forums, or had been involved in activism to achieve legislative and policy reform. This meant there was some overlap between the two types of interview and the kinds of discussion that ensued in each.

The study thus draws on and extends a burgeoning sociological literature on the rise of *post-modern families* or *families of choice*: complex configurations of significant intimate relationships that reveal considerable change from orthodox, Western nuclear family models. Such change can be observed within intimate relationships and family formation among heterosexuals and ‘non-heterosexuals’ alike (e.g. Stacey 1988, 1996; Giddens 1992; Beck 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995, 2001; Plummer 1995; Stein 1997; Weeks, Heaphy & Donovan 2001). It also follows numerous anthropological investigations into how ART exposes hitherto taken-for-granted Western assumptions about the relational bases on which family and parental relationships rest, while at the same time adapting, undermining and transforming these (e.g. Weston 1991; Strathern 1992b; Hayden 1995; Franklin 1997; Dumit & Davis-Floyd 1998; Carsten 2000). This literature avoids normalising and pro-difference assumptions, in examining the meaning and process of choice and change in contemporary Western intimate relationships and reproductive practices.

Concepts of family, kinship, and gendered embodiment, in their more post-modern permutations, become important conceptual tools to think with here. In the following sections I state my assumptions about each of these concepts.

From family units to family practices

Families are ever changing and diverse, and there is little point in talking about 'the' family.

—David de Vaus (2004) *Diversity and change in Australian families*.

Functionalist sociologists working in the post-World War Two era such as Talcott Parsons and George Murdock tended to conceptualise the Western family as a unit or structure fulfilling basic social needs. Murdock's definition of family was as follows:

...a social group characterized by common residence, economic co-operation and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship and one or more children, own or adopted of the sexually co-habiting adults. (Murdock 1949 cited in Morgan 1975: 20)

This definition of family was criticised extensively throughout the 1970s and 1980s, largely by Western feminists. Feminist scholars from a range of disciplines were keen to expose how this functionalist view of the nuclear family—as a logical unit responding to the labour demands of industrialised capitalism—obscured considerable power differentials between men, women and children. Or, in other words, the nuclear family is as much a site of disunity as it is a functional unit. Feminist critiques of the family were informed by the concept of *patriarchy* which Millett (1970) defined as the universal oppression of women and children by older men. For radical feminists, the problem with nuclear families was the legitimisation and perpetuation of men's power over women, whereas for Marxist feminists the capitalist system had paved the way for the rise of the patriarchal family. The sexual division of labour, which located women primarily as unwaged domestic labourers, in contrast to men's participation in the public sphere of waged labour was a particular target of second-wave feminist interest and critique. Despite their considerable differences, the focus of second-wave feminist family scholars was on how the nuclear family, as a tangible and oppressive social form and institution, established, perpetuated and even naturalised women's social inequality with men.

The Anti-Social Family (Barrett & McIntosh 1982) marked an important transition in feminist critiques of the nuclear family because it emphasised that families need to be considered at the level of the emotional needs they meet, and not just as oppressive patriarchal institutions. Barrett and McIntosh noted that family operates at the level of thinking and talking about how we should live, work and raise children together, as much as it exists as a tangible or thing-like structure. Importantly, appeals to ‘the family’ as the site of care-giving responsibility for children, the sick, the disabled and the elderly lend substance to so-called lean economic policies and the concomitant view that families should be self-sufficient and in need of little support by the state. Another of Barrett’s and McIntosh’s insights lay in their attention to the needs met by families: e.g., economic security, a site for the expression of emotional needs and desires, and a means of having and raising children—which they saw as very valid needs. However, they questioned and critiqued what they saw as the explicit heterosexism of dominant familial ideology and the valorisation of privacy and individualism.

Throughout the 1990s, changing demographic trends alerted Western family scholars to empirically measurable and observable changes in family and household formation, which suggested considerable challenges were occurring to the nuclear family household as a ubiquitous unit or structure. Retaining family as a concept, while moving away from its significance as a specific set of objectively determined ‘blood’ or marriage relationships, characterises much contemporary family sociology. For instance, Morgan (1996) emphasises family is a *topic* to be explored further ‘in all its uses and ramifications’ rather than a *resource* to be drawn on uncritically (p. 11).

