Home & away: Autoethnographic fragments of queer heterosexuality

Abstract:

‘I believe that though my sexual orientation is straight, my ideological and political orientation towards sex is queer’ (Rambukkana 2004, p. 151).

This work explores non-normative, or queer, heterosexuality through the themes of home, belonging and identity. Employing an anti-normative approach to scholarly writing, it uses deconstructive graphic design techniques to present an autoethnographic account of lived experience together with critical analysis. Considering intersectional factors such as gender and race, this writing illustrates the tensions of simultaneously benefiting from heterosexual privilege whilst being marginalised by the conditional bounds of normative heterosexuality, revealing a liminal subject position within heteronormative discourses. Such liminality is reflected in the fragmented form and content of the work, which communicates a sense of dislocation from being enmeshed within both queer and straight discourses of desire. Engaging with heterosexuality as both identity and practice, this writing seeks to challenge understandings of heterosexuality as a unified field while considering the political potential of queer heterosexuality to destabilise and overflow the heterosexual/homosexual binary and help erode heterosexuality’s hegemonic position.
(again! this delightful concussion)

Food bores me. I can’t sleep.

I live on cigarettes and coffee and kinetic wonderment.
I buy new clothes – I consume – I am consumed.
I am the empty breathy fullness of a Noosha Fox song.

I feel aberrant, strange, odd;
I feel deliriously and riotously **ALIVE!**

Falling in love while already loving.
Falling in love while being loved in return/while being loved in return.
This state I’m in, this state of love (against the usual state of affairs).

A form of respect: I don’t fantasise about him when I masturbate.
I want him to be real. We have never even kissed.

Does anyone else feel like this?
I go online to find out. I don’t know how to ask.
‘When you love two people’
Polyamory: many loves.

Is two many? (**Three** has always been my **lucky number**.)

Overwhelmed by RIGHTEOUSNESS
(Polyamory about love **NOT** sex. Polyamory is **NOT** swinging)
I have no hesitation telling Luke that I have fallen in love with **him**.

*Love is all you need*

I rather hoped he might be pleased, because I was.

[he wasn’t.]
‘I’m sick of talking about it. Let’s just go out and have fun together’.

We drive to Byron and sit on the headland, overlooking the beach.

‘I love you.’

‘I love you.’

Nothing has really changed. Everything has really changed.

What will become of us?

In some of the poly books, they talk about your intellectual decision to reject monogamy. Alternatively, you might have given it a red-hot go, but your attempts were doomed from the start, because humans are naturally non-monogamous.

I was raised on Enid Blyton.

I admired her group of jolly friends who wore things called anoraks and had a dog that didn’t work.

These children (fuelled by lashings of ginger beer) adventured around thwarting smugglers (who were swarthy and “foreign” and thus inherently suspect).

The Famous Five didn’t pick tomatoes or dip cattle [the soft little pricks].

It all seemed so seductive and yet so utterly strange.

‘It’s not an affair; I don’t just want to fuck him.’

‘But that’s it. It’s called a love affair for a reason.’

I WON’T listen. This is really special. I WON’T give this up. I WON’T decide between you. I DON’T WANT TO.

YOU can’t make ME.

Having questioned all kinds of things that were purportedly “natural” (including the inevitability of motherhood and the mysterious workings of God) I never thought about monogamy.

I have been blindsided/I have been blind.

I never really thought about being heterosexual either.

You don’t have to when you just are.

Much like whiteness.
“My role is to be love’s executioner,” says the counsellor.

What a wanker, I think. I’ve read Yalom too. This is nothing like that.
I hope the counsellor will tell us that polyamorous relationships can work, that they are successful for lots of people. [That never happens]

“So tell me Nollie, what does he give you that Luke doesn’t?”

“I’m not a ledger. I don’t take bits of them to balance myself out. They are whole people. I love each of them and both of them.”
I think it’s a compelling speech, but the counsellor seems unimpressed.

[I am the lack]

Always this pull between what is meant to be and what is and what could be: the standard melodrama that informs keeping everything as normal as possible {two gold rings/one of each (opposites attract)/monogamy or infidelity}. Swings and roundabouts.
Falling off the horse to realise it was just a merry-go-round and wondering if you want to get back on again (whilst knowing that your multiple privileges facilitate such wonderment).
And this merry-go-round exists because your horse is pink and the horse beside it is blue and that is supposed to explain everything.

