

Meet the Parents:

*A Review of the Research on
Lesbian and Gay Families*

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January 2002

Contents

Foreword	3
Summary	5
1 Introduction	13
2 How May Lesbians and Gay Men Have Children	18
3 Family Forms into Which Children are Born	22
3.1 Lesbian Families.....	22
3.1.1 The Role of Co-Mothers.....	24
3.1.2 How DI Babies are Conceived	30
3.2 Gay Fathers	32
3.3 The role of Gay Donors/Dads in Lesbian Mother Families.....	33
4 Social Science and Psychological Research on the Children of Lesbians and Gay Men	37
4.1 Children of Lesbian Mothers (who have separated from the father)	40
4.2 Children of Gay Fathers	44
4.3 Children Born into Lesbian Relationships	46
4.4 Children’s Difficulties in Social Situations/Stigmatisation.....	49
4.5 Parent’s Difficulties	50
5 Social Science References:	52
5.1 Overviews of Research into Children of Lesbians and Gay Men in Various Family Forms	52
5.2 Children Raised in Lesbian Families (of various constellations, not always from birth).....	53
5.3 Children Born into Lesbian Families.....	55
5.4 Children Raised by Gay Fathers	56
5.5 Experiences of Parenting, including qualitative research	57
5.6 Children’s Experiences	58
5.7 Societal Views.....	59
5.8 Overview of issues	59
6 Legal References	61
6.1 Legal Issues Australia	61
6.2 Legal Issues USA/UK/International	61

Foreword

Meet The Parents - A Review of the Research on Lesbian and Gay Families

The Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby (GLRL) is an active campaigner for legal and social equality for lesbians and gay men. An area of vast injustice, where lesbians and gay men continue to be denied basic human rights, is parenting. Lesbian and gay parents are regularly discriminated against in the community, in schools, in the provision of health care to their children and in relation to leisure activities.

In Australia we like to believe that we recognise diversity and give a 'fair go' to all, yet very little is done to challenge the intolerance and discrimination thrust upon lesbian and gay families including their children. All the worse when people make excuses for such discriminatory behaviour and for the lack of legal recognition of lesbian and gay families. Such excuses however fly in the face of all credible research, as this report 'Meet The Parents' clearly demonstrates.

The major findings of this report conclude that the sexuality of a child's parents has no bearing on their development or well being. It is the care and love put into a child's upbringing that is of utmost importance, and lesbians and gay men demonstrate just as good capabilities at loving and caring for their children as their heterosexual counterparts.

Difficulties arise however for lesbian and gay families as a result of the denial of basic rights and social bigotry. Legal rights currently denied include:

- Gay and lesbian couples cannot both be legally recognised as parents
- The non-biological parent cannot adopt the child without the birth parent giving up all parental rights.
- Access to donor insemination is not universally available from health clinics.

- The Human Tissue Act 1983 (NSW) prevents most gay men from legally donating sperm.
- Adoption is not an option for lesbian and gay couples.
- Laws covering superannuation do not recognise the dependency of a child of a lesbian or gay couple when a contributor is a non-biological parent.

Anyone interested in the research or involved in the battle for legal and social equality for lesbian and gay families will find this report both informative and useful. For GLRL, the report clearly backs up what we have always been fighting for, and provides undeniable evidence that current circumstances are unjust and discriminatory. It thus provides us with an important tool in our campaign work for equal rights. After all, lesbian and gay parents and their children suffer from others' bigotry, not from their own loving families.

Alexandra Sosnov and Anthony M. Schembri

Convenors, Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby Inc.

Summary

Over the past 25 year a considerable body of credible social science research on lesbian and gay parents and their children has built up. It shows convincingly that lesbian and gay parents are 'like' heterosexual parents in that their children do not demonstrate any important differences in development, happiness, peer relations or adjustment.

Much research through the 1970s and 1980s was targeted towards searching for evidence of homosexuality or 'gender dysfunction' in children of lesbians and gay men. Later studies compared children across family types using a broader range of standard indicators for well-being and social adjustment (such as Bem's Sex Role Inventory, Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory, Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children).

Through all of these studies, there was no evidence of significant differences among children across different family types on any of these scales.

Recent and increasingly detailed and methodologically rigorous studies by researchers such as Charlotte Patterson in the USA and Fiona Tasker and Susan Golombok in the UK have demonstrated that it is family *processes* and not family *structures* that are determinative of children's well being. That is, the number of adults and the sex of the adults in a household has no bearing on children's well being – one adult or two, female or male, heterosexual or homosexual - whereas the happiness of the *relationship between adults* in the household, and the openness of warmth and communication *between the adult/s and the children* do have a major impact on children.

The major aspects of this research review are summarised below. For more detail on any point see the body of the report under the same heading title.

How many Lesbians and Gay Men Have Kids

Estimates of the number or proportion of children in the population with lesbian and gay parents depends in part upon how many adults are lesbian or gay. Shere Hite's surveys on female and male sexuality in the USA through the 1970s and 1980s support the generally accepted estimate that around 10% of the adult population are predominantly lesbian or gay in sexual orientation.

Of the lesbian and gay population, there are many studies that have attempted to quantify how many are parents or live with children. Surveys of gay men in the USA have suggested that around 10% of gay men are parents. American and Australian surveys of lesbians and NZ census data suggest that between 15-20% of lesbians have children. Australian surveys suggest that this proportion is likely to increase in the next 5 years as many lesbians also indicate that they are planning to have children in the future.

Social Science and Psychological Research on the Children of Lesbians and Gay Men

Over the past 25 years a great deal of sociological and psychological research has been conducted to find out what, if any, effect a parent's sexual orientation has on the welfare and development of their children. Richard Green's small study was published in 1978, and since that time a body of work has appeared in the USA and UK, with increasing sample sizes and methodological rigour.

Many research studies in the USA and UK, covering many hundreds of children in total have been summarised and reviewed by current researchers such as Charlotte Patterson in the USA and Fiona Tasker and Susan Golombok in the UK.

These summaries (and some cases separate analysis) found that there was no discernible differences in the children of heterosexual or homosexual parents regarding:

- Children's sex role identification

- Level of happiness
- Level of social adjustment
- Sexual orientation
- Satisfaction with life
- Moral and cognitive development.

Further, in studies which looked at adult children of lesbians and gay men, there was shown to be no difference in the proportion of those children who identified as lesbian or gay themselves, when compared with children of similarly situated heterosexual parents.

Later studies were more specific in that they compared children in households headed by a lesbian mother with families headed by a heterosexual single mother, with the children in both types of families having been through the experience of parental separation and divorce.

The results across a range of issues found lesbian and heterosexual women were routinely similar in their parenting styles and skills and that their children showed no important differences. Specifically, the children showed no differences in:

- gender role or gender identity
- psychiatric state,
- levels of self esteem,
- quality of friendships, popularity, sociability or social acceptance.

Of the studies that looked at lesbian mothers and their interactions with their children, they found that lesbian mothers were equally as child oriented and warm and responsive as heterosexual mothers.

Several studies have found that lesbian mothers were in fact more concerned than heterosexual women that their children should have contact with men and positive male role models, and that the children of lesbian mothers did indeed have more

contact with adult male family members and friends than did children of heterosexual parents.

In 1996 Tasker and Golombok published a summary of the results of their longitudinal study in the UK which spanned 16 years comparing the children of lesbian single mothers with the children of heterosexual single mothers. They found that lesbian mothers and heterosexual mothers were equally likely to have lived with a romantic partner post divorce. The children of lesbian mothers in this study had more positive step-parent relationships with the partner, both as adults and during adolescence, than did the children of heterosexual women.

In addition to confirming the findings of many other studies mentioned above, Tasker and Golombok found that the children of lesbian mothers were no more likely than children of heterosexual mothers to:

- be teased or ostracised,
- to experience anxiety or depression,
- feel unhappy or embarrassed about their mother being physically affectionate with a partner,
- and were no more negative about their family identity as children than the children of heterosexual mothers -- and in fact as adults they were *more positive* about their family identity.

Tasker and Golombok also found that the more open, positive and political the mother was about her lesbian identity, the more likely it was that her children were accepting and positive about their family identity. Likewise, Patterson concluded from her review of the children of lesbian mothers that a child's happiness and level of adjustment is higher when a lesbian mother lives with her partner, when the mother's sexuality is acknowledged to the child before adolescence, and when the child has contact with children from other lesbian-led families.

Children Born into Lesbian Relationships

In recent years, studies have additionally been made of children born into lesbian families – comparing the children from lesbian single and couple households with single heterosexual mother households and heterosexual couple households in all of which children had been born as a result of donor insemination.

These studies have found that children in “father absent families” were no more likely to develop behavioural problems, and felt just as accepted by their mother and by peers as children in families where the father lived in the home. There were no differences in the development of the children between the lesbian and heterosexual mother headed families.

These more specific studies conclude that it was family processes, not family structure, that determined children’s welfare – that is, parenting stress and conflict were the determining factors in indicating children’s dysfunction, and these were completely unrelated to gender or family structure.

In essence, all of these studies support the view that the sexual orientation of a child’s mother or father has absolutely no bearing upon their development and well being.

Family Forms into Which Children are Born

Lesbian Families

Women who come to parent the child of a partner who has had that child in the context of a previous heterosexual relationship, or, increasingly, through donor insemination (either alone or with a previous lesbian partner) are often referred to as ‘step-mothers’. Women who are non-biological parents in a relationship with a partner where they have jointly planned, conceived and raised a child are often called ‘co-mothers.’ Biological mothers in all of the above situations often have the

unhyphenated luxury of being called mothers, but are sometimes referred to as birth-mothers.

The growth of lesbian planned families is notable through the 1990s and in recent studies of lesbian-led families in the US and UK the overwhelming majority of children were born to lesbian couples using donor insemination. There are also a significant number of lesbian single mothers bearing and raising children – either from birth or following the break down of a lesbian relationship into which the children were born. The role of lesbian step-parents and separated co-parents, as well as resident co-parents, will therefore require increased attention as lesbian mothers, like other mothers, separate and re-partner in the future.

The Role of Co-Mothers

Like other step-parents, lesbian step-mothers tend to play an “auxillary” role as a parent, rather than being a primary parent. Co-mothers by contrast have decided to have a child with the mother and are involved at each stage of the child’s conception and life. It is very important that co-mothers not be compared – as they often are - to heterosexual men who are not biologically related to children they help to raise as step-parents.

There is considerable evidence to demonstrate that lesbian co-parent families have a more even distribution of domestic labour and child care than heterosexual families do, with positive results for the relationship between the partners and for the children they raise.

