



# NOT SO PRIVATE LIVES

## The Ins and Outs of Same-Sex Relationships

A report on the analyses of relationship recognition measures included in the Not So Private Lives online survey for same-sex attracted Australians

August 2009

Total sample - 2232

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## Background

*Not So Private Lives: The Ins and Outs of Same-Sex Relationships* online survey was conducted through the School of Psychology at The University of Queensland, Australia. The aim of the survey was to add to the growing body of research on the lives of sexual minorities in Australia. The full report of this survey is expected to be completed by November 2009. The report provided here is based on the analyses of responses to a sub-set of questions within the survey. These questions focused on current relationship status and preferences for relationship recognition. The examination of these factors aimed to provide an insight into the preferences of same-sex attracted Australians with regard to the legal recognition of their relationships following the introduction of de facto status for same-sex couples at a federal level.

The survey site was hosted by Globalpark through its Unipark program for academic research. Globalpark has its headquarters in Germany and is one of the leading international suppliers of online software for academic and commercial research. All data collection and storage is provided by Globalpark. The url for the web-page entry to the survey was [www.notsoprivatelives.com](http://www.notsoprivatelives.com)

## Recruitment Strategies

The survey commenced on the 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2009 and ran until midnight, 15<sup>th</sup> August 2009. Responses to the survey decreased substantially in the latter two weeks, suggesting the sample had reached its maximum uptake. The survey was advertised online in the LGBTQI press for every state and territory and in print in various LGBTQI magazines. Information on the survey was also circulated through sexual minority email networks across the country. Flyers and/or email information were sent to sexual minority - businesses, health and community centres, sporting clubs, reading groups, parenting groups, outdoor activity groups, city and country social clubs, chat rooms, and sexual minority welcoming religious organisations. The survey was also promoted via Queer radio (e.g., JOY FM – Melbourne) and flyers were distributed at sexual minority events (e.g., Brisbane Pride Day and the Brisbane Queer Film Festival). Participants were also asked to consider informing their same-sex attracted friends/contacts about the survey.

## Eligibility

Participants were invited to take part in the survey provided they met the criteria of being:

- a) at least 18 years of age
- b) a citizen or permanent resident of Australia
- c) attracted (sexually and/or romantically) to people of the same sex

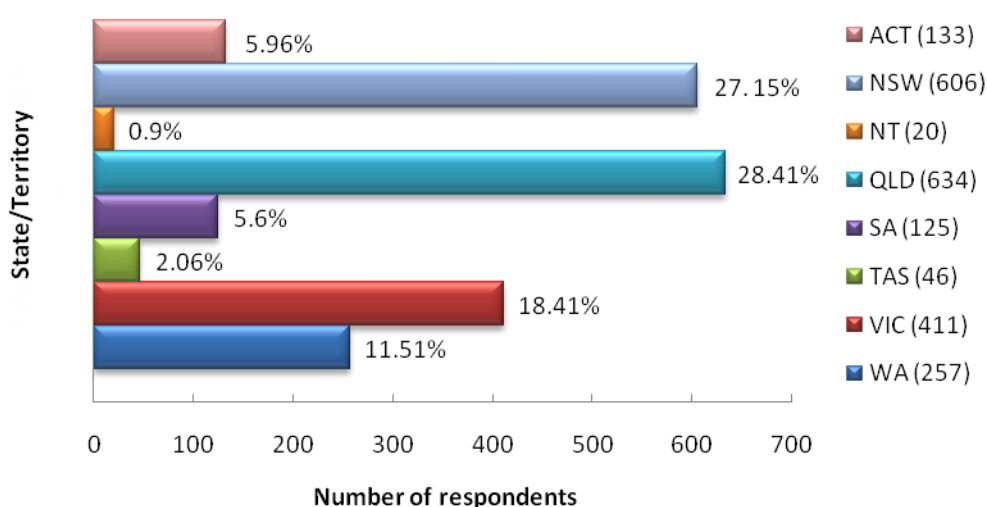
Participants, who did not select the 'Yes' option for all three of the questions addressing the criteria, were thanked for their interest and directed away from the survey. Identification as same-sex attracted was further verified by the Sexual Identity and Sexual and Romantic Attraction measures in the survey proper.