‘Most people, I hope, have had the experience of discovering deep pleasure in something they would not have said previously that they wanted. Yet the prevalent wisdom, oddly enough, seems to be that variant desires are legitimate only if they can be shown to be immutable, natural and innate’

(Warner 1999, p. 9).
Politics emerges when we begin to see our individual and personal lives as sites of resistance from which we can challenge broader hierarchies of power.

(Wilkinson 2010, p. 252).
Middle of the night find a towel down the hallway too close to the right straight into that **FUCKING RIB-BREAKING BASTARD** of a bookshelf edge close the door softly wait for the flush to stop quietly now *don’t wake them up*. Possums in the roof! Do they *really* chew the wires or just piss everywhere?

Through the kitchen light switch on the left *(your other left)*

into the laundry sharp slice from that **bastard** of a cheap plastic washing basket through the door leave it open seat down:

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fuck

my toe is stinging!
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Different hairbrushes, plates, keys, mealtimes, couches, visitors. Son-like people, unmet daughter, housemate, five cats, one dog, two sets of dead parents, one stepfather (unseen), two stepmothers (neither evil), two anniversaries, two September birthdays, two electricity bills, bag full of books and clothes too heavy to walk “home” with.

**Where** are the tissues? *Do we have any tissues?*

There are **three [3] boxes** at Dalley Street.

I picked up some milk.

I will call you tonight.

*Is there any chocolate left?*

Hello darling.

Honey, I’m home.

⚠️ This suggests a contained, compartmentalised neatness – a simple doubling of the {heterosexual} couple relationship.

    A FIFO arrangement for love.
    [Am I the miner or the resource?]

    But is that just a cover for all the **DELICIOUSLY FILTHY ADULTEROUS SEX?**

This ongoing disorientation when I wake in the middle of the night, feeling momentarily uncertain about exactly where

I am.

When people ask ‘where do you live?’

I pause to decide what (or how much) to tell.

Living in two places: *(a movement)*

    home.
A young child lived at Dalley Street with us for about eighteen months. Sometimes, I gave him a bath. I fed him, but largely managed to avoid nappy changes. I sang Run Rabbit Run and tried to substitute Johnny Cash for The Wiggles, with partial success.

He had a mark on his hand, so I taught him “stigmata”. The people at daycare heard “tomato”.

One day, as I scraped play-doh off the vintage rug, I was flooded with joy that I decided never to have children, although I love this child (and later, the son-like people).

I have never wanted kids of my own. Luke and I got married because this ceremony seemed to represent a formal bond instead of having a child. People used to smile and say, plenty of time, or one day you’ll feel differently.

Plenty of time and one day have now passed, so when people say do you have kids? it’s not really a question. It’s a conversational opening, a chance to talk about what they think will be common ground, if they see you as heterosexually coupled too.

Now I say, I’m child-free. I’ve never wanted kids. I usually follow up with, I have lots of nieces and nephews, I love being an auntie! because that’s true, and it seems to makes them more comfortable.

Perhaps I also experience a desire to say something that might make me seem less strange.

I feel anxious and edgy around babies, but I like some kids. I enjoy it when they are old enough to start to talk and sing with you, or draw pictures together, or make things out of sticks and leaves and imagination.

I like knowing them as they grow up, becoming themselves.

It’s like Eve said: ‘People are different from each other’ (Kosofsky Sedgwick 2008, p. 22).

As Harding (1998, p. 46) argues, ‘within a matrix of heterosexism, reproduction can be seen as the ultimate visible expression of being a sex and having a sexuality’. Thus, pronatalist ideologies frequently represent ‘woman’ and ‘mother’ as synonymous identity positions (Rich et al. 2011).

Pronatalism advances a position that supports and encourages fertility and parenthood through attitudes, beliefs and actions that may be implicit or explicit (ibid).

As a recent Australian study demonstrates, being child-free frequently serves as a discrediting attribute, often associated with selfishness or a lesser inherent capacity for care or compassion (Rich et al. 2011).