Co-mothers are far more engaged in parenting than are heterosexual fathers. Studies in both the UK and USA have shown that co-mothers are more likely than mothers to be in full time employment. However co-mothers are far less likely than heterosexual fathers to be in full time employment, and therefore have more time to contribute to the care of their children.

The overwhelming majority of lesbian mothers and co-mothers describe their parenting as evenly or equitably shared. Household labour and parental decision making and responsibilities were equally shared in the studies to date. While mothers took a somewhat higher burden of child care than did co-mothers, co-mothers nevertheless undertook a significantly higher proportion of child care than did heterosexual fathers. An equal division of household and child care responsibilities has been shown to correlate with children's happiness and "positive adjustment".

How Donor Insemination Babies are Conceived

In many jurisdictions, the legality or availability of fertility services may determine whether lesbian mothers conceive using anonymous donor sperm through a clinic, known donor sperm through a clinic (after testing etc) or using a known donor through self insemination at home. Where fertility services are discriminatory through law or practice, the first two options are not available to lesbian mothers (or to gay fathers who wish to donate generally or to a lesbian friend). It is therefore not surprising to find that a high number of babies born into lesbian families are conceived from a known donor, often through informal self insemination.

Although Australian jurisdictions vary in their accessibility, surveys and studies indicate a high level of known donors in Australia, Canada and the UK, with a much higher use of unknown donors in the USA. Higher proportions of known donors also means that there are higher numbers of – usually gay – men who may be involved to some degree in the child's life. Many gay men are becoming parents through involvement with lesbian couples who wish to have children through DI.

Gay Fathers

Like lesbian mothers, gay fathers may have children from a previous heterosexual relationship. They may also adopt or foster children after having come out. (Gay

men and lesbians are eligible to adopt children in NSW but only as "single" applicants, not as couples, and therefore have low priority). In such situations there may also be a partner who acts as co-parent or step-parent to the child. Men who come to parent a child of a male partner who has had that child in the context of a previous relationship are referred to as step-fathers. Men who are co-parenting a child from birth with a male partner who is the biological father of a child are referred to as co-fathers.

Biological fathers who have chosen to have children with lesbian mothers may also be referred to as a co-parent where they share the role of parenting. For the sake of clarity such men will be called either a father or a donor in this paper, depending upon the circumstances of the family structure and their involvement in it.

If a gay father has a biological child after having come out, it is increasingly likely that he will have done so as a donor or a secondary non residential parent with a lesbian woman or couple who have borne the child. Depending upon the circumstances of the birth and raising of the child, he may see himself and be seen by the child and the mother/s as a 'donor' who has helped them, a co-parent, or a father. In what seems to be a relatively small number of lesbian families a gay donor acts as a non-resident father in the sense that he has a lot of contact with, and some responsibility over, the child. In many more instances fathers act as a friend or 'uncle' to the child or children and play a role that is very distinct from that of parent.

There is relatively little information on gay father led families with resident children.

1 Introduction

Much of the current objection raised to lesbian parents, especially those who conceive through donor insemination, centres on “father absence”. Some of the submissions to the recent Senate Inquiry on amendments to the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth) (to permit states to discriminate against lesbians and single heterosexual women in the provision of fertility services) supporting the legislation used the argument that children “need” fathers (preferably married to their mothers) and tendered American social science literature to that effect.¹ Although the Committee concluded that the Bill ought not to proceed as it would contravene Australian’s international obligations (the *Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women* in particular) and erode our human rights record, the majority report does not indicate any view on the “detriment” to children growing up in sole parent or lesbian families. Instead it simply claims that there were “extensive references” to support claims on both sides.²

This is simply not so. Children do not “need” a father any more than they “need” a mother, nor do they need a heterosexual parent or parents. All of the reputable social science and psychological literature demonstrates that children need the care of a stable adult parent or parent figure and that parenting style is not connected to sexuality.

So called “father’s rights” and “pro-family” literature, much of it American, is constantly reproduced in a misleading fashion and misused in Australia. Silverstein and Auerbach provide a very concise and thorough deconstruction of much of the American neo-conservative father literature and have undertaken original research into over 200 men from different subcultures in America to study different fathering

¹ Senate Legal and Constitutional Legislative Committee, *Inquiry into the Provisions of the Sex Discrimination Amendment Bill (No 1) 2000*, SPU, Canberra, 2000: see eg Australian Family Alliance submission quoted para 3.20 citing a “substantial body of research”.

styles.³ Silverstein and Auerbach argue that much of the literature on father absence represents an essentialist view of fathers and a “dramatic oversimplification of the complex relations between father presence and social problems”.⁴ They make the point, as have many feminist social scientists, that studies which have posited the detrimental effects of father-absence are in fact explicable as a direct result of maternal poverty, and when poverty is controlled for in studies there is no such detriment. (See also work by Golombok, Tasker and Murray, and also by Tasker.⁵)

Silverstein and Auerbach conclude that “responsible fathering” occurs across all family types and is not connected to family structure. They state:

In contrast to the neoconservative position, our data on gay fathering couples have convinced us that neither a mother nor a father is essential. Similarly, our research with divorced, never-married, and remarried fathers has taught us that a wide variety of family structures can support positive child outcomes. We have concluded that children need at least one responsible, caretaking adult who has a positive emotional connection to them and with whom they have a consistent relationships. Because of the emotional and practical stress involved in child rearing, a family structure that includes more than one such adult is more likely to contribute to positive child outcomes. Neither the sex of the adult(s) nor the biological relationship to the child has emerged

² Ibid, para 3.30.

³ Louise Silverstein and Carl Auerbach, “Deconstructing the Essential Father” (1999) 54(6) *American Psychologist* 397

⁴ Ibid. Electronic copy used so no page references available.

⁵ Tasker and Golombok, *Growing Up in a Lesbian Family*, Guilford Press, NY, 1997; Susan Golombok, Fiona Tasker and Clare Murray, “Children Raised in Fatherless Families from Infancy: Family Relationships and the Socioemotional Development of Children of Lesbian and Single Heterosexual Mothers” (1997) 38 *Journal of Child Psychology, and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines* 783; Susan Golombok, *Parenting: what really counts?*, Routledge, London, 2000.

as a significant variable in predicting positive development. One, none, or both of those adults could be a father (or mother). We have found that the stability of the emotional connection and the predicability of the caretaking relationship are the significant variables that predict positive child adjustment. We agree with the neoconservative perspective that it is preferable for responsible fathers (and mothers) to be actively involved with their children. We share the concern that many men in US society do not have a feeling of emotional connection or a sense of responsibility toward their children. However, we do not believe that the data support the conclusion that fathers are essential to child well-being and that heterosexual marriage is the social context in which responsible fathering is likely to occur.⁶

Some new research suggests that lesbian and gay families are in some respects better for children than heterosexual families. In Gillian Dunne's interviews with 37 lesbian-led families in the UK she concludes that "creativity and cooperation...appear to characterise much of the parenting of lesbian couples".⁷ Research on the division of parenting and household labour among lesbian co-parents and gay co-parents has shown a distinct pattern of equality and sharing compared to heterosexual parents, with corresponding positive well-being for the partner's relationship with each other, and the child's adjustment. These issues are discussed in some detail below.

Charlotte Patterson sums up the issues facing lesbian and gay parents in social and legal policy as follows:

In conceptualising parenthood, it is helpful to distinguish three facets of the status or role – the biological, the social, and the legal.

⁶ Louise Silverstein and Carl Auerbach, "Deconstructing the Essential Father" (1999) 54(6) *American Psychologist* 397

⁷ Gillian Dunne, "Opting into Motherhood: Lesbians Blurring the Boundaries and Transforming the

Traditionally, all three facets of parenthood have been expected to correspond to one another. When a heterosexual couple fell in love, got married, and had children, there was no separation among the biological, social and legal aspects of parent-child relations...In the contemporary world, however, these three aspects of parenthood are often disconnected. With many births taking place outside of marriage and with frequent divorces and remarriages, children are increasingly unlikely to be cared for by both their biological parents throughout their childhood and adolescence and increasingly likely to live with adults (such as step-parents) who are not their legal parents...

Families that are created when lesbians have children often bring such issues out in high relief. Consider, for example, a lesbian couple attempting to conceive a child using [donor insemination]. There are three adults involved – the two women and a male sperm donor. If a child is conceived, there will be two biological parents – a biological mother and a biological father.... In most states, there will likely be only one legal parent – namely the biological mother. While there will be two social parents, one of them will be a legal stranger to the child... Thus, children brought up in this family will find that the expected correspondence of social, biological and legal aspects of parent-child relations do not hold true for them.⁸

While there are few important differences in parenting styles or child adjustment across lesbian and gay families compared with heterosexual families, lesbian and gay families do face particular challenges and have unique needs. They must, for example, try to craft their own social resolutions to the problems of legal and social non-recognition of lesbian and gay co-parents and step-parents. They must also try

Meaning of Parenthood and Kinship" (2000) 14 (1) *Gender and Society* 11 at 31.

⁸ Charlotte Patterson, "Family Lives of Children Born to Lesbian Mothers" in Patterson and D'Augelli,

to build frameworks of social recognition for known donors, whom lesbian mothers often wish to have a role greater than 'friend' but distinctly different to 'father' in relating to their children. The current legal framework does not assist in this process and often inflexibly excludes the lived reality of the relationships of lesbian and gay parents and their children – so that a child raised by two lesbian mothers and a gay donor/dad in law has only one legal parent, while socially he or she often has two or three parents.

2 How May Lesbians and Gay Men Have Children

Estimates of the number or proportion of children in the population with lesbian and gay parents depends in part upon how many adults are lesbian and gay. Figures on the proportion of gay men and lesbians in the general population are also important in determining whether studies on the children raised by lesbian and gay parents demonstrate a higher incidence of non-heterosexual sexuality (i.e. by comparing them to the "norm").

The generally used figure of lesbians and gays making up 10% of the general population is based upon Kinsey's research in the USA, the methodology of which has been repeatedly questioned. Shere Hite's work is more recent and more reputable.

Hite surveyed 4,500 American women in the 1980s, and found that 11% of respondents were lesbian and a further 7% were bisexual.⁹ In Hite's earlier research in the 1970s she had surveyed 3000 women and found that 8% of respondents were lesbian while a further 9% were bisexual.¹⁰ Hite's survey of 7,200 American men in the 1970s found that 11 % of respondents were homosexual, although 2% of them were not exclusively so.¹¹

Hite's surveys were self select but widely distributed and the demographics of those surveyed accorded closely with census data. Alfred Kinsey's figures were far higher than Hite's for men, though lower for women (his results were that 37% of men had sex with other men, while 13% of women had sex with other women) but his

⁹ Shere Hite, *Women and Love: A Cultural Revolution in Progress*, Knopf, NY, 1987

¹⁰ Shere Hite, *The Hite Report: A Nationwide Study of Female Sexuality*, Summit, Sydney, 1977.

