

healing journey toward a stronger sense of legitimacy. Other readers will gain a deeper appreciation for an aspect of maternal experience that is still largely marginalized and silenced. Although Malacrida herself felt empowered and healed by conducting this research, she wanted to assure herself that her participants felt some of these positive benefits as well. To this end, she reports on a follow-up survey at the end of the book that validates her claim that others also gained new insight into their loss and its effects and that their participation in the study had been helpful. By dissecting the social, psychological and physiological interplays in perinatal grief, complicated mourning, and postmodern creativity, Malacrida confronts questions that are seldom asked and a type of death that is seldom validated.

Lesbians Raising Sons

Jess Wells, Ed.
Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 1997

Reviewed by Mary F. Brewer

This anthology, according to the editor Jess Wells, shows how the “current baby boom among lesbians ... is challenging concepts and constraints of the family and, perhaps most important, raising men in a completely new way” (ix). It is divided into three sections, addressing the hybrid identity of lesbian families: how typically they transgress borders not only of sex and gender, but also race and class; the relation between living-out new models of family life and constructing new (self)images of lesbians and lesbian community; and the way in which the inherent sexism and homophobia within the legal system and society at large continues to victimize lesbian parents and their children.

The central theme within this collection rests on the various strategies employed by lesbian mothers to raise healthy, happy sons—boys who will have access to their full range of emotions and who will grow up to behave in ways that do not support systems of oppression — within the context of a society that denigrates women and homosexuals.

Rather than attempt to review all the articles, all of which document and provide valuable insights into lesbian’s parenting skills and the wider impact lesbians raising sons may have on traditional gender roles in society, I shall attempt to look at how some of the above themes are addressed throughout. Most contributors follow a similar format of giving some history of their own experiences raising sons. Many of the lesbian mothers admit to some fear, even in some cases loathing, at the thought of raising a ‘little patriarch,’ and most also

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make the telling connection between raising sons and having to re-evaluate their own generalizations of the 'other' gender. Robin Morgan's entry is especially noteworthy for the way it demonstrates that it is possible to "erode the allure of male entitlement," without giving boys a negative self-image. (Wells, 1997: 41) Other issues explored are: the advantages as well as the drawbacks of being out outside one's immediate circle of family and friends, how to protect children from the negative attitudes of teachers and peers who would hold their parents' sexual orientation against them, and to what extent lesbian parents, or indeed any parent, can influence a child's sex-gender development.

For me, one of the most interesting aspects of the collection is the way it debunks the myth that lesbian parents will coerce their children into accepting their own particular sexual orientation: rather, what the book makes clear is that the essence of good parenting for lesbians is respect for the child's individuality. Most lesbian mothers assert that it is of little importance to them whether their sons grow up to be straight or gay; they do, however, acknowledge working very hard to socialize their boys to adopt non-violent ways of resolving conflicts and to respect other people's rights and preferences.

Ellen Lewin's research on mothering illustrates that most women's accounts of becoming a mother focus on the power of the individual to construct or to imagine herself as a mother (1994: 338). In one of the books' most moving testimonies, Tryna Hope writes of giving up her son because "The truth is, I didn't see how I could be a lesbian *and* a mother" (Wells, 1997: 206). Studies such as this one point the way for lesbians to develop this sense of agency and a belief in their parenting capabilities. Its positive representation of lesbian families provides a valuable contribution to contemporary lesbian feminism.

References

- Lewin, Ellen. 1994. "Negotiating Lesbian Motherhood: The Dialectics of Resistance and Accommodation." *Mothering: Ideology, Experience, and Agency*. Eds. Evelyn Nakano Glenn, Grace Chang, and Linda Rennie Forcey. New York: Routledge. 333-353.