



2 Mums and a Dad

A story of the rocky
road of three-way parenting

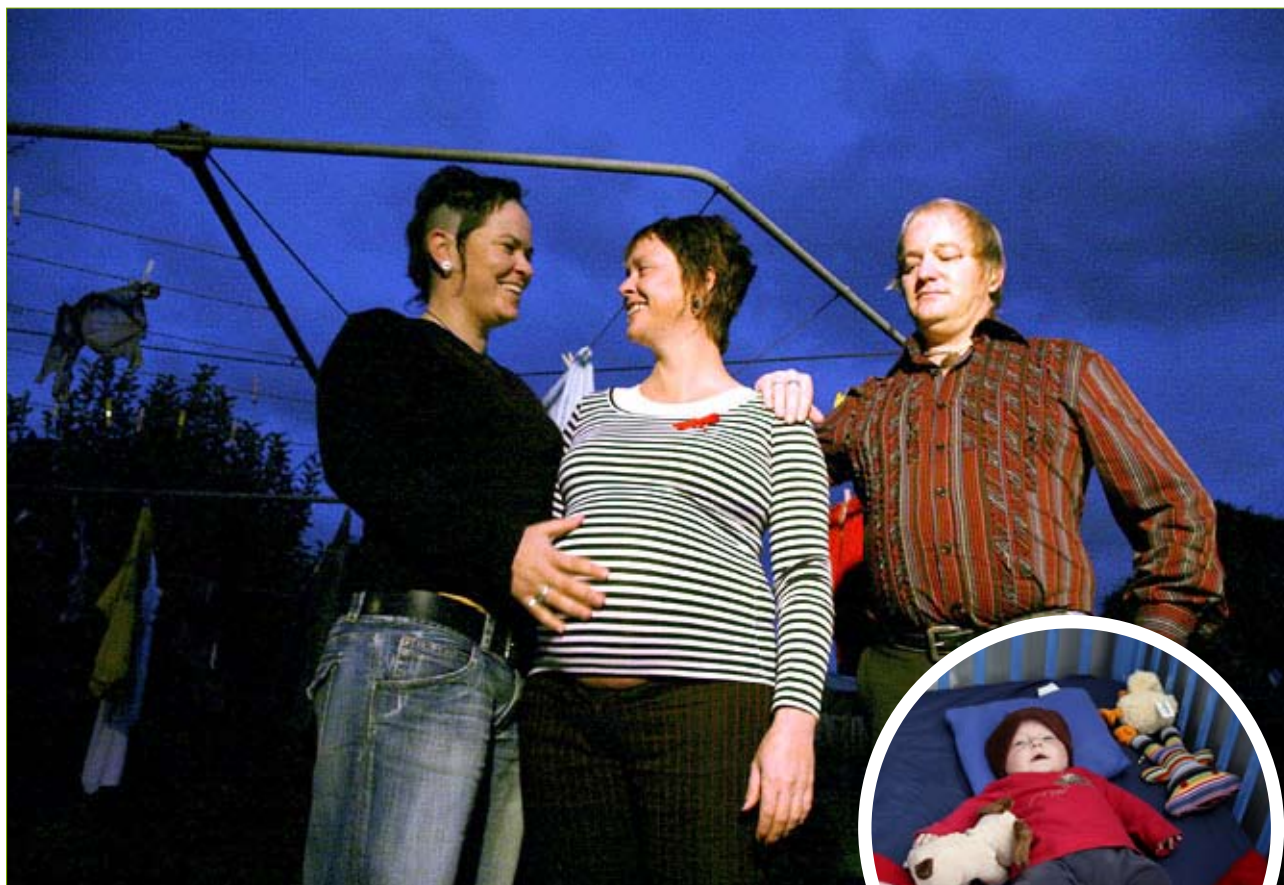
A **STUDYGUIDE** BY MARGUERITE O'HARA

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INTRODUCTION

2 Mums and a Dad is the story of the rocky road of three-way parenting, a unique exploration of the nature of family in today's complicated society, as well as an insightful resource for everyone concerned with issues regarding the raising of children such as access, parents' rights and family conflict.