¹¹ Shere Hite, *The Hite Report on Male Sexuality*, Optima, London, 1981.

methodology has been doubted as he drew many case histories from people he knew - other issues with Kinsey figures are discussed by Hite, and by Ross, below.

Random surveys, especially those undertaken by government agencies are problematic as they draw an extremely low response rate on sensitive issues. A random health survey of 2600 people in Australia in 1986 found that 11.2% of male respondents reported having gay sex, while 4.6% of female respondents reported having lesbian sex.¹² David Chambers states that:

Many lesbians and gay men, perhaps most, refuse to identify their sexuality to strangers who ring their doorbell or call them on the telephone...

and he notes that in one US effort,

it took 1650 calls to Kansas - 55 hours of random dialling - before the pollers found the first person willing to admit being lesbian or gay...It is possible, of course, that fewer than one-tenth of one percent of Kansans are lesbian or gay, but I doubt it.¹³

Census figures on the number of cohabiting same sex couples (not the number of lesbians and gay men) were collected for the first time in Australia in 1996. The response rate was low. It is my feeling that random figures on the incidence of non-heterosexual sexual orientation or number of same sex couples, such as those gathered in census data, are unhelpful at this stage.

¹² Michael Ross, "Prevalence of risk factors for human immuno deficiency virus infection in the Australian population" (1988) 149 *The Medical Journal of Australia* 362.

¹³ David Chambers, "What if? The legal consequences of marriage and the legal needs of lesbian and gay male couples" (1996) 95 *Michigan Law Review* 447 at 449.

Of the lesbian and gay population, there are many studies that have attempted to quantify how many are parents or live with children.

Several large scale studies of gay men in the USA have suggested that around 10% of gay men are parents.¹⁴ A smaller Australian survey of 'homosexually active' men published in 1996 found that 19% of the men had a child or children – however these figures may be inflated by the fact that not all of the men were gay identified and some were living with a female partner.¹⁵

A large scale US survey of lesbians (1,925 respondents to the National Lesbian Health Care Survey) found that 9% of the respondents were custodial parents.¹⁶

A survey of 732 lesbian readers of a Sydney based magazine in 1995 found that 19% of lesbian respondents had or lived with children, and a further 14.5% planned to have children in the next 5 years.¹⁷ In 1999 a similar survey by the same magazine of 386 lesbians found that 12.7% of respondents had dependent children and a further 9.1% had non-dependent children. Moreover a further 19.7% of respondents reported that they intended to become pregnant in the next 5 years, with almost 70% of them stating that they expected to use DI to do so.¹⁸

¹⁴ Patterson and Chan, "Gay fathers" in Michael Lamb, *The Role of the Father in Child Development*, 3rd ed, Wiley, NY 1997 at 249.

¹⁵ This study was of 695 men who had gay sex, but not all of them necessarily identified as gay. P Rodden et al, *Regional Differences Among Homosexually Active Men in Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong*, HIV AIDS & Society Publications, Sydney, 1996.

¹⁶ Cited in Cheryl Parks, "Lesbian parenthood: A review of the Literature" (1998) 68 (3) *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 376 at 377

¹⁷ *Lesbians on the Loose*, LOTL Sydney, March 1996. Estimates are that between 20 and 30% of lesbians are mothers: see Katherine Arnup, (ed) *Lesbian Parenting: Living With Pride and Prejudice*, gynergy books, Charlottetown PEI, 1995; Anita Stuhmcke, "Lesbian Access to In Vitro Fertilization" (1997) 7 *Australasian Gay and Lesbian Law Journal* 15.

¹⁸ See Significant Others, "Australian Lesbians Get Used to Being Called Mum", *Press Release*, 30 March 2000; data also reported in Chloe Saltua, "Study Reveals a Lesbian baby Boom" *The Age*, 30

If one is to simply look at the available Australian figures of existing mothers rather than those who report a desire to become mothers, comparing the figures from the same sampling method across years (although the number of respondents varied) the survey company, Significant Others, concluded that there was a discernible trend to increasing numbers of lesbians having children: in 1993 the proportion of respondents with children had been 14.3%, in 1995 it was 19% and in 1999 it was 21.8%.¹⁹

Of the 3,255 lesbian couples who responded to the first NZ census question on same sex couples in 1996, 21% of them had children.²⁰

Given this range of figures, I would say that it is probable that between 15-20% of lesbians have children, and that the proportion is likely to increase in the next 5 years. There is much less information available regarding gay men, but if the US figures cited earlier are accurate, around 10% of gay men are parents.

March 2000; "Lesbian Mums on the Rise and Seeking IVF" *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 August 2000.

¹⁹ Significant Others, Ibid.

²⁰ Myra Hauschild and Pat Rosier, *Get Used to It! Children of Gay and Lesbian Parents*, Spinifex, Melbourne, 1999 at 14.

3 Family Forms into Which Children are Born

3.1 Lesbian Families

Women who come to parent the child of a partner who has had that child in the context of a previous heterosexual relationship, or, increasingly, through donor insemination (either alone or with a previous lesbian partner) are often referred to as 'step-mothers'. Women who are non-biological parents in a relationship with a partner where they have jointly planned, conceived and raised a child are often called 'co-mothers.' Biological mothers in all of the above situations often have the unhyphenated luxury of being called mothers, but are sometimes referred to as birth-mothers.

In Fiona Nelson's survey of 30 lesbian mothers in Alberta, Canada, roughly half of the women had children through previous heterosexual relationships and half had borne children within a lesbian relationship.²¹

In Dunne's Lesbian Household Project, interviewing 37 cohabiting lesbian couples with children in the UK, in 8 households children were from a previous marriage (21%), in 1 a child was adopted and in 28 (75%) the child had been conceived through donor insemination. In 40% of households the co-mother was also the birthmother of an older child.²²

In Charlotte Patterson's study of 37 lesbian families in the US, she focused only on families where a child had been born into or adopted by a lesbian family. Of the 37 families, 26 were headed by a lesbian couple (70%), 7 by a single lesbian mother

²¹ Fiona Nelson, *Lesbian Motherhood: An Exploration of Canadian Lesbian Families*, U of T Press, Toronto, 1996 at 14-15.

²² Gillian Dunne, "Opting into Motherhood: Lesbians Blurring the Boundaries and Transforming the Meaning of Parenthood and Kinship" (2000) 14 (1) *Gender and Society* 11 at 15.

(19%) while in 4 of the families (11%) the child had been born to a lesbian couple who had since separated and were sharing custody of the child.²³

In the National Lesbian Family Study of 84 families in the US, the focus was only on children born through DI. Of those families, 70 were led by a lesbian couple (83%), while the remaining 14 were lesbian single mothers.²⁴

At the second stage of the study, when children were 2 years old, 8 of the couples had separated (11%), with 7 of the 8 separated couples continuing to jointly parent the children; while 3 of the single mothers had partnered, with the new partners taking on the role of step-mother.²⁵ At stage 2 of the study there were thus: 62 families led by lesbian couples who were co-parenting, 7 separated couples co-parenting, 1 separated mother sole parenting, 11 mothers sole parenting and 3 mothers parenting with step parents.

At stage 3 of the study, when the children were 5 years old, 23 of the 73 couples had separated (31.5%), one co-mother had died, and one single mother had acquired a partner. In 29 of the families there was another child born since the beginning of the study, 16 babies had been born to the birth-mothers of the original children, 9 had been born to co-mothers and 8 children had been adopted.²⁶

²³ Patterson, Hurt and Mason, "Families of the Lesbian Baby Boom: Children's Contact with Grandparents and Other Adults" (1998) 68 (3) *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 390 at 392

²⁴ Gartrell, Hamilton, Banks, Mosbacher, Reed, Sparks, Bishop, "The National Lesbian Family Study: 1. Interviews with prospective mothers" (1996) 66 (2) *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 272 at 274.

²⁵ Gartrell, Banks, Hamilton, Reed, Bishop and Rodas, "The National Lesbian Family Survey: 2. Interviews with Mothers of Toddlers" (1999) 69 (3) *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 362 at 364

²⁶ Gartrell, Banks, Reed, Hamilton, Rodas and Deck, "The National Lesbian Family Survey: 3. Interviews with Mothers of Five Year Olds" (2000) 70 (4) *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 542 at 543

Of the 23 separated couples at the third stage of the study, child custody was shared in 10 of the families, while the birthmother had sole custody in 7 cases and primary custody in 6.²⁷

There is clearly considerable diversity as to the range of lesbian families in which children are being born and raised. I think it is fair to estimate that between 50-70% of the children being raised in lesbian households are now children born into lesbian families rather than from previous heterosexual relationships. This proportion will likely increase in the next 10 years.

Of children born to lesbians, it is noteworthy that between 15-20% of children are being born to lesbian single mothers rather than lesbian couples. Also, as the rate of separation of lesbian couples appears to be on par with the divorce rate in the general population, with relationships ending in divorce averaging 7 years (and the separated couples in the US National Lesbian Families Survey averaging 8 years²⁸) there will be an increasing number of children from divorced lesbian homes and from blended lesbian step parent homes as their parents re-partner. The role of separated lesbian co-mothers, and lesbian step-parents as well as resident lesbian co-parents therefore will require increased attention.

3.1.1 The Role of Co-Mothers

Nelson reports that there were significant differences in how women saw their parenting relationships with children, with a marked difference between Co-mothers and step-mothers. Step-mothers saw themselves as having an "auxillary" role as a parent, rather than being a primary parent. Step-mothers were concerned not to cross the line of the biological mother's relationship with her children and took a

²⁷ Ibid at 545.

lesser role in discipline and decision making.²⁹ Co-mothers by contrast shared the care of children and parenting roles evenly with biological mothers. Nelson reports that:

Couples who had children through DI were much more likely to describe their roles as 'the mother' and 'the other mother'. Having equal authority over the children was not a problem in these families...What was problematic was that the non-biological mothers had no legal authority. Several non-biological mothers reported difficulties in getting children admitted to hospital or in to see a doctor because they could not prove their maternal identity or their legal right to make medical decisions for the child. This legal barrier had emotional repercussions for the non-biological mothers, who could not help feeling excluded from their childrens' lives when in the public realm.³⁰

In Dunne's Lesbian Household Project, with a mix of co-parents and step-parents, parenting was described as jointly shared in 80% of the households.³¹ Dunne's study found that although co-mothers are more likely than mothers to be in full time employment, they were less likely than fathers to be in full time employment. Tasker

²⁸ Ibid at 545-6.

