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LGBTQI Parented Families and Schools: Visibility, Representation, and Pride

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Abstract

This is an overview and honest review of the 182 page, paperback edition of LGBTQI Parented Families and Schools: Visibility, Representation, and Pride, authored by Anna Carlile and Carrie Paechter.

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**LGBTQI Parented Families and Schools:
Visibility, Representation, and Pride**

By: Anna Carlile and Carrie Paechter. 2018, Paperback Edition, 182 pages. ISBN 036744142X

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There has been increasing recognition of the basic human rights of LGBTQI+ communities in recent years. Marriage equality, reproductive and kinship rights are some of the most striking changes globally from the Republic of Ireland to Taiwan. The visible representation of diverse LGBTQI+ communities has grown exponentially through characters and storylines in *Orange is the New Black*, *Pose*, and *Queer Eye*. Despite the seemingly dizzying pace of change, many educational institutions remain enclaves resistant to such rapid transformation. Heteronormativity has traditionally been ingrained in school discourses and rules through both formal and informal school cultures. *LGBTQI Parented Families and Schools: Visibility, Representation, and Pride* (2018) emerges from the United Kingdom at this moment in history to survey the climate of contemporary English schools.

The goal of the book is to explore the relationship of LGBTQI+ parented families and children with schools. In a slim monograph, Carlile and Paechter examine six main areas of inclusion for LGBTQI+ families: ideologies of parenting and schooling, media representations, visibility/invisibility in school policies, parents' perspectives on school policies, experiences of children, and 'usualizing' LGBTQI+ people and issues in schools. One of the great strengths of the book is the clarity of presentation and reasoning of its argumentation. The empirical data is drawn from previous analyses of school policies on school websites, surveys of schools in London and media reports, and in-depth interviews conducted specifically for this book. The data is well synthesized to produce a comprehensive overview of LGBTQI+ parented families in England. Both authors also narrate their own insider positions in relation to the subject matter clearly, which further enriches the perspective and point of departure of the book.

The first chapter opens by theorizing the heterosexual matrix in relation to society. This provides a strong foundation to understand how schools operate with the social, cultural and civil context of heteronormativity. Drawing on the work of Monique Wittig and Judith Butler, Carlile and Paechter show how heteronormative assumptions about stable sex and gender have been fundamental to the social contract of civil society. They argue that the wider struggle for inclusion in civil society institutions has created a form of homonormativity that elides the diversity of sexual and gender identities. They further introduce common associations of motherhood with feminized body types as another layer of normativity. The authors thus problematize the common narrative that LGBTQI+ social acceptance has been achieved.

The book discusses media representations in the next chapter where the authors explore different tropes of LGBTQI+ representations, such as the evil lesbian lover, rejected by family, and bizarre freaks, to better understand where teachers and students get their ideas of LGBTQI+ people. It then moves to examine English school policies, showing the complexity of how equality is constructed. The authors point out that, while LGBTQI+ relationships and identities are largely absent from curricula on sex education, they are often solely represented as victims of bullying.

The heart of the book is its analysis of the in-depth interviews that inform the chapters on parents' and children's perspectives on schools. The complexity of relationships with schools and other parents and students show that LGBTQI+ parents often have partial visibility. Because LGBTQI+ issues are usually centered around the issue of bullying in schools, parents felt invisible in the curriculum and in commemorations of holidays such as Mother's or Father's Day. The

children of LGBTQI+ parents reported a range of stresses in school from the invisibility of their family structures, difficulties in finding language about their families because of the lack of representation in curriculum, and bullying.

The book closes with an examination of the ‘educate and celebrate’ training intervention to raise awareness of the need to make diverse LGBTQI+ identities and family types ‘usualized’ in schools. They argue that these trainings can make teachers more conscious of homonormativity and help them feel more confident in dealing with LGBTQI+ issues in schools. However, they argue that only systemic change will be effective in making school policies and curriculum more open, inclusive and welcoming to the diversity of families.

The great strength of *LGBTQI Parented Families and Schools: Visibility, Representation, and Pride* lies in the precision and clarity of its argument. In detailing the many ways that LGBTQI+ parented families feel erased through hetero- or homonormativity, Carlile and Paechter connect how small changes that can make a positive difference still require broader structural transformation to truly expand the visibility, inclusivity, and friendliness of schools towards the wide variety of families. Most of all, this book calls for us to go beyond dualistic binaries of gender and sexuality to truly recognize and celebrate the diversity of human identity, which benefits all students.

Author Notes

Kris Clarke, Ph.D., is an associate professor of social work at the University of Helsinki, Finland. Her research interests include decolonizing and structural social work, addiction and harm reduction, social memory, and LGBTQ issues in social work education.

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