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“Do you, Dragon, take Donkey to be you lawfully wedded husband?” Children who watch films like *Shrek* or read fairy-tales or have them read to them are used to ‘odd’ pairings of people, animals and mythical creatures. And they accept the hybrid progeny that result.

Throughout history (as far as we know) there have been human pairings that were taboo or at least frowned upon: rich with poor; Christian/Jew/Muslim with non-Christian, non-Jew, non-Muslim; Capulet with Montague; Protestant with Catholic; Sunni with Shiite; orthodox Jew with non-orthodox Jew; Athenian with Spartan; eastern suburban with western suburban. The list could be endless. We have a taboo against sibling coupling but there have been societies where siblings mated, at least in the ruling classes.

Pairings that were out of favour or in favour were often a matter of taste, prejudice or fear, or simply a matter of ‘them’ and ‘us’. The taboo against closely-related people marrying makes good biological sense: the consequences of inbreeding can be dire. Yet only two generations ago in my own family there were two instances of first cousins marrying and it can still be common in some societies.

In some countries, including Australia, the debate rages about whether to allow same-gender marriage. The Christian objection seems to be on the sidelines now, centre stage being taken by the objection that children have the right to be living with their biological mother and father. That may be ideal but may not even be the norm anymore with heterosexual marriage. Studies of the reality of adultery have variously concluded that between 1.4% and 20% of the children in ‘stable’ heterosexual families were not the offspring of their mother’s husband¹. And then there are the children whose parents married ‘until death or his alcoholic violence or her gambling addiction do us part’. After several break-ups and re-marriages of both biological parents, the children may be living with neither of them.

That in this country homosexual couples cannot marry does not stop them having or adopting children. In some jurisdictions, lesbian couples can avail themselves of IVF programs and both lesbian and gay male couples may often adopt. Children are also conceived through the generous donation of semen from friends or produced through surrogacy. Adoption and surrogacy are, of course, also options used by heterosexual couples.

Children who live with both biological parents may soon be in the minority, if they aren’t already. I have several times seen children interviewed on TV, whose ‘parents’ are same-gender and they seem to regard it as normal, as children tend to regard their parents, no matter how strange the parents may seem to outsiders. A child with a blind parent or one in a wheelchair or one without arms would regard that as normal, for them.

Children are not blind to difference but they tend to accept it. Black and white children will happily play together until told they shouldn’t. If the difference of a friend’s skin colour is pointed out, the child will probably acknowledge it and add that “Marcia’s mum and dad also have a ginormous TV, and two cats and a bird in a cage. I mean, the bird’s in the cage,

not the cats, because the cats might eat the bird.” It’s all there as part of ‘normality’. It is only when indoctrination is applied that difference becomes an issue.

I had two great-uncles who were gay and lived together. Actually, one was my great-uncle but we called both of them ‘uncle’ and thought nothing of it. I know a young woman who refers to her gay uncle as ‘aunty’, without any irony. Not only do children appear to see their own family situation is normal, they accept that other children accept *their* situation as normal, even if it is quite different.

The introduction of civil marriage for heterosexual couples is relatively modern, marriage having been a ‘religious’ institution for most of human history, when marriage has existed at all. The state has wrested this institution from the ‘church’ (i.e. from organised religion) and made it its own. In Australia it is not a complete separation – people can still be married by a functionary of almost any religion. In some countries, such as the Netherlands, a couple can be married in church or synagogue or mosque, but the marriage is not recognised until there has been a civil ceremony, often in a registry office. Also in the Netherlands, there has been gay marriage since 1st April 1991, and that is not an April fool’s joke – the Dutch take their liberties very seriously.

1. see, for instance, www.childsupportanalysis.co.uk