²⁹ Fiona Nelson, *Lesbian Motherhood: An Exploration of Canadian Lesbian Families*, U of T Press, Toronto, 1996, Chapter 5.

³⁰ Ibid at 85.

³¹ Gillian Dunne, "Opting into Motherhood: Lesbians Blurring the Boundaries and Transforming the Meaning of Parenthood and Kinship" (2000) 14 (1) *Gender and Society* 11 at 15.

and Golombok suggest that, "co-mothers may be more willing than most fathers to compromise paid work in order to take on more involvement in parenting".³²

Patterson and Chan give an overview of several US and UK studies through the 1990s of families where lesbian couples had planned and borne children together and conclude that:

*Lesbian couples, by and large, reported being able to negotiate their division of labor equitably. In addition, lesbian non-biological mothers were consistently described as more involved than heterosexual fathers with their children.*³³

In the US National Lesbian Family Study (of 84 families) in the second stage of the study when the child was at the age of 2, in 75% of the two mother families the mothers reported that they shared responsibilities of child rearing equally and considered themselves equal parents. Among the other 25% child rearing was shared but (with one exception) the birth mother was considered the primary parent.³⁴

At stage 3 of the study of the 50 original couples: 29 shared the child caring responsibilities for their five year old child equally (58%), in 17 of the couples the birthmother had more responsibility (34%), and in 4 of them, the co-mother had more responsibility (8%).³⁵

³² Golombok and Tasker, "The Role of Co-Mothers in Planned Lesbian-Led Families" in Dunne (ed) *Living Difference: Lesbian Perspective on Work and Family Life*, Harrington Park Press, NY, 1998 at 65. (published simultaneously in (1998) 2 (4) *Journal of Lesbian Studies*)

³³ Patterson and Chan, "Families Headed by Lesbian and Gay Parents" in Michael Lamb (ed), *Parenting and Child Development in 'Nontraditional' Families*, Erlbaum, New Jersey, 1999 at 203.

³⁴ Gartrell, Banks, Hamilton, Reed, Bishop and Rodas, "The National Lesbian Family Survey: 2. Interviews with Mothers of Toddlers" (1999) 69 (3) *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 362 at 365.

³⁵ Gartrell, Banks, Reed, Hamilton, Rodas and Deck, "The National Lesbian Family Survey: 3.

In Sullivan's interviews with 34 lesbian families in the US, 32 of whom had jointly planned and conceived their child or children, 29 couples reported that parenting and domestic work were equally shared between the partners. Further, respondents stated that they actively sought to ensure that both partners were involved and responsible and that neither one took on a disproportionate load for any length of time.³⁶ Sullivan adds that of the families where one partner did take a heavier burden, "she was no more likely to be the birth mother than the co mother".³⁷ In only 5 of the couples was there a clear breadwinner/caregiver split with the caregiver relying heavily upon her partner's income.

In 19 of the 29 equal sharing couples, both partners worked full time and paid for child care. In eight of the equal sharing couples the partner with a more flexible workplace undertook the bulk of child care during the week with the other partner doing more at weekends, and in two couples both partners worked part time.³⁸ Sullivan concluded that the mothers in the equal sharing families, regardless of level of income and income disparities between the partners, made their decisions about the division of paid work and family responsibilities following "an egalitarian principle of self-conscious mutual understanding and sharing of both rewards and responsibilities".³⁹

In Patterson's interviews with 34 lesbian-led families in the US (The Bay Area Families Study) all of the couples where a partner co-mothered regarded both women as mothers, and shared in participation of household labour, family decision-

Interviews with Mothers of Five Year Olds" (2000) 70 (4) *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 542 at 544

³⁶ Maureen Sullivan, "Rozzie and Harriet: Gender and Family Patterns of Lesbian Coparents" (1996) 10 (6) *Gender and Society* 747 at 756.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid at 756.

³⁹ Ibid at 757.

making and childcare. While the biological mother performed a slightly higher portion of child care and the co-mother spent more time in paid employment there was a relatively even sharing of roles and a high level of relationship satisfaction. Household labour and family decision making were shared evenly. Patterson found that the more evenly child care is shared, the more positive adjustment is reported for both partners in their relationship and for their children.⁴⁰

Tasker and Golombok compared the role of co-mothers in 15 British lesbian mother families with the role of resident fathers in two different groups of heterosexual families (43 where the child was conceived through donor insemination and 41 where the child was conceived without DI).⁴¹ The comparison was based upon the birth mothers reports and the researchers' observations across a variety of scales (parenting load, parental coordination of discipline, affection to the child, play with the child etc). They found that co-mothers in lesbian-led families were more involved in parenting than fathers in the heterosexual DI family group and significantly more involved than fathers in families where children had been conceived without assistance (the ratings were 3.2 out of a possible 4 for the co-mothers compared with 2.5 and 2 respectively for the fathers). There were no differences in the three groups concerning the affection, closeness and play between the co-mothers, fathers and children but there were very significant differences in caregiving. Birth mothers reported that over 90% of the co-mothers were at least as involved as themselves in parenting in the lesbian families, compared with 47% of fathers in DI families and 37% of fathers in non-DI families.⁴²

⁴⁰ Patterson and Chan, "Families Headed by Lesbian and Gay Parents" in Michael Lamb (ed), *Parenting and Child Development in 'Nontraditional' Families*, Erlbaum, New Jersey, 1999 at 167, 168; see also Charlotte Patterson, "Families of the Lesbian Baby Boom: Parent's Division of Labor and Child Adjustment" (1995) 31 (1) *Developmental Psychology* 115.

⁴¹ Golombok and Tasker, "The Role of Co-Mothers in Planned Lesbian-Led Families" in Dunne (ed) *Living Difference: Lesbian Perspective on Work and Family Life*, Harrington Park Press, NY, 1998

⁴² *Ibid* at 59.

There is therefore considerable evidence to demonstrate that lesbian co-parent families have a more even distribution of domestic labour and child care than heterosexual families do, with positive results for the relationship between the partners and for the children they raise.

77% of the lesbian respondents in the Sydney Lesbian Parenting Conference (2000) saw a co-mother as the woman who had planned to have a child with the biological mother and was present from conception onwards. However it is interesting to note that 69% of respondents also saw a co-mother as a woman who may not have been present for conception but had lived with the child and treated the child as her own for some time. 78% of respondents reported that co-parents should be recognised by the law for all purposes.⁴³

In Sullivan's interviews with 34 lesbian families in the US, all of the mothers responded that the non-birth mother should be equally recognised as a second parent.⁴⁴ All of the couples who lived in jurisdictions where second parent adoptions were possible had "thought about, initiated, or completed" a second parent adoption at the time of the interview.⁴⁵ This finding is consistent with the second stage of the National Lesbian Family Study where all of the eligible co-mothers had legally adopted their children by stage 2 of the study when children were 2 years old.⁴⁶ At stage 3 of the study when children were 5 years old, 35 of the co-mothers (of 50 still in couples) had adopted their children.⁴⁷

⁴³ *Report of the Lesbian Parenting Conference 2000, Sydney 2000* at 11.

⁴⁴ Maureen Sullivan, "Rozzie and Harriet: Gender and Family Patterns of Lesbian Coparents" (1996) 10 (6) *Gender and Society* 747 at 753.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Gartrell, Banks, Hamilton, Reed, Bishop and Rodas, "The National Lesbian Family Survey: 2. Interviews with Mothers of Toddlers" (1999) 69 (3) *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 362 at 367

⁴⁷ Gartrell, Banks, Reed, Hamilton, Rodas and Deck, "The National Lesbian Family Survey: 3.

Clearly, mothers and co-mothers are keen to use whatever available means there are to ensure recognition of co-mother's relationships with their children. This recognition is important both socially and legally, and its impact on the co-mothers relationship with her child or children should not be underestimated. At stage 3 of the US National Lesbian Families Survey, of the separated couples, where the co-mother had already completed a legal adoption of her child before separation she was far more likely to share custody and parenting after separation. Of the 23 separated couples, the birthmother retained sole custody in 7 cases and primary custody in 6, and in none of those families had the co-mother adopted the child.⁴⁸

3.1.2 How DI Babies are Conceived

In many jurisdictions or regions, the legality or availability of fertility services may determine whether lesbian mothers conceive using anonymous donor sperm through a clinic, known donor sperm through a clinic (after testing etc) or using a known donor through self insemination at home. Where fertility services are discriminatory through law or practice, the first two options are not available to lesbian mothers (or to gay fathers who wish to donate generally or to a lesbian friend). It is therefore not surprising to find that a high number of babies born into lesbian families are conceived from a known donor, often through informal self insemination. The following surveys and studies indicate a high level of known donors in Australia, Canada and the UK, with a much higher use of unknown donors in the USA (where, notably, there are well known sperm clinics that have provided non discriminatory access for many years to women throughout the country, but also where self insemination may, in some states, give the donor legal rights as a father).

Interviews with Mothers of Five Year Olds" (2000) 70 (4) *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 542 at 544

⁴⁸ Ibid at 545.

In Maureen Sullivan's interviews of 34 lesbian-led families in the San Francisco bay area only 4 of the couples had used known donors with the remainder (88%) using clinic services where the identity of the donor would generally be available to the child when they reached 18.⁴⁹

By contrast, in Fiona Nelson's survey of 30 lesbian mothers in Alberta, Canada, all of the dozen mothers who had DI babies had self inseminated (though some of the donors were known only to intermediators, and not to the women themselves).⁵⁰

In Tasker and Golombok's study of 15 lesbian-led families in the UK, of the 14 couples who had conceived their child through DI, 11 of them were through self insemination.⁵¹

In Dunne's Lesbian Household Project in the UK, of the 28 (of 37) households where the child was conceived through DI, "almost all" organised this informally, and did not use clinics or hospitals; rather meeting donors through friendship networks.⁵²

In a survey of 84 women at the Sydney Lesbian Parenting Conference in 2000 self insemination was by far the most popular method of conceiving. 68% of respondents used self insemination with a known donor with a further 8% using an

⁴⁹ Maureen Sullivan, "Rozzie and Harriet: Gender and Family Patters of Lesbian Coparents" (1996) 10 (6) *Gender and Society* 747 at 755.

⁵⁰ Fiona Nelson, *Lesbian Motherhood: An Exploration of Canadian Lesbian Families*, U of T Press, Toronto, 1996 at 19.