## Demographics

The *Preference for Legal Recognition of Same-Sex Relationships*' component of the survey was completed by 2,232 participants in total. Demographic information for these participants is provided below.

**Figure 1:**

**Numbers and percentages of respondents according to state/territory of residence**



All participants acknowledged that they were either citizens or permanent residents of Australia. Thirty-three participants selected the 'currently living overseas' option and were asked to provide the name of their home state or territory in Australia. These numbers (ACT - 3, NSW - 10, QLD - 8, VIC - 9 and WA - 3) are accounted for in Figure 1 above. The survey attracted a higher number of participants from Queensland, despite balancing advertising across states and territories. This is likely to have been as a result of the survey being conducted in Queensland and advertised under The University of Queensland logo.

**Table 1**

**Numbers and percentages of respondents according to area of current residence**

	N	%
Capital City	1643	73.6
Other metropolitan area (population 100,000 or more)	316	14.2
Large rural centre (25,000 – under 100,000)	144	6.5
Other rural area	111	5.0
Remote	18	0.8

Total N = 2232

## Age

The mean age of this sample was 35.8 years with a range from 18 to 82 years. Table 2 below indicates the numbers and percentages of participants by age group.

**Table 2**

### Numbers and percentages of respondents according to age group

	<i>N</i>	%
18 - under 20	131	5.9
20 - 29	701	31.4
30 - 39	585	26.3
40 - 49	484	21.7
50 - 59	236	10.6
60 - 69	74	3.3
70 - 82	17	0.8

Total *N* = 2228 (four participants did not provide their age).

## Biological Sex, Gender Identity and Sexual Identity

Participants were first asked to select their biological sex as defined at birth. Of the sample, 56.2% (*n* = 1254) selected female, 43.6% (*n* = 974) selected male and 0.2% (*n* = 4) selected intersex. Participants' current gender identity is detailed in Table 3 below. When examining the numbers of transgender, transsexual, intersex, and gender different participants, it is important to note that this survey was not open to all sexual minority individuals but only those who identified as same-sex attracted.

**Table 3**

### Current gender identity of respondents

	<i>N</i>	%
Female	1201	53.8
Transgender/Transsexual Female	13	0.6
Gender Different/Intersex Female	7	0.3
Male	948	42.5
Transgender/Transsexual Male	7	0.3
Gender Different/Intersex Male	2	0.1
Gender Different	30	1.3
Other	24	1.1

Total *N* = 2232

The most frequent responses for sexual identity were gay (40.9%), lesbian (37.9%), bisexual (8%), queer (5.7%) and no label (3.8%). Larger numbers of those identifying as female than male nominated the terms bisexual, queer or no label. These terms were also nominated by the majority of gender different participants.

## Employment

**Table 4**

**Numbers and percentages of respondents according to current employment and/or education status**

	<i>N</i>	%
Full-time student	412	18.5
Part-time student	189	8.5
Full-time employment	1156	51.8
Part-time employment	432	19.4
Self-employed	215	9.6
Not in paid employment (incl. Volunteer work)	160	7.2
Retired	81	3.6

*Note:* Respondents were able to select multiple responses for this measure.

## Religion

Participants were simply asked if they considered themselves to be a religious person rather than asked to state their religious background. Of this sample, 19.2% (*n* = 428) selected 'yes', 80.8% (*n* = 1803) selected 'no' and one person did not respond. However, 41.6% of participants reported that religion (including the religious beliefs of others) plays a role in their decisions to disclose their sexuality.

## Relationship Measures

Of the sample, 66.3% of participants reported currently being in some form of same-sex relationship. The numbers and percentages for these relationships are in Table 5 below.

**Table 5**

**Type of current same-sex relationship**

	<i>N</i>	%
Regular partner (living together)	1008	45.2
Regular partner (living apart)	345	15.5
No primary partner or casual relationships only	125	5.6
Not currently in a same-sex relationship	751	33.7

Total *N* = 2229 (three participants did not respond).