Such beliefs are evident in a statement about the former Australian Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, by politician Mark Latham, who contended that ‘... anyone who chooses a life without children, as Gillard has, cannot have much love in them’ (Wright 2011). Julia Gillard’s reproductive status was also a matter deemed appropriate for comment by politician Bill Heffernan in 2007.
I am

**heterosexual**

according to the original
**scientific and medical meaning** of the term:

A person whose sexual
desire for the “opposite
sex” is not based in a
reproductive drive

(Katz 2007).

This term was used to
label that which was
seen as perverse.

Once, at a particular
point in time, in a
particular location,
heterosexuals were, it
seems, quite **QUEER**.

Words change over time.
Times change over words.

In remarks he later apologised
for, Heffernan described Gillard
as ‘deliberately barren’ and thus
not having experienced ‘one of
the great understandings in a
community’, namely ‘family and
the relationship between mums,
dads and a bucket of nappies’
(Harrison 2007).

As this illustrates, pronatalist
rhetoric can invoke and naturalise
the heterosexual nuclear family
model as the specific location for
child rearing. In calling for an
increase to the birth rate, Peter
Costello similarly seemed to
invoke and naturalise this model
when he urged Australians to have
‘one for mum, one for dad, and one
for the country’ (Ryan 2010).

When “woman” and “mother”
are conflated, female subjects
are required to have children in
order to be seen as having an
interpretable sex and sexuality:
one that represents an enactment
of their “natural” state. Conversely,
this logic also positions women
without children as “unnatural” or
“unwomanly” (Rich et al. 2011).

Yet, as a marginalised identity
position, being a voluntarily
child-free heterosexual woman can
also be seen to offer ‘generative
potential’ at the boundaries of
hegemonic heterosexuality
(Hockey et al. 2007, p. 115).

Here, the lack of need to direct
time, emotional and financial
resources to parenting may support
the conditions that enable child-
free subjects to enact and maintain
‘differently configured cultural
relations’ (Harding 1998, p. 98).
A phone call with my mother. She says *any chance you’re coming home soon?*

Home means *the farm,* the place I learned to ride a horse (Barney), the place where Gran made rice pudding in a blue and white enamel dish and Pa sat on the back steps, smoking.

[Later in the story he develops emphysema. A dog howls at the moment of his death.]

My father says the listing is on the website: can I look at it for them? They don’t have the internet.

When I think about *the farm being sold* I think about home as a place (the place) you can always go back to. They have to welcome you, or at least begrudgingly accept you back.

**blood is thicker than water**

My frame of reference for home is a noun. Jackson *(cited in Mallett 2004, p. 73)* writes that nomadic people have a focus that does not centre on an idea of home as a ‘private place’ distinct from the ‘outside’ world.

**Inside out:** that time I went to the doctor for a pap smear and she looked away and then suggested **other** tests.

I said *husband* and I said *partner.*

*But unless sexually transmitted diseases are now spreading via miasma, I’m fine: it’s a waste of time and resources.*

‘Let’s just do them anyway.’

I was never stolen from my family. Nobody ever put me in ‘a home’.

I have no experience of dispossession or exile or migration.

*losing the farm sounds too melodramatic yet even now when I think those are the words*
The uncomfortable indignity of being treated as someone you don’t recognise.

I was fifteen when the first “grim reaper” ad, produced under the auspices of the National Advisory Committee on AIDS, appeared on television (Reynolds/NACAIDS 1987).

This told me it was no longer ‘just gays and IV drug users’ who were being killed by AIDS: now ‘every one of us’ (this meant (heterosexual) ‘men’ and ‘women’ and their (innocent) children) was at risk.

On the shelves of the pharmacy or the supermarket I can buy an assortment of condoms to put on my partner’s penises. I can get such condoms free of charge from a bowl in the waiting room of the doctor’s surgery at the university.

If I want a Femidom, they cost about four dollars each, not including postage. The diagram inside the pack shows how to arrange your fingers in the shadow puppet position necessary to insert the small inner ring into your vagina.

Stuffing this miracle of polyurethane origami inside myself, I think of the pack’s claim that my partner and I will enjoy ‘comfortable, sensitive lovemaking’. Then again, Femidoms are also supposed to be ‘simple and easy to insert’.

It kind of hangs outside my body a little. I think this is what they mean by ‘gently lines the vagina’.

It makes a rustling noise.

I can use one if I have to and I feel good about this.

I have the means (money and knowledge) to protect myself.

The heteronormative privilege to privacy: heterosexuality assumes the position of being “normal” and thus unremarkable.