⁵¹ Golombok and Tasker, "The Role of Co-Mothers in Panned Lesbian-Led Families" in Dunne (ed) *Living Difference: Lesbian Perspective on Work and Family Life*, Harrington Park Press, NY, 1998 at 52

⁵² Gillian Dunne, "Opting into Motherhood: Lesbians Blurring the Boundaries and Transforming the Meaning of Parenthood and Kinship" (2000) 14 (1) *Gender and Society* 11 at 15.

unknown donor to self inseminate.⁵³ The accessibility of fertility services to ensure testing and storage of semen for health purposes (rather than, necessarily, access to anonymous semen) is therefore a matter of some importance.

3.2 Gay Fathers

Like lesbian mothers, gay fathers may have children from a previous heterosexual relationship. They may also adopt or foster children after having come out. (Gay men and lesbians are eligible to adopt children in NSW but only as "single" applicants, not as couples, and therefore have low priority). In such situations there may also be a partner who acts as co-parent or step-parent to the child. Men who come to parent a child of a male partner who has had that child in the context of a previous relationship are generally referred to as step-fathers. Men who are co-parenting a child from birth with a male partner who is the biological father of a child are generally referred to as co-fathers.

Biological fathers who have chosen to have children with lesbian mothers may also be referred to as a co-parent where they share the role of parenting. For the sake of clarity such men will be called either a father or a donor in this paper, depending upon the circumstances of the family structure and their involvement in it.

If a gay father has a biological child after having come out, it is increasingly likely that he will have done so as a donor or a secondary non residential parent with a lesbian woman or couple, one of whom has borne the child. Depending upon the circumstances of the birth and raising of the child, he may see himself and be seen by the child and the mother/s as a 'donor' who has helped them, a co-parent, or a father. In what seems to be a relatively small number of lesbian families a gay donor acts as a non-resident father in the sense that he has a lot of contact with, and some responsibility over, the child. In many more instances fathers act as a friend or

⁵³ *Report of the Lesbian Parenting Conference 2000, Sydney 2000* at 10.

'uncle' to the child or children and play a role that is very distinct from that of parent. This is discussed below in the section on the role of donors/dads.

There is relatively little information on gay father led families with resident children.

3.3 The role of Gay Donors/Dads in Lesbian Mother Families

In Fiona Nelson's 1991 survey of 30 lesbian mothers in Alberta, Canada, all of the dozen mothers who had DI babies felt that the donors should never assert paternal rights over the children.⁵⁴

In the US National Lesbian Family Study, which surveyed 84 lesbian families, all of the children were conceived through DI. In the first stage of the study 47% of the women preferred that the donor be unknown and 45% elected to know the identity of the donor.

Of those who chose to know the donor's identity, 51% anticipated that he would have some involvement and 49% thought he would have no involvement with the child.⁵⁵ In the follow up second stage of the study, when the children were 2 years old, the donor was actively involved in parenting 12% of the children and had some involvement in a further 13% of children's lives – so around half of the known donors did have contact with the children.⁵⁶ By the time the children were 5 years

⁵⁴ Fiona Nelson, *Lesbian Motherhood: An Exploration of Canadian Lesbian Families*, U of T Press, Toronto, 1996 at 47.

⁵⁵ Gartrell, Hamilton, Banks, Mosbacher, Reed, Sparks, Bishop, "The National Lesbian Family Study: 1. Interviews with prospective mothers" (1996) 66 (2) *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 272 at 277.

⁵⁶ Gartrell, Banks, Hamilton, Reed, Bishop and Rodas, "The National Lesbian Family Survey: 2. Interviews with Mothers of Toddlers" (1999) 69 (3) *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 362 at 366.

old this proportion had increased. Of the 21 children with known donors, 71% had occasional contact and 29% had regular contact with the donor.⁵⁷

In Patterson's Bay Area Families Study, in 46% of the 34 families, the child had been conceived with anonymous donor sperm through a clinic, in 27% a known donor was used, and 8% of children were adopted.⁵⁸ In a third of the families the donor's identity was known to the parents and children but he "enacted the role of family friend rather than that of father" with only 2 of the men acknowledged as a father and assuming a non residential father role.⁵⁹

In Dunne's Lesbian Household Project in the UK, 86% of the women who had used DI to conceive responded that they wanted to know the donor.⁶⁰ In 40% of the households, the donors had regular contact with the children. Donors were generally gay men and all of the men who took a role as co-parents were gay. The most frequent term used by respondents to describe what Dunne refers to as the "fairly limited yet enthusiastic relationship between a donor and his child or children" was "uncle" or "kindly uncle".⁶¹

In three partnerships in the Dunne study (9%), donors were actively co-parenting from separate households. In one household, where the two mothers shared child care with the non-resident donor (who lived around the corner) one of the mothers

⁵⁷ Gartrell, Banks, Reed, Hamilton, Rodas and Deck, "The National Lesbian Family Survey: 3. Interviews with Mothers of Five Year Olds" (2000) 70 (4) *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 542 at 545.

⁵⁸ Charlotte Patterson, "Family Lives of Children Born to Lesbian Mothers" in Patterson and D'Augelli, *Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Identities in Families*, OUP, NY, 1998 at 164.11% children were conceived through intercourse and for 8% the parents did not wish to disclose the method.

⁵⁹ Ibid at 165.

⁶⁰ Gillian Dunne, "Opting into Motherhood: Lesbians Blurring the Boundaries and Transforming the Meaning of Parenthood and Kinship" (2000) 14 (1) *Gender and Society* 11 at 15.

laughingly described herself and her partner as, “the envy of the mother and toddler group”.⁶²

Catherine Donovan discusses the Dunne study, as well as the Families of Choice Project, a UK a survey of 100 non-heterosexual women and men, to conclude that lesbian-led families negotiate fatherhood and family concepts in a multitude of flexible forms. Donovan, like Dunne, notes the tendency for donors in lesbian families to be gay men.

Some of the participants in the ‘Families of Choice Project’ co-parented children with gay donors – and such co-parenting itself included a wide range of possibilities from “Sunday fathers” who played with the child from time to time, to men who undertook child care regularly or had the child stay in their home on a weekly basis.⁶³ Interestingly few, if any, of the men who co-parented undertook equal responsibility for care, or engaged in decision making regarding the child. This was seen as the domain of the ‘primary parents’ (the lesbian parents).

In a survey of 84 women at the Sydney Lesbian Parenting Conference in 2000, the majority of respondents with DI children reported that their relationship with the donor was one of friendship; the donor had no parenting responsibilities or decision making role (66%). A further 21% had no contact with the donor, and 12% reported a sharing of parental responsibilities with the donor. In terms of the child’s contact with the donor, 31% had no contact, 33% had ‘some’ contact, 22% had ‘regular’ contact (including birthdays and babysitting) and 13% had ‘extensive’

⁶¹ Ibid at 16-18.

⁶² Ibid at 28.

⁶³ Catherine Donovan, “Who needs a Father? Negotiating Biological Fatherhood in British Lesbian Families Using Self Insemination” (2000) 3(2) *Sexualities* 149.

contact with the donor relating to the child as a non residential parent.⁶⁴

Respondents were divided about the legal role of the donor, with just under half responding that the donor should not have legal recognition under any circumstances while an equal number reported that legal recognition may be justified in some circumstances. Only 3% responded that the donor should be recognised in all situations.⁶⁵

Australian women, like English women, appear more likely to self inseminate than use anonymous donor sperm (in contrast to women in the US: see earlier section on How DI babies are conceived). Surveys seem to indicate that this is only partly a result of clinic (in)accessibility and that the choice of self insemination is a result of the decided preference of around 70-80% of mothers in the UK and Australia to have a known donor.⁶⁶

Of known donors, it seems that over half have contact with the children, with a small but significant proportion having regular contact. With as many as 10% of donors sharing some parental responsibility it is clear that options for the recognition of such non-nuclear family forms need to be thought through.

⁶⁴ Report of the Lesbian Parenting Conference 2000, Sydney 2000 at 10.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ See earlier discussion based on Gillian Dunne's UK work and the Significant Others (LOTL) surveys and Sydney Lesbian Parenting Conference surveys for Australia.

4 Social Science and Psychological Research on the Children of Lesbians and Gay Men

Over the past 25 years a great deal of sociological and psychological research has been conducted to find out what, if any, effect a parent's sexual orientation has on the welfare and development of their children. Richard Green's small study was published in 1978, and since that time a body of work has appeared in the USA and UK, with increasing sample sizes and methodological rigour.⁶⁷

Charlotte Patterson, of the University of Virginia, has published a number of comprehensive reviews of the available studies of the children of gay and lesbian parents, as well as initiating a number of her own studies of lesbian families in the US. Patterson concludes:

...central results of existing research on lesbian and gay couples and families with children are exceptionally clear. Beyond their witness to the sheer existence of lesbian and gay family lives, the results of existing studies, taken together, also yield a picture of families thriving, even in the midst of discrimination and oppression. Certainly, they provide no evidence that psychological adjustment among lesbians, gay men, their children, or other family members is impaired in any significant way. Indeed, the evidence suggests that relationships of lesbian and gay couples are just as supportive and that home environments provided by lesbian and gay parents are just as likely as

⁶⁷ Richard Green, "Sexual Identity of 37 Children Raised by Homosexual or Transsexual Parents" (1978) 135 *American Journal of Psychiatry* 692.

*those provided by heterosexual parents to enable psychosocial growth among family members.*⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Charlotte Patterson, "Family Relationships of Lesbians and Gay Men" (2000) 62 *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 1052 at 1064.

In a 1996 overview, Mike Allen and Nancy Burrell gathered together data from 18 earlier studies from the USA and UK which spanned 1978 to 1995 with the aim of generating a single comparative set of figures for children of lesbian and gay parents and children of heterosexual parents.⁶⁹ The research only included quantitative statistical data where there was a comparative group of children from heterosexual parents, and did not include qualitative data (thus excluding many studies). The data included both children's self reports and parent's and teacher's reports of children across a wide variety of standard social and psychiatric testing procedures (Iowa Parent Behaviour Inventory, Bem's Sex Role Inventory, Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory, Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children etc).⁷⁰

The data was entered into a meta analysis model to produce a single set of comparative figures for the children of heterosexual and homosexual parents across a variety of indicators. This analysis found that there were no discernible differences in the adults' reports of the children regarding:

- Children's sex role identification;
- Level of happiness; and
- Level of social adjustment;

The analysis found that there were no measurable differences in the children's self reports regarding:

- Sexual orientation;
- Satisfaction with life; and
- Moral and cognitive development.

⁶⁹ Allan and Burrell, "Comparing the Impact of Homosexual and Heterosexual Parents of Children: Meta-Analysis of Existing Research" (1996) 32(2) *Journal of Homosexuality* 19.

