

Who's Your Daddy? And Other Writings on Queer Parenting

Rachel Epstein, ed.
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Reviewed by Lesley Tarasoff

Who's Your Daddy? is a collection of articles, stories, and interviews that investigate the history, reality, and possibilities of queer families in North America. The editor of this insightful anthology is Rachel Epstein, a renowned Canadian LGBTQ parenting activist, educator, researcher, and mother. In *Who's Your Daddy?* Epstein includes the personal and legal history of her own queer family: "Together with three other lesbian couples and their kids, we were part of a historic joint Charter challenge, *Rutherford v. the Register General of Ontario*, seeking the right for birth mothers to be able to name another woman as a second parent at birth" (Lois Fine 198). This charter challenge was successful.

Epstein's story is one of many in *Who's Your Daddy?* that demonstrates that queer parents have done a lot with a little: "In the short period from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s, queer parenting activists in Canada, at times with only modest resources, made enormous gains" (David Rayside 208). Despite these gains, which are outlined in the third section of the book, the LGBTQ community still faces many challenges. Lesbians may have achieved major gains, but other members of the queer community, particularly trans people, continue to confront barriers to become parents and create families.

Who's Your Daddy? includes the stories of diverse queer families from all walks of life: lesbian mothers, gay dads, queer foster parents, bisexual parents, queer women who experience infertility, trans parents, single parents, queer teen parents, polyamorous parents, butch mothers, queer mothers over 40, trans-racial families, queer spawn with one, two, or more parents, and families created through assisted human reproduction (AHR) and adoption. In many ways, these queer families challenge and recreate "the conventional model of the heteronormative nuclear family and traditional notions of family, biology, blood and kinship" (22). The stories shared in *Who's Your Daddy?* ask us to "interrogate what 'family' is all about and how and by whom it gets defined" (16). They also probe the meaning of "queer." Is queer an identity, an adjective, or an adverb? Must one be erotically queer to be a culturally queer parent or to parent queerly?

Who's Your Daddy? calls on queers and non-queers alike to stop policing

each other—there is no right way to parent, to be a family, to be queer. A sperm donor/donor dad interviewed by Epstein says it best: “As we become more familiar with all the varieties of queer families, hierarchies will develop—this is a better model, this is a lesser model. But I think we should be smart enough not to do this to ourselves” (114). Likewise, Radford stresses that “it is important to valorize and celebrate unconventional families, in their myriad forms, but there is no need to disparage those who hold dear our ‘traditional’ families ... let us be kinder to each other, loving to each other, as we theorize about families, the most important loving relation in our lives” (344). The book elicits support among queers for and across the diverse range of queer families.

Epstein goes further. She also asks readers to celebrate the uniqueness of queer families, the strengths that queer parents offer their children and that queer families offer the world. Queer parents are resilient and creative, and they raise children who are also creative, resilient, and socially conscious: “Gay families are good for the world, whether it’s because we teach children to think for themselves and to respect the dignity and humanity of every other person they share this planet with, or because we love *well* and are committed in our desire to see our children grow to be the best they can be” (Christina Starr 314). Moreover, queer people arguably spend more time thinking and strategizing about parenting and family than their heterosexual counterparts because they often rely on outside resources, like AHR services and adoption, to become parents.

In response to those who are concerned about the impact of queer parents on the development of a child, the stories in *Who’s Your Daddy?* show that parental gender and heteronormative family configurations do not matter: “Gay parents, trans parents, whatever. Doesn’t matter. Your kids will be kids, and they will in turn be obnoxious, self-righteous, naively adventurous, and, sometimes, outright arrogant pricks. They’ll sneak out of the house once or thrice, probably smoke pot and think they got away with it because they’re so clever, and eventually they’ll start making plans—horrible, incompetent, ill-executed, and often hopeless plans—to kiss and/or bang a classmate or two. They may also be gay, or not. But who gives a damn about that?” (Jonathan Feakins 366).

Who’s Your Daddy? is an excellent resource to combat voices that demonize queer parents and deny queer people the right to create families. While there is still much to be done in terms of queer family recognition and rights in North America, reading *Who’s Your Daddy?* left me feeling invigorated and excited about the prospect of becoming a queer parent myself. I recommend this book to anyone interested in the subject of parenting and families. *Who’s Your Daddy?* has a great deal to offer queer and non-queer families alike.