Through the power of being on the left of the (heterosexual/homosexual) binary, heterosexuality is allowed to be private because there is no need to explain it.

(Spell checker does not recognise ‘heteronormative’, perhaps proving something.

Spell checker suggests heteromorphosis – it knows of queer regenerations.)

He’d had a vasectomy so I didn’t have to worry about getting pregnant and we’d talked about histories and he was out of practice with condoms and it just sort of happened. And I had to say sorry, I have been unsafe, but since you and I are using condoms it should be ok although I have broken my promise. And then I had to wait and when everything was clear I felt so relieved, like I had been given a lucky break and what would I do (if there was a) next time?
Home as plural: a feeling of being free range, rejecting ‘... modernity’s traditional discourses [that] genders the home feminine and defines the housewife’s role as the creation and preservation of its moral and physical homeliness and cleanliness’ (Pink 2004, p. 83).

Sheff (2005, p. 278) notes that ‘women with greater class and race privilege reported feeling greater freedom in relationship style’.

**Tuesday 9 August, 2011:**

Question 3 asks ‘Is the person male or female?’

There isn’t a space to write ‘no’.

You are instructed to mark one box per person.

Organisation Intersex International Australia (2011) urged intersex people to write ‘intersex’ in the space provided to answer Question 19: ‘What is the person’s religion?’

Having previously put a check in the ‘female’ box I was spared the necessity of declaring myself intersex as a matter of (optional) faith.

‘The Census is a snapshot of the nation and accurately measures the number of people in Australia on Census night, their key characteristics, and the places in which they live’ (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011a).

**[People in Australia are male or female.]**

After successful lobbying by Australian Marriage Equality (AME) (Lahoud 2011), the 2011 Census recognised the marital status of same-sex couples who had married overseas. For the first time, the 2011 Census counted both married and defacto same- and opposite-sex couple partnerships in Australia.

Same-sex couples cannot legally marry in Australia.

I go to the Lismore launch of Speak Now: Australian Perspectives on Same-Sex Marriage (Marsh 2011).

I’m married to Luke, so I can’t marry **him**, but its not a big deal (for me, anyway).

**he** talks to Victor, the book’s editor, about our family.

Victor has included a chapter in Speak Now by Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli that talks about polyamory.

My television hails me as the purchaser of hand sanitiser, antibacterial spray and disinfectant wipes. Its about keeping clean. **Failure** to deal with dirt and contagion is to jeopardise the family.

You can never just wash your hands of it, **woman**.

**People are secretly judging your toilet**

(you filthy slut).

‘The way Australians are organising their lives is often in advance of what business and government are doing in the way of policy,’ (Shorten in Australian Associated Press 2011).
I think this is a brave move, considering the campaign for same-sex marriage equality is gaining mainstream support, and polygamy is something the far right hold up as a “slippery slope” argument against it.

The book launch is wonderful.

We are in Luke’s workplace; at the university where all three of us spend time. This feels like a safe space and a gatecrashing all in one.

Kentlyn (2008, p. 335) writes that ‘... it seems the further from urban areas that people live, the more important geographic localities rather than communities of interest may be for social participation’.

I feel that I live in a place where diversity is more than a word. Nimbin is just down the road. Lismore has Tropical Fruits and the University:

I am glad to live in this place, where Aunties welcome me to country.

I live on Widjabul land.

**Home as a verb (a ‘doing word’) ...**

Luke fixes the wall and then, together, we paint the new bedroom that he and I will move into. A son-like person helps us paint while another goes out and gets the ingredients for lunch. We are making a new space together. Perhaps this is more than just a repainted bedroom. Maybe in a grander vision it could exemplify how domestic activities can be ‘intentional and creative strategies of affirmation or resistance to perceived conventions, norms or discourses’ (Pink 2004, p. 42).

After all, why should Luke care about or devote time to this “other home”?

A home where I live with the other man?

Mallett (2004, p. 77) suggests that home can be ‘a constellation of relationships’. If family moves beyond the nuclear, beyond kin, you can add more people without first having to make them:

**a water family!**
The Census form asks me where I usually live, and I select ‘the address shown on the front of this form’. At Dalley Street, Luke is filling out the Census too. He answers yes to Question 52; ‘a person who usually lives at this address was absent on Census night’.

Relationship to Person 1: spouse.