For Morgan, a number of ideas are conveyed in focusing empirical enquiry on family practices rather than units. First, there is the notion of movement. Whereas family structures sound quite static and objectively defined, practice conveys a sense of activity. A sense of doing family rather than being in a family is communicated by a notion of practice. A second implication is that of repetition or regularity. The significance and character of family builds over time through ongoing or habitual practice. This idea is not distinctive to family theory. A similar idea of repeated performance or *performativity* has been fundamental to reconfiguring the field of gender studies. In Butler’s extremely influential work (1990, 1993), the sexed body, is

de-naturalised or deconstructed in favour of viewing it as an effect of gendered repetitions or acts. Finally, family practice also suggests a degree of fluidity or open-endedness in that practices have more than one definition or meaning. The significance of a family practice may have meaning outside the realm of family to others or be highly dependent on one's point of view.

Testimony to the increasing relevance of family practice over structure is the extent to which notions of family have become meaningful for those living outside of heterosexual family relationships, as Weston's (1991) usage in her influential study of lesbian and gay kinship—*Families We Choose*—would suggest. Family retains enormous intuitive appeal among gay men and lesbians as a descriptive term for their most valued social relationships. For this reason alone it needs to be respected in this study as a valid category that can no longer be deployed naively. Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001) argue that lesbians and gay men's retention of familial language is an important means of asserting the legitimacy of other than heterosexual relationships and practices. For these authors, it is the continuing stigmatisation of homosexual sex and same-sex relationships in law and social policy that has led to a reclaiming of the word family among lesbians and gay men. The appropriation stakes a claim to the validity of those intimate relationships that fall outside convention.

In accepting a shift away from objective definitions of family, it is important not to lose sight of a manageable focus for empirical enquiry. As Gubrium and Holstein (1990) point out: 'The familial is not so much an undisciplined, unfettered interpretive brainstorm as it is a reasonably ordered and recognisable set of articulations' (p.155). Family, as deployed in conventional and unconventional usage, continues to bring to mind associated terms such as 'belonging', 'household', 'home', 'privacy', 'intimacy', 'connectedness' and 'kinship'. It continues to evoke meaningful, enduring and emotionally significant relationships.

Kinship

This study also draws on the anthropological concept of kinship. This is arguably more subtle than family for exploring symbols and practices of connectedness without assuming the connections take a singular social or institutional form (see Edwards et

al. 1999). Until relatively recently, kinship studies proceeded as a kind of anthropological science; kin configurations in non-Western cultures were presumed predicated on relationships derived from sexual intercourse. However, the post-modern or *reflexive critique* of kinship (Franklin & McKinnon 2001) came to prominence during the 1980s. This exposed how understanding kinship as the social construction of natural or biological facts of life imposes Western notions of belonging and connectedness on non-Western cultures.

Schneider's *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* in 1984 was not the only or the first of its kind (e.g. Needham 1971). However, it was pivotal to disrupting the established anthropological practice of going into non-Western cultures and discerning 'family trees'. Schneider questioned two main assumptions of kinship theory: the 'Doctrine of the Genealogical Unity of Mankind', which would have it that biological relationships based on a genealogical grid are the pre-eminent means of conceptualising relatedness in every cultural setting; and the assumption that 'Blood is Thicker than Water' universally, or that genealogical connections are always considered stronger than other kinds of social bonds. For Schneider, to invoke blood ties became a question of speaking metaphorically, in keeping with a Western *folk model* that privileged biological relatedness.

Schneider's earlier work *American Kinship* (1980), first published in 1968, emphasised sexual intercourse as the key symbol in Euro-American definitions of relatedness.⁶ His critique made the point that the link between coitus and procreation simply did not have the same foundational significance for creating persons and establishing relationships between persons in other cultures. Relationships and body constitution in a variety of non-Western settings could be predicated on substantive connections established through feeding (see Strathern 1988; Carsten 1995; Long 2000), attachments to land (see Mallett 2003) or the influence of ancestral spirits (see

⁶ US and UK based anthropologists writing on kinship in the era of assisted reproduction tend to speak of 'Euro-American' rather than 'Western' kinship. 'Western' is a term that can overly homogenise when the cultures and ethnicities encompassed by Western display great variations (see Bouquet 1993). I have used Western throughout this study due to the absence of viable alternatives. Euro-American cannot geographically encompass Australia, and to speak of Australian kinship is to obscure the European lineage of non-indigenous Australian familial and kinship organisation.

Malinowski 1929; Weiner 1976, 1988). Schneider was highly critical of the assumption that because Western science privileged biogenetics as fundamental to personhood and family, biogenetic kinship was construed as a universal entity that could be found in any given culture as a building block of that culture.