## Current Legal Status of Same-Sex Relationship

Participants who reported that they currently had a regular same-sex partner (whether living together or apart) were asked how they would describe their current same-sex relationship in legal terms. To minimise confusion, participants were provided with examples for relationships formalised through a state or municipal registry in Australia. These were ACT Civil Partnership, City of Melbourne Relationship Declaration, City of Sydney Relationship Declaration, Tasmania Significant Relationship, Victoria Domestic Partnership and Yarra City Council Relationship Declaration. Examples of relationships recognised overseas were provided next to the relevant answer options (see Table 6 below).

**Table 6**

**Reported current legal status of same-sex relationship for respondents with a regular same-sex partner, living together or apart (N = 1353).**

	N	%
No legal status	548	40.5
De facto	719	53.1
Relationship formalised through a state or municipal registry (see examples above)	47	3.5
Overseas recognised relationship other than marriage (e.g., UK Civil Partnership, NZ Civil Union)	43	3.2
Overseas marriage (e.g., Canada, Netherlands, South Africa, Massachusetts)	23	1.7

*Note:* Respondents were able to select more than one option.

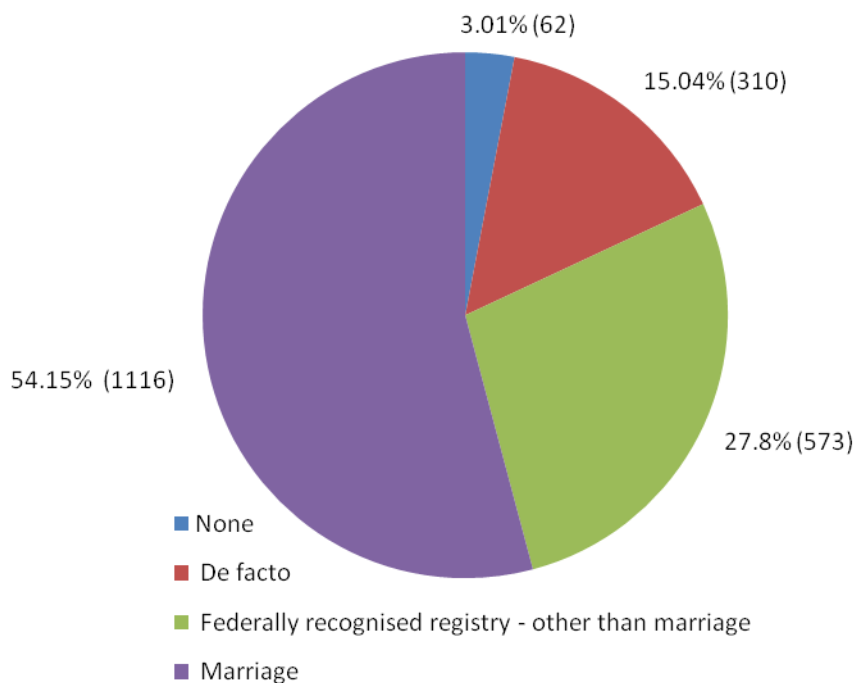
The question asking participants how they would describe the legal status of their same-sex relationship also provided the option of selecting 'Other'. Forty-eight participants (3.5%) selected this 'Other' option. However, the majority of these participants (31 out of 48) had also selected one of the categories listed in Table 6 above and simply utilised the 'Other' text box to clarify their selection. Three participants used the 'Other' option to state that they were unsure about the legal status of their relationship and 13 did not make the legal status of their relationship clear in their description.

## Preferred Legal Recognition of Same-Sex Relationship

All participants, regardless of whether or not they were currently in a same-sex relationship, were asked about their personal preference for legal relationship recognition in this country. Figure 2 below indicates the responses to the question *"If you are or were to become involved in a long-term committed same-sex relationship, in what way would you prefer Australian law to recognise your relationship?"*

**Figure 2**

**Personal preference for relationship recognition - general sample (including those not currently in a same-sex relationship).**