Fiona is thirty-three and wants to have a baby. But her partner, Kellie, is a woman and sperm isn't handy. Fiona has a solution: an English gay guy from work wants to be a dad. Fiona and Kelly want their child to have a father. It seems perfect ... but is it?

For Darren, the arrangement seems like a dream come true. With his parents in the UK, Darren will finally be a dad and have family in Australia. Kellie is skeptical. A baby is one thing but a man involved in her relationship – forever? Could he take off with the baby if anything happened to Fiona?

Unsure what being a parent really

means – the three draw up a contract outlining how they will raise a child. All they have to do is get pregnant – without sex! Medical advice: a plastic syringe for the sperm, some contrived romance, and the three manage to self-inseminate.

With pregnancy well underway, the cracks in this unusual family begin to show. Arguments over colours of the baby's room are just the start. The 'baby contract' unravels in an explosive confrontation. Could the three end up in court before the child even arrives? And will their own parents think of the baby as their grandchild?

They are entering uncharted legal

territory as well. Kellie is not legally considered a parent, nor is Darren. In fact, the law does not recognize them as a family at all – what will happen if the whole thing falls apart?

Once baby Marley is born, three-way parenting shifts up a gear. The baby lives with the girls, and Darren is allowed restricted visits. But without enough bonding time, Darren is heartbroken. Access rights are renegotiated with new Mum Fiona keeping a careful eye on every move Dad makes.

It's Darren's worst nightmare; he's fighting to see his son and feels Fiona has decided he isn't a good father. Did they just want him for his sperm?

While the blood parents battle it out, Kellie is so entranced by the baby, now she wants one with Darren too.

Shot from the perspectives of Fiona, Kellie and Darren, *2 Mums and a Dad* will take the audience on a roller coaster ride from pregnancy to parenthood in a most unusual unit, while also tackling universal issues of relevance for anyone with a family, and isn't that all of us?

Curriculum Relevance

This documentary offers a fascinating insight into the question – what is a family? It explores a less traditional way of conceiving and parenting a child, while at the same time demonstrating how this can be a very similar though more complex process for gay people than for people in traditional heterosexual relationships. It has relevance for middle to senior secondary students of:

- Health and Personal Development
- Psychology
- SOSE/HSIE
- Legal Studies
- English
- Media Studies
- Values Education
- Gender Studies

It would also be a valuable resource for tertiary students in Human Services and Social Work for the perspective it offers on family and parenting issues.

About the filmmakers

The film is written and directed by Miranda Wills and produced by Sally Ingleton for Singing Nomads Productions. Cinematography is by Jenni Meaney and Peter Zakharov. The film was edited by Mark Atkin and the music composed by Burkhard Dallwitz.

Director Miranda Wills initially gained her experience writing and directing wildlife documentaries, including *King Koala*, winner of several awards. She has moved into social documentaries to reflect her passion to tell stories about unusual subcultures and minor-

ity groups.

Producer Sally Ingleton's credits include films exploring people from other cultures, many of which have won international awards. These include *Welcome 2 My Deaf World*, *Mao's New Suit*, *The Tenth Dancer* and *Muddy Waters: Life and Death on the Great Barrier Reef*.

Composer, Burkhard Dallwitz won a Golden Globe for Best Original Score for Peter Weir's *The Truman Show*. He also composed the music for the recent Australian film *The Caterpillar Wish*.

Words and terms used in the film

Lesbian/Gay – terms used to identify females and males whose sexual orientation is same-sex. The term homosexual also refers to sexual orientation but is less commonly used, particularly in relation to women.

Donor Sperm – a man donates sperm to a woman so she can have a child. The man ejaculates sperm into a jar and the sperm is then placed into the female's vagina when she is ovulating.

Turkey baster – a large plastic needle-less syringe used to keep turkeys moist while cooking, but also sometimes used to inseminate women by placing the sperm into the woman when she is ovulating and more likely to conceive. In most cases just a normal size plastic syringe is used for self insemination.