Nature /culture in Western kinship

By critiquing the application of Western kinship models to non-Western locales Schneider effectively reframed Western kinship itself as an empirical question needing to be investigated rather than an immutable set of facts. This provided the momentum for a number of social anthropological investigations into how biology and nature are culturally constructed in Western kinship. Strathern's work on English kinship is exemplary. In *After Nature* (1992a), Strathern (in part) traced the persistent alignment of biology and nature in Western kinship thinking to the mid-19th century. According to Strathern, around that time, kinship, in the Western view became a hybrid institution connecting nature and culture. Nature became understood as a bedrock or grounding force that did not change, against which culture exerted itself. This coincided with the popularisation of Darwin's theory of evolution, which presupposed a fundamental consanguineous connectedness between all life forms on earth:

Perhaps it was...around 1860 or so, when the cultivation of nature was replaced by its own grounding naturalism, that is, by apprehension of nature as a natural system. Given a concern with reproduction ('inheritance') of organisms, one might suggest that evolutionary thinking also facilitated the equation of procreation and biology. The 'natural facts' of life were natural in the sense of belonging to the biology of the species. (Strathern 1992a: 132)

In Strathern's example, the theory of evolution provided the means by which an older understanding of nature, as procreation or bringing forth, was superseded by a newer understanding of nature as reproduction or inheritance of traits. In historicising ideas about nature in Western kinship, Strathern effectively de-naturalised it or exposed nature as itself mutable or subject to cultural process and construction. There are parallels here with work by historians of sexuality (e.g. Foucault 1980; Weeks 1977, 1985), tracing the creation by sexologists of pathologies construing the homosexual as a species. Historians of biological science such as Haraway (1991, 1995) also reveal through various studies in primatology and embryology how Western science is as

much made as it is discovered. Scientists are as dependent on well-entrenched metaphors in fashioning their knowledge as they are on impartial facts or data.

Carsten (2000) speaks of relatedness rather than kinship believing it difficult to escape the historical immersion of kinship studies in notions of universal genealogy and foundational facts of life. Alternatively, Haraway (1991, 1995) has recast an interest in contemporary themes of connectedness between humans, technology, plants and animals conventionally associated with kinship through metaphors such as the cyborg and the vampire, precisely to emphasise this ongoing cultural construction of biology. However, others have retained kinship in a reformulated understanding that focuses attention on how the meanings of biological connections or shared biogenetic substance are multiple rather than singular and may be either privileged or de-emphasised in favour of other ideas about connectedness (see Franklin & McKinnon 2001; Edwards 2000; Thompson 2001). To observe this retains Schneider's (1984) argument that kinship should be primarily a question of empirical investigation rather than an imposition of so-called objectively observable facts.

Edwards (2000: 27) provides one of the more evocative post-modern definitions of kinship:

Kinship embraces connections people trace to each other through notions of shared substance, be it blood, genes, flesh or bone; at the same time it places a greater or lesser emphasis, at different historical moments and in different parts of the world, on the creation and maintenance of social relationships through intimacies of care and effort. This is a potent combination with which to imagine relations of all kinds.

This formulation heralds neither biological determinism nor foundationalism, but what Franklin (1997, 2001) would call a denaturalised view of biology, in which the meanings of biology are varied. It also represents a range of perceptions of connectedness with others that may or may not embrace biology.

Gendered embodiment and reproductive technologies

The use of medical technologies to constrain or facilitate women's reproductive capacities has always been controversial. As Wacjman (1991) argues:

Nowhere is the relationship between gender and technology more vigorously contested than in the sphere of human reproduction. Women are the bearers, and in most societies the primary nurturers of children. This means that reproductive technologies are of particular significance to them. Birth control has been a major issue for all movements of women's equality and much feminist scholarship has been devoted to uncovering women's struggle throughout history against the appropriation of medical knowledge and practice by men. (p. 54)