A mononormative reading of these forms would be that I have moved in with him (my ‘defacto partner’) while Luke (my ‘spouse’) stays in Dalley Street, completing the Census alone in the misguided belief that I will come back (returning to “the residence”, to “the household”, to “my usual place”).

Under the heading ‘Some basic facts’, the Australian Institute of Family Studies (2010) explains that ‘... members of families who live in different households are not treated as part of the same family unit’, for ‘statistical purposes’.

[Some families are not.]

Everyone on the Census form can only be shown to have a relationship to Person 1

so even if you all live together you can’t accurately reflect relational bonds other than to Person 1.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2009) notes that couple relationships ‘... provide people with love, companionship, support, and opportunities for having children and raising families. As such, couples are a fundamental building block of society’.

I seem to have raised a family from people I found laying around.
On my birthday card my mother writes *I miss you.* My father writes *you are very special.* Luke is all they expect to hear about. Not speaking about *him* is possible because I can easily condense and edit my life. [Please remember that, dear reader.]

I wonder about *telling them.*
What would be the outcome?
The surprising acceptance (*When will we meet him?*),
the unexpected reveal (*Oh, we were into the Lifestyle in the '70s!*),
or the more anticipated [pain of] rejection.

**Slut** without *ethical* in front of it.
Perhaps confusion and fear: *is there something wrong with Luke?*

Should I tell them so they might know the *real* me?
And what of Luke and *him* in all this?
And the son-like people?
What is really to be achieved?

Do I want to shed *blood*?
Do I want to mix *blood* and *water*?

At the supermarket: milk costs one dollar per litre.
It is perhaps better to say that is the price.
For most things a price must be paid:
*what's the damage?*
Sometimes, the cost of things really comes home to you.
Home Brand: I can afford not to buy it.

*Subversion of the past, emergence of the future; two sides of the same undertaking.*

(Audinet 2004 in Pallotta-Chiarolli 2011, p. 178)
The active construction of categories to produce identities by the state is evidenced by historical changes in the terminology used to classify Torres Strait Islanders – ‘Polynesians’ in 1947, ‘Pacific Islanders’ in 1954 and 1961 – in the Australian Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2011b, p. 4).

It was not until 1996 that people who self-identified as having both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage were accurately acknowledged in the data generated from census form responses (ABS 2011b, p. 5).

Information gathered from the Census forms part of the *avalanche of numbers* through which the state regulates life. Subjects under the law are categorised to produce citizens and identities (Foucault 1981).

This asserts what may be measured, spoken of, understood, seen and aspired to. Such power is constructive, as well as censorious.

*In the picture: present, yet blurred?*

*The power to name.*
As Appadurai (1993, p. 796) writes, nations are ‘fragile abstractions’. They need to be brought into being again and again by numbers and categories that construct the real. The responses of individuals make up the group inside the picture; a snapshot of a nation, carefully framed. **We** all have a part to play.

The Census is a legal instrument. You are expected to be complicit, to comply, in recording yourself according to the terms set by the state. Giving **false information** is a **punishable offence**. There are penalties for not playing your part in this ongoing project to inscribe the Australian national identity.

The state needs you.
With the High Court’s 2013 ruling that the ACT’s laws enabling same-sex couple marriage were unconstitutional, same-sex couples are again unable to legally marry in any Australian state or territory (Byrne 2013). This upholds the requirement that an amendment to the Marriage Act to remove specific reference to ‘a man and a woman’ (an addition made in 2004 under the Howard government) would be necessary to enable same-sex couples to marry under the same conditions that currently govern marriages between opposite-sex couples under federal law (Schubert 2012).

In addition to achieving the same legal rights as heterosexual married couples, same-sex couple marriage has been identified as symbolically important in recognising and respecting lesbian and gay couples and their families within Australian society, asserting their equal validity to heterosexual couples and family units (Morgan 2011). In contemporary Australia, the right for same-sex couples to marry is an issue of national significance, attracting considerable media coverage and a national day of action.

Within this movement, Australian Marriage Equality (AME), a national membership-based organisation, is a central advocate. The AME website claims that this organisation is ‘... working for equal marriage rights for all Australians regardless of their gender or sexuality’ (AME 2013). Yet, the AME Constitution states that the objective of this organisation is to ‘... achieve equal marriage rights under Australian law for same sex couples’ (AME 2009a). Importantly, this demonstrates that the notion of marriage equality currently being advanced by AME is highly specific.