Parenting Agreement – a contract drawn up between some prospective parents outlining custody, access and financial responsibilities. While not a legally binding document, it is likely to be considered by courts if disputes arise later.

Surrogacy – carrying a baby to term for another person. Australian gay men seeking this option to parent a child usually do so through clinics in the USA. The male donates his sperm, chooses an egg donor and a woman

as a surrogate to carry the baby, then goes back to pick up the child after birth. This option can cost up to \$30,000. Neither the egg donor nor surrogate has legal parenting responsibilities.

Primary carer – the adult or people the child lives with, who take on the day-to-day parenting responsibilities (in this case Fiona and Kellie).

Birth Mother – the female who carries and gives birth to the child (in this case Fiona)

Ectopic pregnancy – the development of a fertilized ovum (egg) outside the uterus, as in a fallopian tube. The pregnancy cannot develop to full term.

In vitro fertilization (IVF) – the process used to conceive a child outside the body when a couple cannot conceive any other way. A woman's eggs and a man's sperm are placed together in a dish and fertilized before implantation into the woman. This technology is used to assist people otherwise unable to have a child.

(NB. Fiona's pregnancy is **not** the result of in vitro technology).

People in the film

Kellie – partner of Fiona and mother of Marley

Fiona – 33-year-old birth mother of Marley

Darren – 39-year-old birth father of Marley

Marley – the baby boy born to Fiona, Kellie and Darren.

Friends and families of Darren, Fiona and Kellie – the parents of all three parents and several friends appear in the film.

Leanne Kelly – a family lawyer

Ruth McNair – Fiona's doctor who advises them on how to get pregnant



ACTIVITY 1

Before Watching the Film

1. What does 'family' mean to you? Make a list of as many different kinds of family structures as you can think of e.g. traditional nuclear families, blended families etc.
2. Who may use a 'sperm donor' to conceive a child?
3. What do you think the term 'primary carers' means in relation to parenting?
4. Should the legal rights of birth parents, (those whose genetic material has created the child), have precedence over parents who have nurtured and brought up a child, as in adoptions.
5. How do you think the word 'parent' should be defined?
6. What could be included in a 'parenting agreement' drawn up by prospective parents? Do you think this is a good idea?
7. Would it be more challenging to be the child of gay parents than the child of a heterosexual relationship? If so, in what ways?
8. What are the most important attributes parents should have?
9. Do you think it is possible to generalize about the relative parenting capacities of men and women?
10. Should children conceived through 'in vitro' ([with]in the glass) processes, be able to access information about the donor's identity? If so, at what age should this information be available to children conceived through such programs? (*Note: the baby in this film is not conceived through in vitro fertilization.*)
11. Under what circumstances do people have more than two 'parents'?

ACTIVITY 2

Close Viewing > As you watch this documentary, use **Tables 1 (page 5) and 2 (page 6)** to make notes in response to the questions in

the left hand column. Read through them before watching the film. The information you collect should provide the basis for later discussion of the

issues raised in **Activities 3 and 4**. Read through the **Background Briefing (on page 7)** before moving on to Activities 3 and 4.

QUESTION	ANSWER
Who is the birth mother, the birth father and the 'other mother'?	
What is unusual about the family structure the three people in this film are setting up?	
Approximately what age are Kellie, Fiona and Darren?	
Where do the three adults live and who with?	
Why do they decide to draw up a parenting contract before the baby is born?	
To what extent is this contract legally binding on the adults involved?	
When same-sex couples have a baby, is it usual for the male sperm donor to be involved at the birth and afterwards?	
Does the law recognize children of gay relationships?	
Describe what happened in Darren's two earlier attempts to become a father.	
Explain the process involved in Fiona becoming pregnant.	
Why do Kellie and Fiona seem unsure about signing the parenting contract before the baby is born?	
What are some of the practical aspects of preparing for the baby's arrival that cause tensions between the three?	
What kind of work have Kellie, Fiona and Darren all been involved in?	
What happens at the 'Love Makes a Family' fair that upsets Darren?	
How do Fiona and Kellie see what happened?	
In what other situations in preparation for the baby's birth is Darren shown feeling excluded?	
When Fiona is eight months into the pregnancy, what changes does she and Kellie want made to the parenting contract?	
Describe Darren's response to these proposed changes.	
Does Darren have any legal redress about changes to his access problems?	