⁷⁰ Note that this analysis did not control for gender differences with lesbian and gay parents, nor for single parent/divorce factors – ie whether children of a lesbian divorcee were being compared with children of an intact heterosexual family, as later researchers such as Tasker, Golombok and Patterson argue is necessary.

The authors argue that their statistical analysis indicates sufficient power to determine large or medium effects. Allen and Burrell conclude that:

The results, taken as a whole, indicate no difference between homosexual and heterosexual parents when taken together or individually. The results fail to support the assumption of widespread differences, or any differences on the basis of the particulars studied, between parents on the basis of sexual orientation.⁷¹

More detailed comparative analysis of different family forms follows.

4.1 Children of Lesbian Mothers (who have separated from the father)

In 1991, Tasker and Golombok in the UK⁷² and in 1992, Patterson in the USA⁷³ published comprehensive summaries of the many dozens of studies that had been undertaken to that time, most of which compared children in households headed by a lesbian mother with families headed by a heterosexual single mother, with the children in both types of families having been through the experience of parental separation and divorce.

The results across a range of issues found lesbian and heterosexual women were routinely similar in their parenting styles and skills and that their children showed no important differences. Specifically, the children showed no differences in:

⁷¹ Allan and Burrell, "Comparing the Impact of Homosexual and Heterosexual Parents of Children: Meta-Analysis of Existing Research" (1996) 32(2) *Journal of Homosexuality* 19 at 28.

⁷² Fiona Tasker and Susan Golombok 'Children Raised by lesbian mothers: The empirical evidence' (1991) *Family Law* 184.

⁷³ Charlotte Patterson, "Children of Lesbian and Gay Parents" (1992) 63 *Child Development* 1025.

- gender role or gender identity (and Patterson notes that in the more than 300 children studied there was absolutely no evidence of gender identity disorder);
- psychiatric state;
- levels of self esteem; and
- quality of friendships, popularity, sociability or social acceptance.

Further, in studies which looked at adult children of lesbians and gays, there was no difference in the proportion of those children who identified as lesbian or gay themselves, when compared with children of similarly situated heterosexual parents.

Of the studies that looked at lesbian mothers and their interactions with their children, they found that lesbian mothers were equally as child oriented and warm and responsive as heterosexual mothers.

Patterson concluded from her review that a child's adjustment is higher when a lesbian mother lives with her partner, when the mother's sexuality is acknowledged to the child before adolescence, and when the child has contact with children from other lesbian-led families.

Several studies have found that lesbian mothers were in fact more concerned than heterosexual women that their children should have contact with men and positive male role models.⁷⁴ Kirkpatrick (1987) found that the children of lesbian mothers had more contact with adult male family members and friends than did children of heterosexual parents. (These findings are also borne out in the studies of children born into lesbian families.) Golombok, Spencer and Rutter (1983) found that children

⁷⁴ Summarised in Patterson and Chan, "Families Headed by Lesbian and Gay Parents" in Michael Lamb (ed), *Parenting and Child Development in 'Nontraditional' Families*, Erlbaum, New Jersey, 1999.

of divorced lesbian mothers had higher rates of contact with their fathers than those of heterosexual women.⁷⁵

In 1996, Tasker and Golombok published a summary of the results of their longitudinal study which spanned 16 years comparing the children of lesbian single mothers with the children of heterosexual single mothers. This study is extraordinary in that it focused on parent's reports of the children when they were around 9 or 10 years of age, and then followed up with interviews of the children as 25 year old adults.⁷⁶

They found that lesbian mothers and heterosexual mothers were equally likely to have lived with a romantic partner post divorce. The children of lesbian mothers in this study had more positive step-parent relationships with the partner, both as adults and during adolescence, than did the children of heterosexual women.

In addition to confirming the findings of many other studies mentioned above, Tasker and Golombok found that the children of lesbian mothers were no more likely than children of heterosexual mothers to:

- be teased or ostracised;
- experience anxiety or depression; or
- feel unhappy or embarrassed about their mother being physically affectionate with a partner.

⁷⁵ These two studies are both cited in Gartrell, Banks, Hamilton, Reed, Bishop and Rodas, "The National Lesbian Family Survey: 2. Interviews with Mothers of Toddlers" (1999) 69 (3) *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 362.

⁷⁶ Fiona Tasker and Susan Golombok, "Do parents influence the sexual orientation of their children? Findings from a longitudinal study of lesbian families" (1996) 32 *Developmental Psychology* 3; Tasker and Golombok, *Growing Up in a Lesbian Family*, Guilford Press, NY, 1997.

Further, they were no more negative about their family identity as children than the children of heterosexual mothers -- and in fact as adults they were *more positive* about their family identity.

Tasker and Golombok conclude:

Children brought up by a lesbian mother not only showed good adjustment as young children but also continued to function well as adolescents and as young adults, experiencing no detrimental long-term effects in terms of their mental health, their family relationships, and relationships with peers and partners in comparison with those from heterosexual mother families.⁷⁷

Tasker and Golombok also found that the more open, positive and political the mother was about her lesbian identity, the more likely it was that her children were accepting and positive about their family identity.

In 1995, Lisa Saffron interviewed 17 children and adults in the UK who had been raised by lesbian mothers. Saffron states that most of the sociological literature has been focused upon whether there is any disadvantage to having a lesbian parent and that very little inquiry has focused upon whether there are in fact advantages to having a lesbian parent. Saffron reports:

According to the people I interviewed, there may well be meaningful differences in moral and social developments. Respondents suggested that children raised by lesbian mothers have the potential to develop more accepting and broad-minded attitudes towards homosexuality,

⁷⁷ Tasker and Golombok, *Growing Up in a Lesbian Family*, Guilford Press, NY, 1997 at 145.

*women's independence, the concept of the family, and social diversity than children from families which conform more closely to the norm.*⁷⁸

4.2 Children of Gay Fathers

Compared to the research available on lesbian mothers, there are relatively few quantitative studies comparing the children of gay fathers with those of heterosexual fathers. In part this reflects the fact that children of divorced parents generally reside with their mothers.

Several of the studies mentioned above, such as those summarised and compared in the Allen and Burrell survey include children living with divorced gay fathers with children living with heterosexual couples (as well as divorced heterosexual parents). The non gender specific information included in the introductory section above on the children of lesbian and gay parents is equally applicable to gay fathers and represents the best information available at this time.

In addition to that information, Patterson and Chan note that gay male parents, like lesbian parents, are more likely to share parenting tasks evenly than heterosexual parents.⁷⁹ They review other studies to note that:

A study of gay couples choosing parenthood was conducted by McPherson (1993) who assessed the division of labor, satisfaction with division of labor, and satisfaction with couple relationship among 28 gay and 27 heterosexual parenting couples. Consistent with the evidence from lesbian parenting couples, McPherson found that gay

⁷⁸ Lisa Saffron, "Raising Children in an Age of Diversity – Advantages of Having a Lesbian Mother" in Gillian Dunne, ed, *Living Difference: Lesbian Perspectives on Work and Family Life*, Harrington Park Press, NY 1998 at 37.

⁷⁹ Patterson and Chan, "Gay fathers" in Michael Lamb, *The Role of the Father in Child Development*, 3rd ed, Wiley, NY 1997.

*couples reported a more even division of responsibilities for household maintenance and child care than did heterosexual couples. Gay couples also reported greater satisfaction with their division of child care tasks.*⁸⁰

Patterson's work on the children of lesbian mothers demonstrates that shared parenting and household labour has a positive impact on the relationship between partners and on the child's wellbeing.

Patterson and Chan cite a 1982 study by Scallen and a 1989 study by Bigner and Jacobsen, both of which asked gay and heterosexual fathers to self report on their own behaviour with their children. Both studies sampled around 60 men, all of whom were divorced. No differences were reported by fathers across areas such as problem solving, providing recreation and encouraging children's autonomy. Both studies found, however, that gay fathers placed more importance on nurturing and less importance on their role as an economic provider for the children than the heterosexual fathers did.⁸¹

Much early research on gay fathers focused upon the sexual identity of their children. This reflects a persistent misconception that homosexual parents raise homosexual children, and also the deeply embedded fear of male children being gay – as such research, both on lesbian and gay parents, has often focused on the sexuality of sons. There is no basis in any of the research to support the claim that gay and lesbian parents are more likely than heterosexual parents to raise lesbian or gay children. Such claims or concerns are implicitly or explicitly premised on the belief that it is undesirable to grow up gay or lesbian, which many lesbians and gay men and their families find deeply offensive.

⁸⁰ Ibid at 254-5.

⁸¹ Ibid at 252.

Specific information on this issue is available from Patterson and Chan. They reviewed a number of studies of the children of gay fathers and found that between 6.5 and 9% of the adolescent or adult children either self reported, or were reported by their father to be, gay or lesbian. These figures may be viewed as below, on par with, or only slightly above, the average incidence of lesbian and gay sexuality, depending upon what general estimate of homosexuality in the population at large one accepts. Further, Patterson and Chan note that one of the studies compared the gay and non-gay sons of gay men and found the non-gays sons actually lived with their fathers far longer on average than the gay sons (11 years as opposed to 6 years) – thus refuting any perceived nexus between living with a gay father and becoming gay, for instance through ‘modelling’ theory.⁸²

4.3 Children Born into Lesbian Relationships

In recent years, studies have additionally been made of children born into lesbian families. Golombok, Tasker and Murray⁸³ in the UK and Chan, Raboy and Patterson⁸⁴ in the US compared lesbian single and couple households with heterosexual mother and heterosexual couple households - all of whom were raising children born as a result of donor insemination.

Golombok, Tasker and Murray compared the adults and children in 30 lesbian families (15 single and 15 couples) with 42 families headed by a single heterosexual mother and 41 two parent heterosexual families. The lesbian and single mother families had all parented a child without a father from the first year of the child’s life.

⁸² Bailey, 1995, cited Ibid at 256.

⁸³ Susan Golombok, Fiona Tasker and Clare Murray, “Children Raised in Fatherless Families from Infancy: Family Relationships and the Socioemotional Development of Children of Lesbian and Single Heterosexual Mothers” (1997) 38 *Journal of Child Psychology, and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines* 783.

⁸⁴ Raymond Chan, Barbara Raboy and Charlotte Patterson, “Psychosocial Adjustment among Children Conceived via Donor Insemination by Lesbian and Heterosexual Mothers” (1998) 69 (2) *Child*

The study used parent interviews and questionnaires, teacher questionnaires and data from the children using a series of standardised assessments. The children were aged 3-9, with an average age of 6.