As Fox (2011) identifies, marriage equality between consenting adults would require an ability for individuals to marry regardless of sex or gender, including intersex people, or those who identify as not having a sex or gender identity. Further, marriage equality would include an ability to be concurrently married to more than one person.
Fox suggests that such an expansion of marriage equality could encourage a broader acknowledgement of committed relationships, to recognise people in caring, supportive and interdependent relationships, similar to the Tasmanian relationship register. In doing so, perhaps the hierarchical nature of marriage (‘forsaking all others’) could be challenged, to value, acknowledge and respect people in many different kinds of relationships, beyond partnership with “the one”.

Despite this potential, the rules for registering relationships at a state or territory level in Australia do not currently enable a significantly broader acknowledgement of relationship diversity. The Australian Capital Territory (ACT Government 2013) and Queensland (Queensland Government 2013) enable only two people over the age of 18 years, regardless of sex, to enter into a civil partnership, one of whom must be a resident of the state or territory where the relationship is registered and neither of whom may be married or already in a registered civil union or partnership. Further, a relationship cannot be registered if it is ‘prohibited’ (i.e. between linear descendants or lineal ancestors, siblings or half-siblings). In addition to the rules that apply in the ACT and Qld, information about the NSW partnership register specifically notes that individuals who are ‘in a relationship as a couple with another person’ cannot register their relationship (New South Wales Government 2013).

In Victoria, which enables registration of both ‘domestic’ and ‘caring relationships’, both parties must usually reside within the state and only one relationship between two people may be registered. Thus, an individual who is married, in a registered relationship or in ‘another relationship that could be registered’, is unable to register as part of more than one domestic or caring relationship (State Government Victoria 2012). In Tasmania, which also enables both ‘caring’ and ‘significant’ relationships to be registered, caring relationships similarly cannot be registered if either party in the relationship is married, or in an existing caring or significant relationship with another person (Tasmanian Government 2013).

**Only one person is significant.**
You can only care for one person.
Mono not stereo. Not poly.
Considering this, perhaps a disavowal of formal relationships registered with the state is the solution to oppose such construction and reinforcement of relational hierarchies, classifications and exclusions.

Yet, marriage or relationship registration in contemporary Australia guarantees access to relevant federal and state entitlements, as it proves the existence of a relationship. In relation to this, AME (2009b) argue that same-sex civil unions in Australia are a ‘failed experiment’ as they do not offer the legal equality, practical benefits or social acceptance that marriage does.

In seeking to gain the right for same-sex couples to marry, an acceptance that rights should be afforded to people based on their relationship status is confirmed by default. Such an approach focuses on achieving equality within existing legal frameworks, rather than critiquing institutional power itself. This has been a source of sustained critique by queer groups such as Against Equality who are becoming increasingly active in Australia (Nair 2012). Against Equality (2011) argues that same-sex couple marriage is an inherently conservative position which ‘apes hetero privilege’ and ‘increases economic inequality by perpetuating a system which deems married beings more worthy of the basics like health care and economic rights’. Similarly, in a recent opinion piece, Poole (2012) points to the exclusionary nature of marriage, writing that it discriminates against ‘sexual minorities within our community, or outside it’ and facilitates ‘bigotry against multi-partner relationships, non-standard families and the celibate’.

Polyamory is not a sexual identity, although some advocate for it to be recognised as such, so that laws could be developed to protect against discrimination, an issue of particular relevance for those raising children (Tweedy 2010). In a social climate where polyamory is growing in visibility, proponents such as Wagner (2008) argue that ‘putting a less radical face on polyamory’ will help it become more acceptable and accessible in mainstream society.

Mainstream Western media evidences a growing fascination with non-monogamies (Barker & Langdridge 2010). Here, polyamory is ‘a growing sexual story’, but the dominant narrative being told focuses on the centrality of love in polyamorous relationships, which can serve to de-emphasise the role of sexuality (Ritchie 2010, p. 50).

Further, as some popular texts about polyamory make distinctions between polyamory and the lifestyle (“swinging”) (Anapol 1992, Chapman 2010), polyamory can be represented as more “ethical” than other forms of non-monogamy which are conventionally seen as sex- or pleasure-based.