TABLE 1: PREGNANCY, PARENTAL RIGHTS AND PROBLEMS

QUESTION	ANSWER
Who is physically present at labour and the baby's birth?	
Describe Darren's feelings at Marley's birth.	
Do all three parents seem to be both united and 'over the moon' when Marley is born?	
Who does Darren send first photos of his son to?	
What practical assistance does Darren provide to Fiona and Kellie in the period immediately following the birth of the baby?	
How do we know he is happy and proud to be a father?	
What hands-on care of his son is Darren involved in?	
What is the crucial bonding experience only Fiona can have with baby Marley?	
Does Darren feel confident that Fiona trusts him with the baby?	
Once baby Marley is born, how do all three sets of grandparents respond?	
When Marley is two months old, how comfortable is Fiona about leaving him with Darren? What are her reservations about long stays?	
How much access would Darren like?	
When Marley is six months old, how do we see him responding to his dad on Father's Day?	
Describe Darren's feelings about his access to Marley at this stage?	
How do we know how all three parents feel about one another and about Marley?	
What are the advantages for all three parents in their shared parenting arrangements?	
What is Kellie thinking about now that Marley is a part of all their lives?	

TABLE 2: BIRTH AND BRINGING UP BABY

BACKGROUND BRIEFING | FAMILIES, LEGAL RIGHTS, COMMUNITY ATTITUDES AND BEING GAY IN AUSTRALIA TODAY

FAMILY

- Less than half of Australian families consist of mum, dad and the kids, the traditional 'nuclear' family model.
- Other family structures include: single parent families, blended families, step families, and children born through surrogacy.
- Developments in reproductive technology, including IVF (in vitro fertilization) now allow people who may never have been able to have children to have them.
- Increasing numbers of lesbians and gay men are having babies through sperm donors or surrogacy.
- Some lesbians and gay men are choosing to parent together to form new, alternative forms of family that can include two mums, a dad and three sets of grandparents (as in this film).

LEGAL ISSUES

- Lesbian and gay families are not recognized by Commonwealth legislation. Without the legal and social safety nets that other families automatically receive, lesbian and gay families are at greater risk in a number of ways.
- The non-birth mother (in this case Kellie) is not legally considered a parent. Should anything happen to Fiona, Darren could get access and raise the child alone, despite Kellie having been a principal live-in carer of Marley.
- Darren, like Kellie, is not considered legally to be a parent because Marley was conceived through AI (artificial insemination).
- The person who carries the child to birth has predominant legal rights.
- In practice, the Family Court places the welfare of the child as the single most important issue in determining custody and access questions.
- A recent legal judgement in Canada has given the non-birth mother of a child of a lesbian couple full parental rights equal to those of the birth mother and donor father. An article detailing this judgement can be accessed through a link at the end of this guide in the reference section.

COMMUNITY ATTITUDES

- Some groups in society, such as religious groups, claim that one of the problems with these family structures is the lack of a father figure in a child's life. Yet, studies of lesbian couples show that at least 80% want the child to know who the sperm donor is and to have a relationship with the father.
- Despite the diversity of our society, some people have never known a gay or lesbian person and tend to have fixed pre-conceptions about them, particularly in relation to becoming parents.
- When two mums were shown with their child on an episode of *Play School* on ABC television in 2004, there was a community outcry at what some people described as 'an attempt to normalize the abnormal'.