Six participants stated that they preferred a Civil Union and three stated that they preferred a Civil Partnership in the 'Other' text box provided. As both types of relationships are forms of federally recognised relationships documented at a registry (other than marriage), these nine responses were included in the main category 'Federally recognised registry- other than marriage'. Twenty-two participants selected the 'not applicable' option (e.g., never wish to be in a long-term committed same-sex relationship) and were therefore excluded from the analysis. From the remaining sample of 2210, 149 participants selected the 'Other' option with the most common statement used to clarify this selection being that they simply wanted the same rights as heterosexuals (e.g., "all ways permitted for opposite-sex couples", "exactly the same as heterosexual couples"). These responses, although making an important statement, were more in keeping with a later question on a person's general preference for relationship recognition in which participants could select more than one choice. Therefore, these responses, along with those from others who did not select a single preference as instructed by the question, were not included in this analysis. However, it is acknowledged that making a specific choice may have been difficult for some participants, particularly those who were not currently in a committed same-sex relationship.

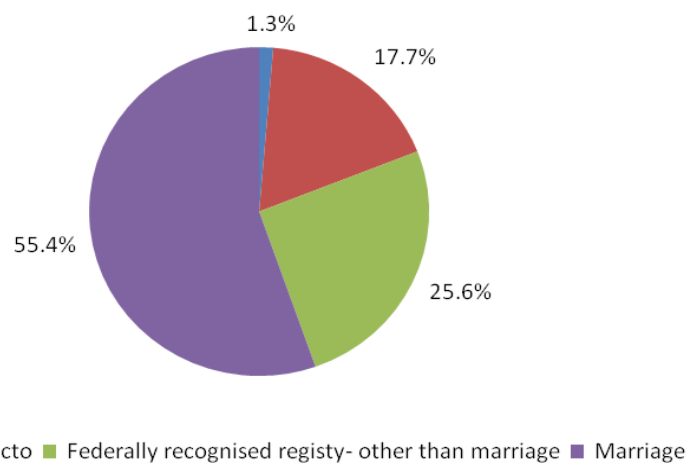


### Preferred legal recognition of same-sex relationship for participants with a regular same-sex partner.

Figures 3 to 7 indicate the personal preferences for the legal recognition of a committed same-sex relationship for participants who reported having a regular same-sex partner whether living together or apart ( $N = 1353$ ). Those with invalid responses, for reasons described on the previous page, were excluded from analyses leaving a total of 1291 responses across categories. Responses are grouped according to the current legal status of participants' same-sex relationships.