Such representations can serve to construct polyamory as superior to other non-monogamies, and align polyamory within conservative heteronormative discourses that privilege romantic love (Klesse 2006).

Considering this, Wilkinson (2010) argues that any single notion of a true polyamory must be continually challenged to reject the validation of any particular story about polyamory over another.
Based in the desire (or perceived necessity) of working within existing frameworks of privilege and relationship hierarchies, a less radical looking polyamory may also help achieve social and legal recognition for polyamorous practitioners of diverse sexualities. In Australia, the Polyamory Action Lobby (PAL) has been formed to agitate for legal rights and to ‘challenge cultural misconceptions about polyamorous relationships’ (Marshall 2013).

In addition to legal prohibitions against plural marriage (regardless of sex or gender identity) polyamorous practitioners can be subject to more subtle forms of disadvantage, for example, when trying to access family leave from an employer to care for an ill family member who does not reside in the same home.

In addition to disadvantaging polyamorous practitioners, policies which conceptualise caregiving arrangements solely within nuclear family models can disadvantage people who live within other extended family or kinship structures, including Indigenous Australians (McGrath 2008). In relation to this, although polygamous marriages between Indigenous Australians are acknowledged in order to give access to some government benefits and entitlements, these marriages are not recognised under Australian law (Jupp in Powell and O’Brien 2008).

Pallotta-Chiarolli (2011, p. 178) writes that ‘polyamorous and mixed-orientation individuals, relationships and communities ... are increasingly asking why their sexualities and families are being problematised and ignored in the marriage rights movement’. Perhaps partly answering this question, AME spokesperson Alex Greenwich has argued that polygamy would undermine marriage as an institution in Australia (Higgins 2012). Also advancing this position, former Attorney-General Robert McClelland stated that polygamous marriage is ‘entirely inconsistent’ with Australian law and culture (The Age 2008). In understanding McClelland’s position, religion plays an important role, as his comment related specifically to polygamous marriages between Muslim Australians.

‘When people hear ‘polygamy’ they think of a man with multiple wives, [which is] often taken in a creepy religious way. But polyamory can be between many people of differing genders and is always consensual’ (PAL in Marshall 2013).

**What might (other) people think of when they hear polygamy?**

‘Women living with a single man in polygamous relationships often share child-rearing responsibilities with each other. [...] It can leave women who are more interested in furthering careers able to do so while also raising children. It also enables women who are more interested in childbirth to do so without worrying about a financial need to work, since not just a male, but also another female spouse supports the family’ (Paul 2013).

**PS ‘people’: polygamy includes polygyny AND polyandry.**
‘You mean Luke doesn’t have other ... partners?’
‘No, he chooses to be monogamous.’
‘But don’t you feel guilty, seeing other people when he doesn’t?’
‘But if he doesn’t want to, why would I try and make him?’
‘But he has, sees ... other ... women?’
‘No. He probably will, but he hasn’t met anyone yet.’
‘Wow. So he and Luke, do they, I mean, they’re not ...’
‘Lovers? No, they’re more like metamours. That means the partner of your partner. So they have a relationship that’s separate to me. I guess its like friends, or maybe in-laws?’

We practice mutuality, not equality. Mutuality enables you to ask for what you want, instead of demanding the equivalent of what another has, or restricting your asking to what you’re willing to agree to in return. People can want different things, in different measure. Mutuality advances the right to ask without whipping out a set of scales and a blindfold.

Often, people pose problems. It gets frustrating, this ‘what if’ game. It’s like I’m trying to get them to join a cult but they’ve seen through my schemes and have come to protect the more gullible villagers.

Polyamory is not neat or tidy. When people ask questions, I feel like some kind of official spokesperson, so I try to say that there are lots of different ways, and its not just for straight people and yes, some people raise children together, this is just how it works for us, at this point in time.

I tend not to speak of my increasing shift towards relationship anarchy, because it’s even more of a foreign language, for me as well. I will not become fluent overnight. There is so much in language that makes things intelligible through asserting distinctions. It is hard to talk in other ways and be understood. There is also this legacy of thinking about relationships in particular ways, but now I try to catch myself doing it. To try and think and do things differently.

‘But what if you fell in love, like really fell in love, and he said you had to stop doing this or he’d end it?’