AUSTRALIAN GAY AND LESBIAN COMMUNITY

- It is difficult to ascertain the exact size of the gay and lesbian community in Australia because the national census is only beginning to include same-sex couples in its data collection and not all gays and lesbians wish to reveal their sexual orientation. The 2001 ABS census states that there were 9840 gay couples and 8312 lesbian couples living together. Of these, twenty per cent of the lesbian couples had a dependent child/children. Less than five per cent of the gay couples had a dependent child/children. There are now a significant number of lesbian parented families in North America, Western Europe and Australia. Estimates in the USA range from one to five million lesbian mothers parenting more than six million children.
- Affects on children raised in lesbian families. International studies have shown that:
 - a. They are no different in terms of their sexual identity.
 - b. Personality, intelligence, self-esteem and moral judgement are the same.
 - c. Relationships with peers and adults of either sex are the same.
 - d. Relationships with parents are no different.It has been found that children's psychological development is influenced more by family process (such as conflict between parents) than by family structure (such as the number of parents or their sexual orientation).
- There have always been gay and lesbian parents, many of whom conceived children from previous heterosexual relationships. However, across the world there is a gay and lesbian baby boom, as there is greater acceptance of such relationships and increasing access to advances in reproductive technologies.
- Insemination is usually achieved via a sperm clinic, IVF or done at home where the man ejaculates into a jar and the woman draws up the sperm using a needle-less syringe and inseminates herself when she is ovulating.



ACTIVITY 3

Family – discussing how it all works.

All you need is love, love ... love is all you need ... (line from a Beatles' song)

Now that you have gathered information about what happens in these people's lives, you could discuss some of the issues raised in this film about families, rights, expectations, difficulties and possibilities.

1. What preconceptions and assumptions does this story challenge about both families and parenting?
2. What concerns does Kellie have about being the non-birth mother?
3. Is it reasonable for Darren to expect the same level of access rights to his child as any other non-custodial parent?
4. What do you think was at the heart of Fiona's and Kellie's worries about the Parenting Agreement with Darren before Marley was born?
5. Where did your sympathies lie in the conflict scene between the three when they were exchanging and sharing their concerns about how the situation pre-baby was developing?
6. Did all three adults seem to be prepared to listen to and respond openly to the concerns of each other?
7. What qualities does Darren display as a parent?
8. Describe how the three parents, although they don't live together, relate to one another?
9. What role does Kellie, the non-birth mother want to play in her son's life? What would she prefer to be called?
10. Is baby Marley the only thing they all share a common interest in?
11. After the birth, there seem to be fewer tensions between the three as Marley grows from dependent new-born to responsive, sociable baby. How would you explain this?
12. At what other key points in Marley's development can you envisage difficulties arising, e.g. choice of school, curiosity about his family structure from other children?
13. How typical do you think Fiona's concerns as a mum are about entrusting her baby to the care of another person in the first few months of his life?
14. What would be the advantages of having two live-in mums and a dad always happy to mind the baby?
15. Do you see any disadvantages for Marley in the family structure in which he is being raised?
16. Has watching this film changed any views you may have had about unconventional family structures, such as the one shown in *2 Mums and a Dad*?
17. The tagline on the front of this guide refers to 'the rocky road of three-way parenting'. How accurate do you think this is as a description of what happens in the film?



ACTIVITY 4

Bringing it home – researching and role- playing some of the issues raised in the film

1. Go to the *Love Makes a Family* website at <http://www.lovemakesafamilyaustralia.org>. Open the link on the right-hand side – Personal Stories and read some of the stories from same-sex couples about parenting. Once you have developed a sense of the range of people and their aspirations, role-play one of these stories. In groups of three, role-play:
 - a. Initial exploratory discussions between three people wanting to have a child together.
 - b. Negotiation of the details of a parenting agreement.
 - c. Resolving any conflicts arising about access rights after the birth of the child.
2. Imagine you and your partner and the donor parent are involved in the making of a documentary film about your experiences. Allocate roles to the film director and the three parents. A number of issues to do with the relative rights and responsibilities of the three of you have arisen and the director wants to film the scene where underlying tensions come to the surface. One, or more, of you feels these discussions are too private to be recorded on film. Role-play the scene where the four of you negotiate how to proceed at this crucial part of the filming process.
3. On the ‘Love Makes a Family’ website, open the link on the

