

BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

Róisín Ryan-Flood, *Lesbian Motherhood: Gender, Families and Sexual Citizenship*. Palgrave Macmillian Studies in Family and Intimate Life. New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2009, 256 pp. \$US 74.95 hardcover (978-0-230-54541-0).

Current scholarship on lesbian motherhood primarily focuses on the experiences couples face in challenging heteronormativity. However, little attention has been paid to lesbians who choose to become parents with an openly lesbian lifestyle and how their choices reflect broader understandings of kinship, everyday interactions and social policy. Róisín Ryan-Flood interviewed 68 primarily white and professional lesbian parents in Sweden and Ireland in 2000 and 2001, exploring their experiences of sexual citizenship, reproductive healthcare, and child-centred spaces. Three major themes are addressed: the role of social policy on lesbian reproduction, state regulation of kinship, and to heteronormativity. This work contributes to new understandings of contemporary kinship and constructions of motherhood.

Research on lesbian parents often overlooks the effect of social policy on women's ability to form autonomous households. Heteronormative assumptions influence the provision of assisted contraception, kinship possibilities for adoption and formal recognition of co-parents. Ryan-Flood's cross-national comparison shows that there is more support for women's autonomous households in Sweden, which is evident in women's participation in the labour market and availability of parental leave and subsidized childcare. In Ireland gays and lesbians have fewer legal rights, less recognition and are more marginalized from mainstream discourses. "Blood ties" are an intrinsic part of family in both countries, exacerbated in Sweden by their paternal rights policy. Consequently, in both welfare states, lesbian couples face challenges to equal reproductive technologies, access to donors and adoption. As the result of having to navigate around heterosexual policies their path to parenthood is long and complex.

Ryan-Flood also explores the role of state legislation on kinship in regulating intimate relationships. This has become increasingly prevalent with the challenging of traditional family forms through increased control of reproductive decision-making and broader interpretations of 'mother' and 'parent' in contemporary society. She uses the example of 'family discounts' being available to only heterosexual nuclear families and be-

ing denied to lesbian families. Irish lesbians have no official identity, in contrast to Sweden where registered same-sex partnerships were introduced in 1995, and lesbian and gay parenting is more prevalent. Exclusion was still present among all participants, who experienced difficulty accessing medical services such as IVF as open lesbians. Thus, many were forced back into the closet for the purposes of conceiving. Furthermore, many couples remained childless after several attempts to conceive because they were unable to adopt, did not have access to affordable IVF treatments, and were unwilling to seek medical counseling. Attempts to form an autonomous household were hindered by their sexuality.

Finally Ryan-Flood examines the extent to which lesbian couples are similar to or different from heterosexual parents, especially the impact on children of having same-sex parents. A major criticism by the LGBT community against lesbian parents is that they conform to the notions that biological kinship and children constitute a 'real' family. She argues that this ideology constructs the queer 'Other' whose sexuality may damage the child. This research parallels the wider literature on same-sex parenting in finding that both Swedish and Irish participants have an equal division of labour in their relationships. "While participants referred to equal divisions of labour, they often expressed a preference for particular tasks. However, these preferences did not usually fall along traditional gendered lines" (p. 161). In addition, lesbian parents emphasized the importance of their children having male role models and viewed gay men as better role models for their children because they did not subscribe to hegemonic norms of masculinity. Thus, for the lesbian parents in this study, gender was highly flexible in both principle and practice.

Ryan-Flood's research makes a timely contribution to current US debates on the definition of marriage and its impact on families. This book aids in debunking many myths about lesbian parents to show how children of lesbian parents are at an equal or greater advantage because their relationships contain greater gender equality. By using the narratives of lesbian couples to uncover their personal beliefs, struggles and triumphs while attempting to build their own families in a culture that continues to privilege heterosexual families, makes this book a unique contribution. This highly engaging text is suitable for any upper-level undergraduate or graduate courses in sociology, women's studies, and social policy that delve into dynamics of citizenship, gender and sexuality.

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