Yes, what if indeed.
As Willey (2006) outlines, non-monogamy is seen as a characteristic of the ‘uncivilised’, who do not belong to ‘Christian nations’. In contrast, monogamy operates as an unmarked norm which appears without racial significance, making it, by default, white. Opposition to polygamous marriage may therefore be understood as part of the ‘hysteria’ surrounding Islam in contemporary Australia, as identified by Jupp (Powell and O’Brien 2008) and further evidenced in rhetoric by Nick Folkes from the Australian Protectionist Party (Hasham 2012).

Thus, the ongoing disavowal of multiple-partner unions in the current debate about “marriage equality” in Australia arguably illustrates the deeply embedded racial and religious foundations that shape and inform this nation’s law and culture, privileging whiteness and Christianity. If viewed within this framework, the current marriage equality debate focusing on same-sex couple rights may serve to render other modes of inequality embedded within the institution of marriage less visible.

 Luke and I decide to stop being married to each other. I go online to find out about getting a divorce. There seems to be no option that covers rethinking the institution of marriage and deciding to reject it on philosophical grounds (Family Law Courts, n.d.).

I was hoping for a ‘voluntary disassociation from marriage’ option. Luke and I want to continue living with and loving with and sharing with each other.

I take off my wedding ring. Luke ends up losing his somewhere in the backyard. We still retain all the rights and privileges of a heterosexual married couple. I feel like a fraud, but now perhaps I look slightly less like one. The state can be hard to escape from. ‘Til death us do part?

‘... if we redefine it to include not just many lovers, but many kinds of love: maybe then polyamory could become truly inclusive, and potentially revolutionary.’

(Wilkinson 2010, p. 253)
In terms of this, adults in consanguineous relationships, including ‘whole or half blood siblings’, are among those who currently have no right to legally marry in Australia (Australian Government 2012, p. 76.). This includes adopted siblings, who may share no genetic ties to each other, and extends to ‘an adoption that has been annulled, cancelled or discharged or that has ceased to be effective’ (ibid).

As this indicates, laws do not usually advance the concept of a pluralistic sexual ethics (Rubin 1984). They are largely designed to control those who must never be given access to the centre; a place that stands for certain values and is suspicious of difference. A suspicion informed by concern that sexual variation is not, as Rubin suggests, benign, that such variation is a threat, a danger, a reason to panic. Or something to be disavowed wholesale, just in case.

Such caution protects the nation, making sure the people carefully framed in the snapshots are kept safe. Like our national borders must be guarded to keep us safe from

People who are related to each other should not be able to marry, because of the children.

But what if those involved did not want to, or could not, biologically reproduce together?

Should they be allowed to adopt or foster children?

Should they be officially supported in forming a family of their choosing in ways that might not be “normal”? In ways that might not involve children at all?

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Such caution protects the nation, making sure the people carefully framed in the snapshots are kept safe. Like our national borders must be guarded to keep us safe from

those who would come in from outside, the others who are illegal.
and on the margins:

yet also polyamorous and non-reproductive.

yet feel estrangement within this location.

or marginalised,

Perhaps I am a little bit queer

If so, I might use this space acknowledged as a speaker

Nepantla is not Narnia, but go somewhere else.

To look around in order to along the way.

To talk about paths

To think about what we and be enacted.

I am within the centre

I am heterosexual and married,

In this liminal position, I experience the pull of belonging and receive advantage from the centre’s narrow rules for inclusion,

Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli (2011) writes eloquently about the threshold border zone that polyamorous individuals and queerly mixed families inhabit. Here, the border zone is understood as Nepantla, a site of questioning and conflict that offers the potential for creativity, transformation and resistance (Anzaldúa & Keating 2002 in Pallotta-Chiarolli 2011).

In this location, it is possible for subjects such as myself to confront the fact that I have the choice to be privileged depending on what I say, and how I act and what I choose to reveal. I can fit myself into census forms, if I just say what is expected. If I leave things partly unwritten in order to produce the desired result: if I just agree to tick all the right boxes.

but not so queer as to threaten: palatable.

and on the margins:

to speak about the centre and the margins, being by virtue of my privileges, including white skin, heterosexuality, a cisgendered, able body. it might offer a space in which to think about trying to see others who might want to hold hands together that might be taken.

To respect those who want to take different paths.

equality could mean, and how these meanings might
References