Early second-wave radical feminist, Shulamith Firestone, believed biological motherhood was the cornerstone of women's oppression. In *The Dialectic of Sex* (1971) Firestone argued for woman-controlled technological solutions such as *ectogenesis*—the gestation of babies in artificial wombs—which she saw as one means to free women from the tyranny of motherhood. Conversely, in the radical feminist critiques of ART that proliferated in the wake of the first *test-tube babies*, surrogacy and IVF are reformulated as oppressive and debilitating patriarchal practices. They serve as a means for the male-dominated medical profession to colonise infertile women's bodies and appropriate natural processes of pregnancy and childbirth (e.g. Hanmer 1987 Corea 1984; Rowland 1984). Some radical feminists were concerned with how ART can fragment women's reproductive capacities into component parts (Rowland 1990). Others asserted such fragmentation ensured women's experience of motherhood was as discontinuous as the male experience of fatherhood (Hanmer 1987). Rowland (1984) suggested ART could be the *final solution* to the woman problem, or result in a means to make women redundant. While radical feminist critiques were valuable in alerting women to the medical dangers of these technologies, in common, they tended to rely on understanding women's bodies/selves as rather passive and powerless in the face of male doctors' endeavours and manipulations.

According to Albury (1999), by the mid-1980s, at least two other feminist positions were vying with radical feminist understandings of ART. Respectively, these constituted:

...wary engagement with attempts at regulation based on socialist feminism and the emerging cultural studies of the way power is mobilised; and support for the technology in terms of feminist

arguments about choice based on personal accounts of the pain of infertility. (Albury 1999: 17)

To take the second position first, liberal feminists began to question whether the radical feminist critique of ART was consistent with appeals elsewhere in the history of reproductive politics to women's reproductive choice. As Kirkman (2001) notes, the radical feminist assertion that women are patriarchal dupes when it comes to subjecting their bodies to IVF sat uneasily with demands for and assertions of the possibility of choice when it comes to abortion. Further, Kirkman observes, radical feminists mostly positioned themselves as speaking on behalf of all women, only rarely basing their accounts on empirically grounded evidence of the complexity with which women's agentic bodies/selves engage with the technologies.

The 'cultural studies' feminist understandings of gendered embodiment and ART are informed by a more post-modern view of the reproductive body, drawing attention to how radical feminist and liberal understandings rely on a rather unproblematic understanding of female reproductive biology as a fixed and unchanging fact. For instance, Farquhar (2000) contends that insisting on the wholeness and unity of the maternal body simplifies the diverse ways in which women experience motherhood, and relies on fixed ideas about what women and mothers are. Farquhar calls for an understanding of ART that acknowledges how technologies construct the reproductive body in ways that may be both liberating and oppressive, rather than act on *a priori* bodies:

Rejecting a characterisation of reproductive technologies as particularly demonic or beneficent, a post-modern appraisal focuses on the historical specificity of the diversity of their uses and shifting of the meanings they generate for and by different constituencies. (Farquhar 2000: 215)

Haraway's metaphor of the cyborg (1991)—despite misuse and overuse—continues to evoke complex and productive ways of thinking about how contemporary Western men and women participate in the gendered social embodiment of assisted reproduction. For Haraway, the 'machine is us, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment' (1991: 180). The cyborg is a complicated psychic and fleshy amalgam of humanity and technology. As such, it challenges the notion that male and female bodies are sexed timelessly, naturally and differently in human reproduction. Rather,

cyborg bodies are profoundly transformed by various biomedical technologies which change how embodied processes such as conception, pregnancy, birth and parenthood are engendered, understood and experienced. Or in other words, sexed bodies are produced by cultural process at the same time as they produce it.

This idea is best understood by way of example. The routine monitoring of pregnancy made possible through ultrasound technology externalises a visual image of the foetus. Petchesky (2000) argues the technology allows doctors to construe women as marginal to foetal development and constitutes the foetus as a person who exists in a free-floating, disembodied space seemingly independent of the mother. Such visualising technology can be thought of as cyborg because it produces what Franklin (1993) calls *bodily permeability* in which the body boundaries between mother and foetus are breached, in favour of deferring to expertise gained through what can be seen from the outside. This may be an alienating experience for the mother, displacing the intimate knowledge and confidence about her baby's development through unseen literal embodiment. Yet women also experience the technology as beneficial. It provides couples with a much desired means to share during the pregnancy in the emotional connection to the baby. Mitchell and Georges (1998) discuss how sonographers now routinely include fathers in heterosexual couples in the ultrasound examination as a means of promoting both paternal and maternal emotional connectedness to the baby prior to birth.