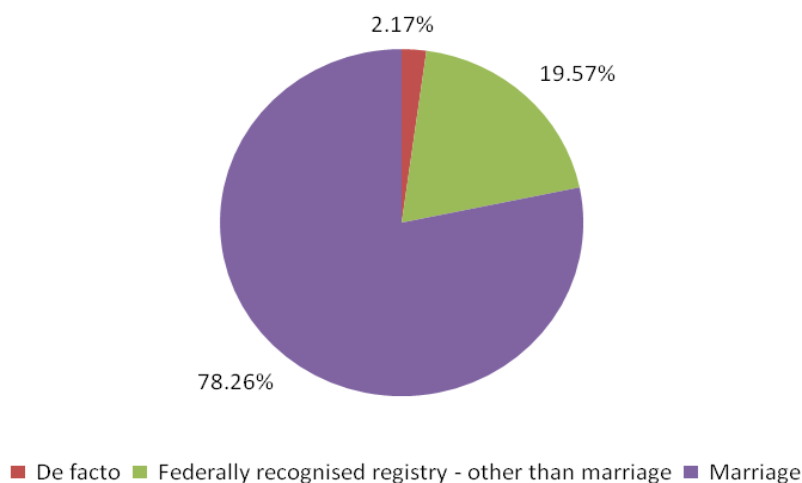
**Figure 3**

### Preferred legal recognition for those currently in a same-sex de facto relationship ( $N = 677$ )



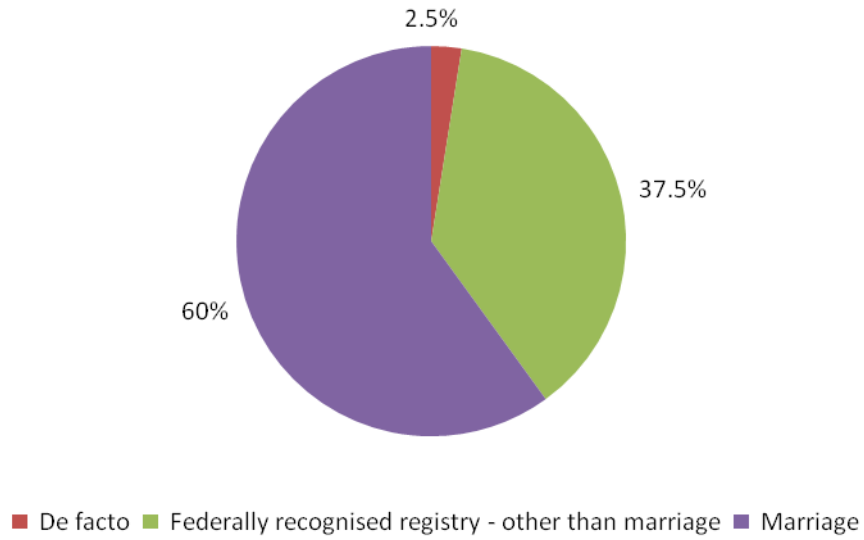
**Figure 4**

### Preferred legal recognition for those with a current same-sex relationship formalised through a state or municipal registry - for examples, see page 7 ( $N = 46$ )



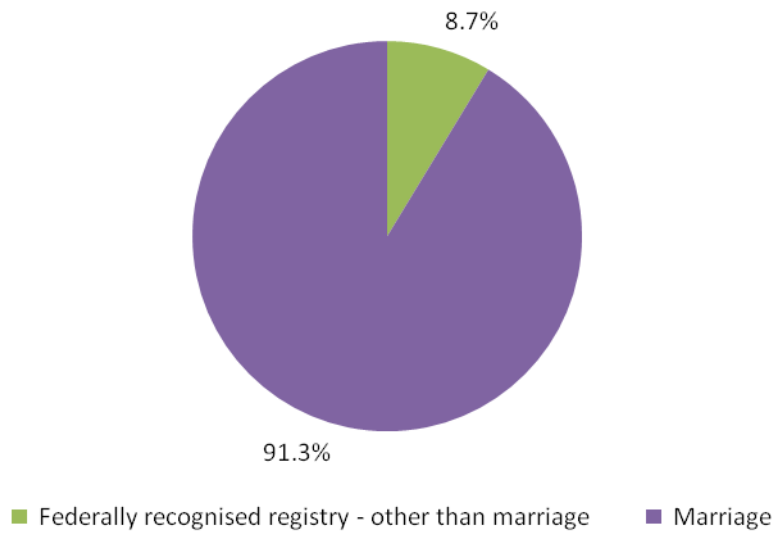
**Figure 5**

**Preferred legal recognition for those currently in an overseas recognised relationship other than marriage - e.g., NZ Civil Union, UK Civil Partnership (N = 40)**