Tasker, Golombok and Murray found that children in the families with no father were no more likely to develop behavioural problems, and felt just as accepted by their mother and by peers as children in families where the father lived in the home. There were also no differences in the development of the children between the lesbian and heterosexual mother headed families.

Chan, Raboy and Patterson undertook a comparative study of the children of 80 families, all of whom had conceived children from a single sperm bank in the US. The study compared parent's and teachers reports of children's social competence, adjustment and behaviour using standardised forms. It also collected data on parent's levels of happiness, stress and relationship satisfaction with their partners. There were 55 families headed by lesbian and 25 families headed by heterosexual parents. 50 of the families were headed by couples (34 lesbian and 16 heterosexual) and 30 by a single mother (21 lesbian, 9 heterosexual). The average age of the children was 7. The aim of the study was to compare the well being of children of families based on sexual orientation and family structure.

Chan, Raboy and Patterson conclude that it is family processes, not family structure, that determine children's welfare – that is, parenting stress and conflict are the determining factors in indicating children's disfunction, and these were completely unrelated to the family structure:

There were no significant differences in child adjustment as a function of parental sexual orientation or the number of parents in the home.⁸⁵

Development 443.

⁸⁵ Ibid at 448.

There is also increasing information as to the breadth and extent of support systems and extended family networks being built by lesbian families.

In the US National Lesbian Family Study, 84 families are being periodically interviewed in a longitudinal study. In the second stage, when the children were aged 2 years old, the researchers found that for 69% of the mothers, having a child had enhanced their own relationship with their parents and for 55% of them, contact had increased with their parents. In 38% of the families close friends had been incorporated into the extended family network.⁸⁶ By the time of the third stage of the study when children were 5 years old, 63% of the grandparents were 'out' about the fact that their grandchild was from a lesbian family.⁸⁷

In Patterson, Hurt and Mason's study of 37 lesbian-led families in San Francisco they measured the level of contact which children had with other adults and relatives and tested that against the child's self reported well-being. They found that although there was no significant relation between the child's well being and contact with grandparents or other relatives, there was a significant relationship between the child's frequency of contact with other adults and sense of well being.⁸⁸ They concluded that:

The children of lesbian mothers in this study were described as having regular contacts with several different adults, in addition to members of the children's own households, and as having occasional contacts with an even larger circle. These adults included grandparents, other

⁸⁶ Gartrell, Banks, Hamilton, Reed, Bishop and Rodas, "The National Lesbian Family Survey: 2. Interviews with Mothers of Toddlers" (1999) 69 (3) *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 362 at 366.

⁸⁷ Gartrell, Banks, Reed, Hamilton, Rodas and Deck, "The National Lesbian Family Survey: 3. Interviews with Mothers of Five Year Olds" (2000) 70 (4) *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 542 at 545.

⁸⁸ Patterson, Hurt and Mason, "Families of the Lesbian Baby Boom: Children's Contact with Grandparents and Other Adults" (1998) 68 (3) *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 390 at 396.

*relatives, and unrelated people (eg family friends) both male and female. The findings are not consistent with stereotypes of lesbian mothers and their children as isolated from kinship networks, or as living in single-sex social worlds. The results do, however, confirm earlier anecdotal reports of considerable social contact between children of lesbian mothers and their grandparents and other adults.*⁸⁹

4.4 Children's Difficulties in Social Situations/Stigmatisation

King and Black attempted to assess the likelihood of children of lesbian mothers being stigmatised by asking 338 undergraduate psychology students in a midwestern US university to complete a checklist for a hypothetical child (whom the respondents believed to be real) of a divorced lesbian or divorced heterosexual mother.⁹⁰ Students were more likely to fill in the forms indicating that the child had problem behaviour if the mother was lesbian than if she was heterosexual. The authors state that:

*Although the research comparing children of lesbian mothers with those of heterosexual mothers has consistently found few, if any, differences, results of this study indicate that the behaviour of children of lesbian mothers is seen as problematic with greater frequency than that of their counterparts with heterosexual mothers.*⁹¹

⁸⁹ Ibid at 396.

⁹⁰ King and Black, "College Students' Perceptual Stigmatization of the Children of Lesbian Mothers" (1999) 69 (2) *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 220.

⁹¹ Ibid at 224.

Interestingly, the respondents did not imagine any greater level of dysfunction when the lesbian mother had a live-in partner, suggesting that the presence of a female partner may not increase levels of stigma.

The National Lesbian Families Study stage 3 found that by the age of 5, 18% of the children had experienced some kind of homophobia or discrimination. Participants worked to prepare and discuss these experiences with their children.⁹²

In contrast, Patterson and Chan state that:

Anecdotal accounts describe children's worries about being stigmatized as a result of their parent's sexual orientation but available research provides no evidence for the proposition that the development of children of lesbian mothers is compromised by difficulties in peer relations. Among adult children of lesbian mothers in Tasker and Golombok's (1997) sample, only 22% reported that their childhood friends did not know about their mothers. Most remembered childhood friends as accepting or positive about their families, and only 3% recalled negative responses from their childhood friends.⁹³

4.5 Parent's Difficulties

In the US National Lesbian Family Study (of 84 families) 23% of mothers reported that they had encountered homophobia from health professionals during pregnancy – usually a refusal to acknowledge the role of the co-mother. Furthermore, 8%

⁹² Gartrell, Banks, Reed, Hamilton, Rodas and Deck, "The National Lesbian Family Survey: 3. Interviews with Mothers of Five Year Olds" (2000) 70 (4) *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 542 at 546.

⁹³ Patterson and Chan, "Families Headed by Lesbian and Gay Parents" in Michael Lamb (ed), *Parenting and Child Development in 'Nontraditional' Families*, Erlbaum, New Jersey, 1999 at 207.

reported difficulty in finding good child care because of their sexuality, and 4% had changed childcare facilities due to homophobia.⁹⁴

The major issue which arises in the qualitative studies and interviews with lesbian mother families is the extent to which the co-mother is excluded by social norms and treated as a non-mother, indeed as an extra 'hanger on' or stranger. Many co-mothers discussed the difficult question of what she should be called by the child (and by other adults) (eg Donovan, 2000; Dunne, 2000) but principally they felt excluded by other adult's responses to them. As Louise reported in Dunne's study:

There's a thing that if you want to be acknowledged as a parent, you just had to 'come out'. It's the only way to explain that you're a parent. And even that is a very hard way to explain that you're a parent...Because as soon as people found out you weren't the mum, they'd just - it was like 'who the hell are you then?'⁹⁵

As noted earlier, the vast majority of co-mothers in the US who were able to undertake second parent adoptions of their children (because such measures were available in their states), did in fact do so. They reported a stronger feeling of belonging and security with their child as a result, as well as increased recognition of their role from family and outsiders.

⁹⁴ Gartrell, Banks, Hamilton, Reed, Bishop and Rodas, "The National Lesbian Family Survey: 2. Interviews with Mothers of Toddlers" (1999) 69 (3) *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 362 at 367.

⁹⁵ Gillian Dunne, "Opting into Motherhood: Lesbians Blurring the Boundaries and Transforming the Meaning of Parenthood and Kinship" (2000) 14 (1) *Gender and Society* 11 at 22-3.

5 Social Science References:

5.1 Overviews of Research into Children of Lesbians and Gay Men in Various Family Forms

Allan and Burrell, "Comparing the Impact of Homosexual and Heterosexual Parents of Children: Meta-Analysis of Existing Research" (1996) 32(2) *Journal of Homosexuality* 19

Uses data from 18 UK and USA studies from 1978 to 1995 which used quantitative data from lesbian and gay families and a comparative group of children from heterosexual parents (with data drawn from children's self reports and/or parents or teachers reports of children across a variety of standard questionnaires and behavioural and psychiatric indicators). Generates a single set of comparative figures.

Susan Golombok, *Parenting: what really counts?*, Routledge, London, 2000

Includes some qualitative research from interviews with parents and children from various family forms conducted over the past 10 years. Considers the larger questions of number of parents in home and father absence and connects to wider research on parenting and child development. An excellent resource, as is all of her work.

Cheryl Parks, "Lesbian parenthood: A review of the Literature" (1998) 68 (3) *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 376

Summary of mostly US studies with helpful tabulation of issues, methods and results.

Charlotte Patterson, "Children of Lesbian and Gay Parents" (1992) 63 *Child Development* 1025

Comprehensive overview of the research to date.

Patterson and Chan, "Families Headed by Lesbian and Gay Parents" in Michael Lamb (ed), *Parenting and Child Development in 'Nontraditional' Families*, Erlbaum, New Jersey, 1999.

Separately summarises the results of literature on: divorced lesbian mothers, divorced gay fathers, lesbians and gay men who have chosen to be parents after coming out, research into children born in the context of heterosexual relationships, and research on children born to or adopted by lesbian mothers. Very comprehensive overview.

Charlotte Patterson, "Family Relationships of Lesbians and Gay Men" (2000) 62 *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 1052

Similar overview to Patterson and Chan above, including information on lesbian and gay couple relationships.

5.2 Children Raised in Lesbian Families (of various constellations, not always from birth)

Gillian Dunne, "Opting into Motherhood: Lesbians Blurring the Boundaries and Transforming the Meaning of Parenthood and Kinship" (2000) 14 (1) *Gender and Society* 11

Interviews with 37 cohabiting lesbian couples with dependent children in 6 UK cities. Entitled the Lesbian Household Project. 40% of children were under 5. In 40% of households co-parents were also biological mothers of older children.

Gartrell, Hamilton, Banks, Mosbacher, Reed, Sparks, Bishop, "The National Lesbian Family Study: 1. Interviews with prospective mothers" (1996) 66 (2) *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 272

Longitudinal study of 84 lesbian families of children conceived by DI, 70 including a mother and co-mother and 14 by single lesbian mothers, drawn from Boston, Washington DC and San Francisco. Stage 1 involved interviews with lesbians who were pregnant or actively in the process of insemination, and covered issues such as relationships between the partners and plans for parenting, social and family support, pregnancy choices, concerns about stigmatization and coping strategies.

The researchers intend to re-interview the mothers when the child is 1 year old, 5 years, 10 years and 17 – and if possible, interview the children at regular intervals after the age of 10.

Gartrell, Banks, Hamilton, Reed, Bishop and Rodas, "The National Lesbian Family Survey: 2. Interviews with Mothers of Toddlers" (1999) 69 (3) *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 362

Second interview in the study above, when the child was 2 years old. Topics covered include health concerns, the division of responsibility among the parents, what extended family structure was formed, how the child had affected the mothers relationship and what discrimination the mothers had experienced.