A cyborg perspective on gendered embodiment and ART is assumed in this study not to valorise uncritically medical intervention into pregnancy and childbirth, nor to champion 'high-tech' medical processes such as IVF and gestational surrogacy. It is valuable to the degree it enables scepticism in the face of all claims to 'nature' untrammelled by cultural process in human reproduction. This is what Dumit and Davis-Floyd (1998) refer to as an agnostic view, understanding how the reproductive body is always mediated by cultural process in ways that are *intrinsically* neither good nor bad. It disrupts the idea of timelessly natural sexed bodies in favour of reflecting on how technologies associated with achieving pregnancy and parenthood can transform the reproductive experience in a given time and place. Medical technologies, in this reading, are not necessarily oppressive, or de-humanising by virtue of being man-made as in radical feminist accounts, or contrasted negatively

with more ostensibly natural (i.e. less medically interventionist) processes. For instance, midwifery and obstetrics can both be understood as technologies of birth, albeit at different ends of a biomedical spectrum of intervention, just as sex, self-insemination and *in-vitro* fertilisation can be understood as technologies of conception. Viewing conceptive processes in an agnostic fashion allows attention to how technologies mediate and transform individual experience of pregnancy and parenthood rather than assuming they have a fixed meaning and value independent of such experience.

Critical Humanism and culture(s)

A view which takes the human being as an embodied, emotional, interactive self, striving for meaning in wider historically specific social worlds and an even wider universe is not a bad, even humbling, starting place.

Ken Plummer (2001) *Documents of Life 2: an invitation to a Critical Humanism*

The empirical part of this study was designed and conceived according to the conventions of interpretive sociology, which emphasise the importance of human agency and subjective meaning. The assumptions about human actors that inform this study echo many of those articulated by Plummer (2001). Plummer's *Critical Humanism* engages with post-structuralist and post-modernist views of human subjectivity, in striking a balance between the realist tradition in sociological biographical research and more contemporary concerns with understanding the manner in which stories and lives are textually crafted. Critical humanism retains an assumption that human beings are important in fashioning the conditions of their own lives. Foremost, it emphasises human agency and creativity while still acknowledging individuals can only act within certain constraints of social embodiment and history. It takes as its subject matter real human experiences as expressed in talk, emotions and activity, again with an emphasis on the social organisation of these activities.

Critical humanism incorporates many of the assumptions of the symbolic interactionist perspective on social research. Symbolic interactionism takes it as given that people act according to the meanings they attribute to words, events and other people. As a research perspective, it requires that the researcher attempts to 'see the situation as it is seen by the actor, observing what the actor takes into account'

(Blumer 1969: 56). Rich descriptions of actors' interpretations become a starting point for the researcher's interpretations. In this regard, those working in the symbolic interactionist tradition 'evince a profound respect for the empirical world' (Schwandt 1998).

One significant divide between contemporary social researchers is between those with an interactionist understanding and those with a *discursivist* (Alvesson 2002) understanding of human subjectivity. Interactionists (like Plummer and Weeks) are to some extent critical of discursivists drawing on the work of Foucault and Butler for being ultimately deterministic in their view of human subjectivity. The emotional states and the unique set of biographical circumstances each individual brings to language or discourse are under-emphasised. Discursivists find in interactionists too fixed a view of individual 'identity' and an over-emphasis on individual agency; in other words, too much emphasis on a self that exists somehow prior to language and acculturation. They tend to emphasise the multiplicity of discourse and the capacity for varied subject positions, within the same person at different times (e.g. Weedon 1992). Critical humanism does not resolve this tension but can, to some extent, breach the gap between the classic symbolic interactionist and the more post-modern or discursivist subject, through incorporating a greater self-reflexiveness about language use. For instance, attention is paid to the metaphors people use to articulate and circumscribe their worldview as well as to any objective reality their words gesture towards.

Attention to the material and discursive effects of metaphor also characterises working with a more post-modern anthropological concept of culture. Yanagisako and Delaney (1995) argue strongly for retaining a notion of culture as the context in which discourse and practice connect. For instance, in the arenas of family, kinship and having babies, nature is a widely used metaphor with a great deal of cultural purchase. When people insist on a behaviour, relationship or process being natural, they are making a claim to its strong emotional significance or its perceived non-negotiable and unchanging dimensions. The ubiquity of appeals to nature in the domains of family, kinship, motherhood and fatherhood provide good examples of how people may create and be influenced by enduring and relatively consistent patterns of meaning and behaviour. This is not to say that nature is a stable category that always

has predictable meaning or content (see Strathern 1992a, 1992b; Franklin 1997, 2001). Foremost, in this reading, culture is not a structure or power exerting uniform and predictable pressure. It does not determine beliefs or practice. Nor is it a relativist recombination of ‘fragments of meaning’ whereby individuals make cultural meaning according to personal whim or choice:

The productiveness of the concept depends on our commitment to use it as an incitement to continually rethink what is same and what is different, how they are so and what this means; and to continually reassess the fragmentation or coherence of discourses, domains and institutions—whether they hold together and how. (Yanagisako & Delaney 1995: 19)

Importantly, this conceptualisation encourages a view of cultural phenomena as plural and dynamic rather than unitary, static and singular.