right-hand side – Fact Sheets. Click on the fact sheet about community support for parenting law reform. Role-play a discussion between four people who have different views on why changes to the laws about same-sex family rights should or should not be supported. One person could be strongly in favour of proposed changes, another firmly against and the other two people holding less strong views. Try to base your discussion on what you have seen in the film, your personal knowledge and through researching the issue through websites and other material such as the information on the ‘Love Makes a Family’ website. References at the end of this guide should help with this activity.



ACTIVITY 5

Style of the film

The idea for the film came from increasing mainstream interest in gay and lesbian families via newspaper articles and TV news. One high profile case involved a lesbian couple in dispute with their gay sperm donor that ended tragically with the mother killing the baby and herself. While this is an exception, it does highlight how complicated and risky gay and lesbian parenting arrangements can be, especially without social and legal safety nets afforded more conventional families. I wanted to make a film that would investigate the issues, raise awareness and spark debate. I completed this film over two years, with Sally Ingleton as my committed producer.

– Miranda Wills, Writer/Director

1. ‘Establishing trust is critical to making a documentary; you have to be able to strike a chord with the people you’re filming.’ – Miranda Wills, Director of *2 Mums and a Dad*
What evidence is there in the style of this film that suggests a high level of trust existed between the three individuals and the filmmakers?
2. Where is most of the film shot? How does this ‘normalize’ what we are seeing?
3. What is the role of narration in this film? Who tells the story and how does the linking narration work?
4. List the scenes where music is used. Are the pieces repeated? How does music add to the story?
5. During the more tense scenes between the three parents, does the way the film is shot seem to be more sympathetic to the claims of any of the individuals? Explain why or why not.
6. How would you describe the tone of this documentary?
7. Are there any scenes where you thought the camera intruded too much in these individuals’ lives?
8. What role do the grandparents play in the film? Do they provide a wider social and familial context for the story of these three people and suggest another perspective on the meaning of ‘family’?
9. Do you think watching this film will encourage people to be more open-minded about what constitutes a family and in their attitudes towards lesbian and gay people in their community?



ACTIVITY 6

Taking the issues further

1. Allowing your life to be shown on screen.
 - Why do you think the people appearing in this film allowed their lives and choices to be made public?
 - Apart from satisfying our often insatiable interest in the details of other peoples' lives, what purpose do you believe showing stories such as *2 Mums and a Dad* might have? How might they modify social attitudes?
 - Filmmaker Kevin MacDonald, director of *Last King of Scotland* and several documentaries, including *Touching the Void*, has said that 'documentary-makers use other people's lives as their raw material and that is morally indefensible'.¹ What do you think he means by this? Does the willing participation of the people whose lives are being shown change the situation?
2. Design a poster promoting this film. Select a suitable image from the film that for you encapsulates what is most important and interesting about the story. Create

3. Create a photo collage on the theme 'Love makes a Family' showing the variety of family structures in Australian society. This could be part of a display at your school indicating your school's openness to welcoming and accepting all kinds of families.
4. There are always constraints on filmmakers about length. If this film had been able to be longer than 52-minutes, what else would you have included in the story – more about Marley, about the backgrounds and working lives of the three adults or something else?
5. Describe your responses to the three 'parents' in the film. Was there one whose concerns you identified with more strongly than the others?
6. Conduct a debate or class discussion on this statement:
The most important thing in a child's upbringing is to spend time with adults who love them and are concerned for all aspects of their welfare. The gender preferences of parents are irrelevant.
7. Many gay and lesbian parents would argue that they are being

denied their basic human rights by the current family law system. Should the changes in modern families necessitate a rethink of our laws?