Gartrell, Banks, Reed, Hamilton, Rodas and Deck, "The National Lesbian Family Survey: 3. Interviews with Mothers of Five Year Olds" (2000) 70 (4) *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 542

Third interview in the above study when the child was 5 years old, covering the same topics as above.

Charlotte Patterson, "Family Lives of Children Born to Lesbian Mothers" in Patterson and D'Augelli, *Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Identities in Families*, OUP, NY, 1998.

Comprehensive overview of all of the research studies into lesbian-led families and children born into lesbian families. Also summarises main findings of the Bay Area Families Study.

Patterson, Hurt and Mason, "Families of the Lesbian Baby Boom: Children's Contact with Grandparents and Other Adults" (1998) 68 (3) *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 390

Study of 37 lesbian-led families in the US (drawn from the Bay Area Families Study - Patterson 1994 & 1995) to examine the frequency of children's contact with adults in extended family and friendship network. Children aged 4-9 years, average age 6.

Maureen Sullivan, "Rozzie and Harriet: Gender and Family Patters of Lesbian Coparents" (1996) 10 (6) *Gender and Society* 747

Study of 34 lesbian led families in San Francisco area.

Fiona Tasker and Susan Golombok, "Children Raised by lesbian mothers: The empirical evidence" (1991) *Family Law* 184

Concise overview of the research to date, particularly the English research.

Fiona Tasker and Susan Golombok, "Do parents influence the sexual orientation of their children? Findings from a longitudinal study of lesbian families" (1996) 32 *Developmental Psychology* 3.

Tasker and Golombok, *Growing Up in a Lesbian Family*, Guilford Press, NY, 1997

As above, 1996, results of a 16 year longitudinal study of the children of lesbian mothers in the UK comparing the children of lesbian single mothers with the children of heterosexual single mothers. This used parent's reports of the children when they were around 9 or 10 years of age, and then followed up with interviews of the children as 25 year old adults. Readable and comprehensive.

5.3 Children Born into Lesbian Families

Raymond Chan, Barbara Raboy and Charlotte Patterson, "Psychosocial Adjustment among Children Conceived via Donor Insemination by Lesbian and Heterosexual Mothers" (1998) 69 (2) *Child Development* 443

Study of 80 families, all of whom had conceived children from a single sperm bank in the US in a comparison of families by sexual orientation and family structure. There were 55 families headed by lesbian and 25 families headed by heterosexual parents. 50 of the families were headed by couples (34 lesbian and 16 heterosexual) and 30 by a single mother (21 lesbian, 9 heterosexual). Children averaged age 7.

Susan Golombok, Fiona Tasker and Clare Murray, "Children Raised in Fatherless Families from Infancy: Family Relationships and the Socioemotional Development of Children of Lesbian and Single Heterosexual Mothers" (1997) 38 *Journal of Child Psychology, and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines* 783.

Study of 30 lesbian families (15 single and 15 couples) comparing them to 42 families headed by a single heterosexual mother and 41 two parent heterosexual families. The lesbian and single mother families had all parented a child without a father from the first year of the child's life. Study used self reports of parents, teachers and child assessments also. The children were aged 3-9, with an average age of 6.

Golombok and Tasker, "The Role of Co-Mothers in Planned Lesbian-Led Families" in Dunne (ed) *Living Difference: Lesbian Perspective on Work and Family Life*, Harrington Park Press, NY, 1998

(published simultaneously in (1998) 2 (4) *Journal of Lesbian Studies*)

Compared the role of co-mothers in 15 British lesbian mother families with the role of resident fathers in two different groups of heterosexual families (43 where the child was conceived through donor insemination and 41 where the child was conceived without DI). Children averaged age 6.

Charlotte Patterson, "Families of the Lesbian Baby Boom: Parent's Division of Labor and Child Adjustment" (1995) 31 (1) *Developmental Psychology* 115

Study of 26 lesbian couples, all of whom had a child between the age of 4 and 9 (couples drawn from the pool of 37 families in the Bay Area Families study). Examined the level of relationship satisfaction between partners and proportion of child care and household labour undertaken by partners and related these to child adjustment.

5.4 Children Raised by Gay Fathers

Patterson and Chan, "Gay fathers" in Michael Lamb, *The Role of the Father in Child Development*, 3rd ed, Wiley, NY 1997.

5.5 Experiences of Parenting, including qualitative research

Report of the Lesbian Parenting Conference 2000, Sydney 2000

Parenting Consultation Report, Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby of NSW, Sydney 2001.

Turan Ali, *We are Family: Testimonies of Lesbian and Gay Parents*, Cassell, London, 1996

Personal accounts from parents in the UK, organised thematically.

Katherine Arnup, (ed) *Lesbian Parenting: Living with Pride and Prejudice*, Gynergy books, Charlottetown, 1995

Includes Canadian legal information.

Dalton and Bielby, "That's Our Kind of Constellation: Lesbian Mothers Negotiate Institutionalized Understandings of Gender Within the Family" (2000) 14(1) *Gender and Society* 36

Based on interviews with 14 lesbian mothers in California, qualitative analysis covering issues such as division of labour and recognition of co-mothers role.

Catherine Donovan, "Who needs a Father? Negotiating Biological Fatherhood in British Lesbian Families Using Self Insemination" (2000) 3(2) *Sexualities* 149

Theoretical analysis of negotiated fathering based on interviews with 100 non-heterosexual women and men; entitled the Families of Choice Project.

Erera and Fredriksen, "Lesbian Step-families: A Unique Family Structure" (1999) 80 (3) *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services* 263

Overview of some issues facing lesbian step-parents; rather general.

Hequembourg and Farrell, "Lesbian Motherhood: Negotiating Marginal-Mainstream Identities" (199) 13(4) *Gender and Society* 540

Based on interviews with 9 lesbian mothers in North-eastern USA, qualitative analysis covering issues such as division of labour and a particular focus on recognition of co-mothers role

Ellen Lewin, *Lesbian Mothers: Accounts of Gender in American Culture*, Cornell UP, Ithaca, 1993.

Qualitative study of 73 lesbian mothers discussing issues such as how and why they became mothers, family structure etc

Fiona Nelson, *Lesbian Motherhood: An Exploration of Canadian Lesbian Families*, U of T Press, Toronto, 1996.

Based on interviews with 30 lesbian mothers in 1991 in Alberta, Canada (about half of whom had children from prior heterosexual relationships and half within lesbian relationships).

Silverstein and Auerbach, "Deconstructing the Essential Father" (1999) 54(6) *American Psychologist* 397

Survey of literature on fathering, argues persuasively that much American neo-conservative discourse on fatherhood is incorrect or oversimplified. Neither mothers nor fathers are essential to child development and responsible fathering can occur across all family structures.

Wakeling and Bradstock, *Beyond Blood: Writings on the Lesbian and Gay Family*, Blackwattle, Sydney, 1995

Mostly personal reflections.

5.6 Children's Experiences

Carrie Paechter, "Growing Up with a Lesbian Mother: A Theoretically based Analysis of a Personal Experience" (2000) 3(4) *Sexualities* 395

Lisa Saffron, "Raising Children in an Age of Diversity – Advantages of Having a Lesbian Mother" in Gillian Dunne, ed, *Living Difference: Lesbian Perspectives on Work and Family Life*, Harrington Park Press, NY 1998.

Study of personal report of 17 UK children and adults who had raised by a lesbian mother. Includes some references to the sociological literature.

Myra Hauschild and Pat Rosier, *Get Used to It! Children of Gay and Lesbian Parents*, Spinifex, Melbourne, 1999.

16 personal accounts from children in NZ.

5.7 Societal Views

King and Black, "College Students' Perceptual Stigmatization of the Children of Lesbian Mothers" (1999) 69 (2) *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 220

Attempt to assess the likelihood of children of lesbian mothers being stigmatised by asking 338 undergraduate psychology students in a mid-western US university to complete a checklist for a hypothetical child (whom the respondents believed to be real) of a divorced lesbian or divorced heterosexual mother.

5.8 Overview of issues

The following are all American and all include at least some reference to legal status, issues with second parent adoption DI etc

Laura Benkov, *Reinventing the Family: Lesbian and Gay Parents*, Crown, NY, 1994.

Kathryn Kendell, "Lesbian Couples Creating Families" in Cabaj and Purcell, *On the Road to Same Sex Marriage*, Josey-Bass, San Francisco, 1998.

Valerie Lehr, *Queer Family Values: Debunking the Myth of the Nuclear Family*, Temple UP, Philadelphia, 1999

More theoretical account of debates about family ideologies.

April Martin, *The Lesbian Parenting handbook: Creating and Raising Our Families*, Harper, NY, 1993.

Practical focus with a lot of personal accounts.

Susan Morton, "Lesbian Divorce" (1998) 68 (3) *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 410

Patterson and Redding, "Lesbian and Gay Families with Children: The implications of Social Science Research for Policy" (1996) 52(3) *Journal of Social Issues* 29

Includes review of US legal issues as well as social science research reviewed in Patterson (2000) and Patterson and Chan (1999).

Judith Stacey, "Gay and Lesbian families: Queer Like Us" in Mason, Skolnick and Sugarman, *All our Families: New Policies for a New Century*, OUP, NY, 1998.

Judith Stacey, *In the Name of the Family: Rethinking Family Values in the Post-Modern Age*, Beacon, Boston, 1996.

6 Legal References

6.1 Legal Issues Australia

Inner City Legal Centre, *Talking Turkey: A Legal Guide to Self Insemination*, ICLC Sydney 1999.

Detailed information on legal issues with donor insemination.

Hayley Katzen, Tim Leech, Jenni Millbank and Kathy Sant, "The Relationships of Lesbians and Gay Men" Chapter 25.5, *The Law Handbook*, 7th ed, Redfern Legal Centre Publishing, Sydney, 1999.

Overview of parenting issues.

Women's Legal Resources Centre, *Lesbians and the Law*, 2nd Ed, Redfern Legal Centre Publishing, 2000

General overview of parenting issues.

6.2 Legal Issues USA/UK/International

Kath O'Donnell, "Lesbian and Gay Families" in Jagger and Wright, *Changing Family Values*, Routledge, London, 1999.

Mostly UK law, but some international and comparative references.

Leslie Minot, *Conceiving Parenthood: Parenting and the Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People and Their Children*, A Report of the IGLHRC, San Francisco, 2000.

International comparative report.

Published by the GLRL (NSW) Inc, Sydney, 2002

ISBN: 0-9580467-0-0

Foreword © Alexandra Sosnov and Anthony Schembri , 1 January 2002

Text © Jenni Millbank, 1 January 2002

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