Chapter outline

The study is divided into three sections. This Introduction and three subsequent chapters comprise Section One and outline the intellectual, socio-legal and methodological parameters. Chapters Four to Eight comprise Section Two and are based on analysis of interviews and other primary sources. In Section Three, a concluding chapter draws together the main theoretical, social and policy implications of the study.

Chapter One establishes *families of choice* as a theoretical entry portal to the study. It contextualises the research within sociological and anthropological debates on individualisation and kinship in the era of assisted reproduction, emphasising the limitations in suggesting choice pertains mostly to lesbian and gay kinship and preoccupations with biology more to heterosexual understandings of kinship. It argues for greater attentiveness to the complexity with which notions of choice, love, friendship and biological relatedness are mobilised in parental negotiations and relationships across sexuality and gender divides.

In Chapter Two an outline is given of relevant aspects of Australian legislation, policy and political activity pertaining to lesbian and gay parenting and assisted reproduction, and the principles or assumptions about family and kinship on which these rest. In

keeping with the broader concerns of the study, the aim is to sketch recent developments in law, policy, activism and public debate, insofar as these limit some and facilitate other forms of parental and reproductive relationships.

Reflection and more detail is provided in Chapter Three about epistemological and methodological issues outlined in the Introduction. The procedural, analytic and political challenges this particular study posed are discussed and the research participants are introduced.

Chapter Four is the first chapter of Section Two and provides a historical perspective on lesbian planned parenthood in Australia. Here I explore the stories of several Australian lesbian mothers who started planning or conceived their children during the 1980s, a time when it was far more difficult than it is now to be a lesbian and not be exposed to feminist ideas and activism. I consider how the influential discourse on women's reproductive autonomy women's right-to-choose is implicated in the popularisation of self-insemination pregnancies. Sometimes, but not always, this knowledge converged with more utopian radical feminist visions naturalising families without fathers.

In Chapter Five, the interest lies in how equality as parents is subjectively understood and put into practice by contemporary co-parenting lesbian couples, and how biological relatedness—broadly conceived—is implicated in this process. Biogenetic connections between birth mothers and children remain highly salient. Achieving a sense of equivalence between a biological mother and co-parent requires attention on a number of symbolic and social levels.

The social and symbolic significance of biological fathers to contemporary lesbian parents is discussed in Chapter Six. Where anonymous donor insemination is the means to conception, the radical feminist valorisation of unidentifiable biological fathers has deferred to a tendency towards concerns about children's right-to-know. However, despite the demise in influence of explicitly radical feminist ideologies, the paternity issue remains extremely politicised within lesbian parenting networks.

In Chapter Seven, attention turns to the stories of gay men. The diverse meaning and character of relationships with women and children created through semen transfer and surrogacy is explored. The interest lies in the extent to which men's conceptualisations and performances transform dominant social possibilities for father/child relationships and to what extent they assume more conventional notions of what it means to be a father or a sperm donor. Of particular interest is the difference between a 'donor', a 'father', and a 'parent', from the men's perspective, as a lived relationship to a child.

Chapter Eight brings together the perspectives of men and women. It considers the planning and negotiation processes engaged in when seeking parenthood without clinical intermediaries and the principles or assumptions about family and kinship on which these rest. Strategies such as carefully worded advertisements, written agreements, and prolonged intense discussions about intended family relationships are discussed. These strategies—from risk management, through trusting in friendship and love—have strong precedents in heteronormative clinical and family practice.

In the concluding chapter, I argue for the need to look beyond unitary notions of families of choice in order to consider with more complexity the range of relationships created between adults and children in gayby boom families, and the power relations that characterise these relationships. Also contemplated are the interesting new questions for law and policy-makers about reproductive rights and social justice raised by these arrangements, in the context of directions in existing lesbian and gay activism and what can be learned from participants' stories.