You may need to reread the Background Briefing information on page 7 before responding to this question

8. Make a list of the kind of challenges gay parents and their children are likely to encounter in our society as the children grow up.
9. How is the issue of same-sex families represented in the media? Do you know of any mainstream films or television dramas that have included these families in their presentations? If so, how are they presented?
10. Having a baby is both a universal and a unique experience. While childbirth throughout the world may be a similar experience for parents, every child and every birth is both extraordinary and unique. Genetic, environmental and cultural factors all play a part in the development of a person. From what you have seen in this film, what sort of child and adult do you think Marley might become?

References and Resources

Films

There are a number of films about childbirth and bringing up children, exploring different aspects from a variety of angles. These include:

- *Maternity Unit* – a 2005 documentary by Janette Howe. This follows the birth of a number of babies from different ethnic backgrounds at Canterbury Hospital in NSW.
- *Who's Afraid of Designer Babies* – a 2004 documentary by Sean Cousins. This film explores the issues associated with IVF and other medical technologies.
- *Life at 1* – a 2006 2-part documentary by Catherine Marciniak. We follow the lives of eleven babies and their families during their first year of life. The series will continue to follow and film these children and their families for seven years. (ATOM study guides are available with all these documentaries.)
- *Two Men and a Baby* – a documentary about two gay men who find a surrogate mother in the USA who will carry the baby for the men and hand it over after birth.

Books and Articles

'Lesbian partner wins right to be third parent', *Sydney Morning Herald* article from Michael Comte in Ottawa, Canada about a landmark legal case, 5 January 2007, <http://www.smh.com.au/news/world/lesbian-partner-wins-right-to-be-third-parent/2007/01/04/1167777218882.html> (Accessed 23

February 2007).
Family is Family is Family, Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby (<http://www.girl.org.au/issues/family.html>) 2004. (Accessed 22 February 2007).

R. McNair, *Evidence of outcomes for children of lesbian parents – Summary of international literature – Fact Sheet*, Endorsed by the Attorney General's Advisory Committee on Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Issues, 2002.

R. Pepper, *The Ultimate Guide to Pregnancy for Lesbians*, Cleis Press, San Francisco, 2005.

Love Makes a Family – Submission to the Victorian Law Reform Commission Enquiry 'Assisted Reproductive Technology and Adoption' – Should the Current Eligibility Criteria in Victoria be Changed?, Prospective Lesbian Parents, 2004.

Pride and Joy – A resource for prospective lesbian parents in Victoria, Royal Women's Hospital, Melbourne, 2003.

J. Tomlins, *The Infertility Handbook: A Guide to Making Babies*, Allen & Unwin, Melbourne, 2003.

Contacts

Prospective Lesbian Parents (Melbourne) – A support group for lesbians wanting to be parents.: <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~plpvic/> (Accessed 22 February 2007).

Maybe Baby (Melbourne) – A support group for prospective gay and lesbian parents: <http://www.maybebaby.org.au> (Accessed 22 February 2007).

Gay Dads (Australia) – Australian based website supporting gay men who

are planning on becoming, or who are already, parents: <http://www.gaydadsaustralia.com> (Accessed 22 February 2007).

Victorian Gay and Lesbian Legal Rights Lobby – Lobby group that aims to achieve equity and social justice for lesbians and gay men: <http://www.vgirl.org.au> (Accessed 22 February 2007).

Royal Women's Hospital – Website offering wide ranging information on lesbian health and parenthood: <http://www.rwh.org.au/wellwomens/> (Accessed 22 February 2007).

Love Makes a Family. A Victorian community education and lobbying group that aims to achieve equal rights and choices for lesbian, gay and bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI or 'rainbow') parents, prospective parents and families: <http://www.lovemakesafamilyaustralia.org> (Accessed 22 February 2007).

Rainbow Families. Support group for alternative families. Each year a Rainbow Families Conference is held in Melbourne including workshops, panels, discussions and presentations on a wide range of topics to do with alternative families: <http://www.rainbowfamilies.org.au> (Accessed 22 February 2007).

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Endnotes

- ¹ *Sunday Age* magazine, interview with Kevin Macdonald by Nigel Farndale, *The Telegraph*, 28 January 2007, p.29.



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