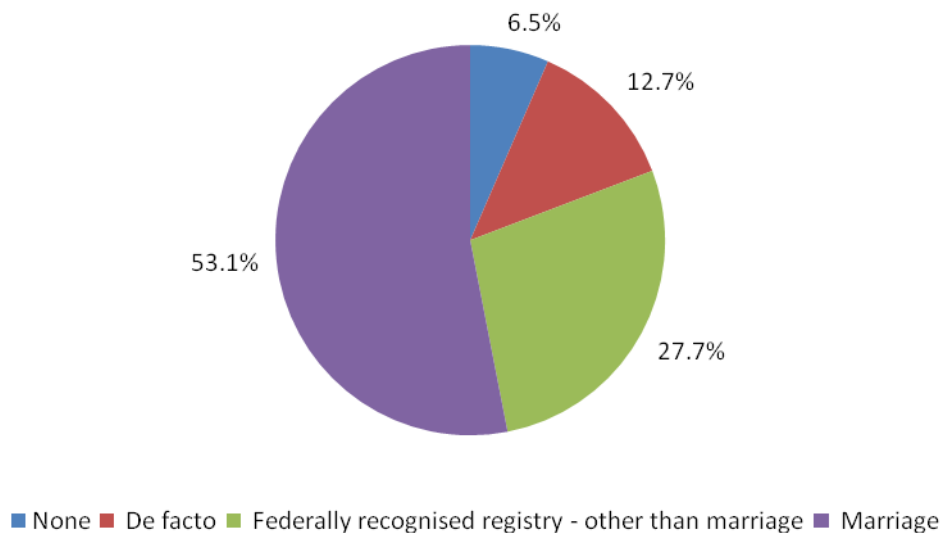
**Figure 6**

**Preferred legal recognition for those currently in an overseas marriage (N = 23)**



**Figure 7**

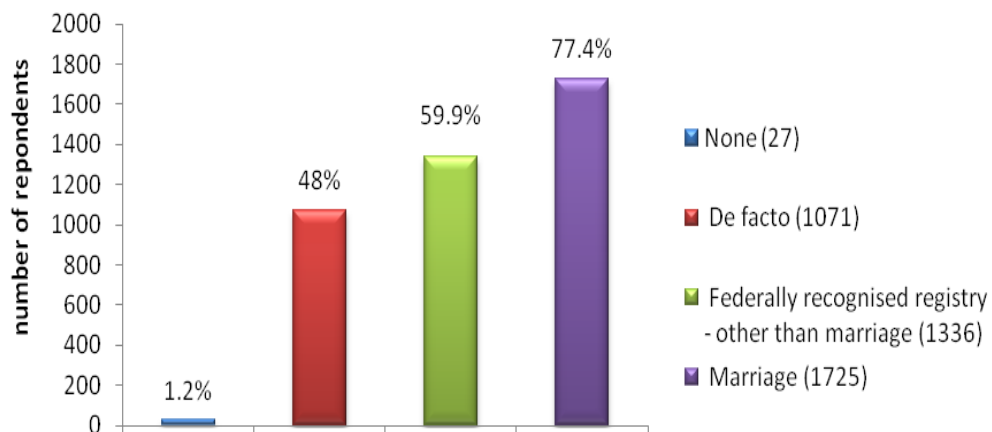
**Preferred legal recognition for those currently in a same-sex relationship with no legal status (N = 505)**



Participants were also asked about their preferences regarding legal recognition in Australia for same-sex couples in general. Figure 8 below shows participants' responses to the question *"Irrespective of your personal preference, which form(s) of relationship recognition would you like to see remain and/or become available for same-sex couples in Australia?"* Note: Participants in this instance were able to select multiple options. One participant did not respond to this measure.

**Figure 8**

**Respondents' preferred legal options for same-sex couples in Australia (N =2231)**



## Summary

*Not So Private Lives* is the first national study to examine same-sex attracted Australians' preferences for various forms of relationship recognition since the introduction of de facto status for same-sex couples at a federal level. It is also the first major study to investigate preferences for relationship recognition while taking into account the current legal status (in Australia or overseas) of an individual's same-sex relationship.

Findings from the relationship recognition measures of this survey demonstrate that same-sex attracted individuals, like other Australians, differ in the way they prefer their relationships to be formally recognised. However, the results show that the majority of same-sex attracted participants in this survey selected marriage as their personal choice. A federally recognised relationship documented at a registry other than marriage was the second most popular option, and de facto status was the third. The preference for a relationship without any legal status was selected by only 3% of the overall sample.

Interestingly, marriage was still the majority choice irrespective of the current legal status of participants' same-sex relationships (including no legal status). For example, of those currently in a de facto relationship, 55.4% stated they preferred marriage for themselves, 25.6% stated that they preferred a federally recognised relationship other than marriage, 17.7% selected de facto and 1.3% chose no legal status.

Participants were also given the opportunity to select which forms of legal relationship recognition they would like to see remain and/or become available in this country for same-sex couples in general. Responses to this measure (which allowed for multiple selections) show that 77.4% would like to see marriage become available as an option, 59.9% would like to see a federally recognised relationship other than marriage be made available and 48% would like to see de facto recognition remain. These numbers indicate that many participants selected multiple options, suggesting that simply having a choice was an important factor.

Although the data from this survey indicates that marriage is not for everyone, the majority of same-sex attracted participants in this national survey selected this type of relationship recognition as their personal choice and as a choice to be made available for their fellow same-sex attracted Australians.

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