



BOOK REVIEW

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Riggs, Damien W. (2007). Becoming parent: Lesbians, gay men and family. Teneriffe: Post Pressed, ISBN 978192 1214172

Becoming Parent is an enticing read about what it means to be a lesbian or gay parent in Western society. This book highlights how the very category of 'parent' is used as a tool of oppression. For lesbian and gay parents their experience of parenting is influenced and shaped by a complex intersection of disadvantage and privilege depend on their particular circumstances.

One of the strengths of the book is that Riggs avoids homogenising the experience of all gay and lesbian parents, rather he draws out differing experiences based around gender, race and other factors. Most of the claims that lesbian and gay parents are, or can be, 'good' parents are made by, and for, white middle class couples at the detriment of non-white, working class and single parents regardless of their sexuality.

Drawing on his knowledge of psychology and using his experience as a gay foster parent Riggs is able to deconstruct the process in which we 'become parent' in relation to the children which we care for.

The main premise of the book is that by using parent as a verb rather than a noun, and exploring the ways in which we 'become parent', we can circumnavigate the privileging of biological bonds and the traditional construction of the family through heterosexual relations. In this way society is able to recognise more diverse family structures.

Riggs takes the reader on a challenging jour-

ney questioning what is a parent and do lesbian and gay parents want to be 'normal'? He explores the experience of mundane heterosexism in everyday life, the legal issues surrounding lesbian and gay parenting, the language and discourses used in the media, children's literature and everyday conversation.

Riggs pays particular attention to the language surrounding lesbian and gay parenting. Most arguments in support of lesbian and gay parenting employ the idea that they are 'just like' heterosexual parents. This is understandable considering the hegemonic discourse that a child's best interest is served by a heterosexual couple.

But Riggs describes how the 'just like' arguments serve to further reinforce the idea that lesbians and gay men are inherently unfit parents due to their sexuality. He further critiques the research used to support lesbian and gay parenting which comes from the position that it is the parents sexuality which is problematic, not the society which discriminates.

Riggs offers us a new language to support diverse forms of parenting without continuing to privilege the heterosexual norm. He explores new ways of myth busting which do not reinforce negative stereotypes. Focussing on 'becoming parent' as something that parents are constantly and actively engaged in allows for recognition of diverse family forms.

I personally found this book both engaging and challenging. Coming from a non-normative family myself, I have experienced, and still experience at times, the desire to claim normality through existing discourses. I also use the argument that 'love makes us a

family' to validate my family form. But Riggs critiques this argument in *Becoming Parent* and forces myself and others to question what language and arguments we use to justify our families. Riggs summarises the persistent tension arising when your family status is subject to the recognition of others when he say "I feel like I am both always and never a parent"

It would have been an interesting extension of the work in *Becoming Parent* to explore the experiences of children with lesbian or gay parents (as the author does elsewhere). This would further disrupt the assumptions of parental ownership over children and also fully acknowledge children's active role in creating and shaping the families they form part of.

Becoming Parent addresses an important gap in the literature on lesbian and gay parenting which up until now has largely ignored both the experience of lesbian and gay foster parents and parenting in the specific Australian context.

While making an important contribution to the academic field, Riggs employs a writing style that is accessible to those outside of academia. Riggs describes his work as "part autobiographical, part pedagogical, part political" which makes for an interesting and engaging read. His work is refreshingly honest, revealing the conflicting emotions of pain, loss, joy and love, which accompany the parenting process.

Authors Note

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