

Queer Parenting and the Challenge to Queer Theory

Chris Roulston

Volume 46, numéro 1, 2021

Special Issue: Queer Bodies
Numéro spécial : Corps Queers

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1086613ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1086613ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

University of New Brunswick, Dept. of English

ISSN

0380-6995 (imprimé)

1718-7850 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Roulston, C. (2021). Queer Parenting and the Challenge to Queer Theory. *Studies in Canadian Literature / Études en littérature canadienne*, 46(1), 117–144.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1086613ar>

Queer Parenting and the Challenge to Queer Theory

CHRIS ROULSTON

IN JUNE 2019, *THE GUARDIAN* PUBLISHED Francisco Navas's interview with a range of North American "queer" families to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Stonewall riots. These families included gender queer, lesbian, gay, non-binary, two-spirit, and trans subjects in a variety of configurations made up of biological children, adopted children, three-way relationships, and small communities identifying as families. According to Navas, the North American family has become an ever-expanding and elastic construct, able to house a broad and diverse range of kinship models.

Indeed, in much of Europe and North America, traditional kinship borders are dissolving, and an increasing array of new social relations now appears to be possible. Considering how the category of the family historically has been one of the most policed, usually requiring heterosexual marriage and strict bloodline ties, a key transformation is taking place.

Yet this transformation, particularly in terms of queer parenting families raising children (and here I use "queer" as shorthand for LGBTQ+ folk), poses certain challenges for queer theory. It raises the question of whether the organically evolving diversity of familial lives involving children is an implicit critique of queer theory or an embracing of its terms. If the family more broadly is being queered, then what is the nature of that queering, and to what extent does it contest the tenets of certain elements of queer theory itself? An Althusserian reading would suggest that the structure of the family always tends toward the normative in that it is supported by and reflected in the state apparatus. Queer theory has also incisively foregrounded the effects of homonormativity, in particular in terms of settler, white, affluent, middle-class lesbians and gays who seamlessly blend into mainstream North American and Western European cultures.¹

Yet it might be time, as Robyn Wiegman and Elizabeth A. Wilson argue, to rethink the category of the normative. The norm is a form of

measurement that comprises both the centre and the outliers; it is not a “compulsory, uniform standard” (15) decreed from above but an average measurement of an entire group. In this sense, “a norm is a wide-ranging, ever moving appraisal of the structure of a set” (16), so that, “in collating the world, it gathers up everything. It transverses networks of differentiation; it values everything; it plays” (17). Norms, in fact, proliferate endlessly; they are neither static nor monolithic. Rethinking norms as elastic and capacious offers a way of positioning queer parenting families outside the reductive lens of homonormativity and reimagining them as challenging the boundaries and questioning the limits of what is assumed to be the normative. Although queer parenting families engage with the norms of reproduction and blood ties, they simultaneously twist them into new shapes, yet-to-be-determined futures, and alternative relationalities. They have the potential to refuse, precisely, the static imposition of the homonormative.

I argue in this essay that, by defining queer parenting families primarily through a homonormative lens, certain dominant strands of queer theory have been missing something, both in terms of queer parenting families’ ability to disrupt the landscape of the nuclear family, and in terms of their capacity to interrogate the essentializing of reproduction and parenting. In response to interpretations of queer parenting families as assimilationist, I question the normative assumptions that underwrite the categories of reproduction, pregnancy, and parenting, and I ask whether these categories must always be aligned with the linear temporality of “birth, marriage, and death” (Halberstam 2) or whether they can be imagined differently through a queer theoretical lens. Indeed, the turn to queer parenting arguably generates forms of queerness that have yet to be theorized, providing us with new pathways for imagining parent-child alliances in terms of queer affinities, unexplored futures, and alternative queer relations.

Of course, there are compelling reasons that the dominant strands of queer theory have positioned themselves in opposition to the nuclear family model. The heterosexual family has been aligned with repressive normativity largely because of the constraints that traditional families have placed on queer bodies. Queers consistently have had to define themselves against the heteronormative nuclear family in large part because they were already being constructed as its failed progeny. Until recently, and often even today, to be queer has often meant being expelled from the realm of the family. In early queer narratives, from

Radclyffe Hall's devastating portrayal of Stephen Gordon's encounter with her mother in the opening of *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), to Edmund White's domineering father in *A Boy's Own Story* (1982), through to Jess Goldberg's alienating parents in *Stone Butch Blues* (1993), the conventional family has been what queers have wanted to escape from; or, as Deborah Cohler writes, "Homosexuality means that home ceases to be home" (162). Traditional families have represented the reality of the closet, the enforcing of social norms, and the embodiment of psychological oppression and constraint. Whether one was actively exiled from the family or chose to leave behind a painfully oppressive context, the family came to embody a complex nexus of loss and often harm.

Behind this rejection lay queer bodies' inability to perform heteronormativity. Queers became aligned with a form of existential failure: the failure to procreate, to ensure a reproductive future, to advance proper citizenship and national belonging. Queers were also accused of being imitative; they had lifestyles rather than lives; they experimented with gender roles, identified as butch/femme, revelled in drag. Queers were seen in terms of performing rather than being, as mimicking and inauthentic rather than natural and real. Implicitly, the characteristics associated with queerness (theatricality, performance, gender fluidity, play, being aslant or offbeat) became the opposite of those associated with the family (naturalness, authenticity, productivity and reproduction, belonging). The family exemplified compulsory heterosexuality, setting itself up, in Judith Butler's terms, as "the original, the true, the authentic" ("Imitation" 312).

Queers also have been positioned as inhabiting, to quote Kathryn Bond Stockton, "the presumed status [of] dangerous children, who remain children in part by failing to have their own" (289). In medical discourse, queers have a history of being infantilized, in a state of arrested development, and incapable of reaching adulthood.² Queers are the ones who fail to grow up, and they have responded accordingly, turning away from the family models that have constructed them as inadequate and immature and in many cases refusing the reproductive narratives that underpin them. As a result, queer culture has invested performatively in adolescent rebellion and in a rejection of the role of parent, around which the concept of the family is predominantly structured.

At the same time, emerging out of the AIDS crisis of the 1980s (a crisis that highlighted for queers the illusory promises of the nuclear

family and reproductive futurism), queer theory offered a new way of thinking about familial models as chosen and grounded in horizontal relations of affinity rather than vertical relations of inheritance. The AIDS crisis also gave rise to the antisocial model of queer negativity — as theorized by Leo Bersani, Tim Dean, and Lee Edelman — which radically challenged conventional kinship and social relations. As Dean has argued persuasively, “Homosexuality can be viewed as threatening because, insofar as we fail to reproduce the family in a recognizable form, queers fail to reproduce the social” (826).

Yet the focus on the antisocial thesis in queer theory has also entailed a loss in terms of how queer theory might address issues of pregnancy and reproduction, on the one hand, and queer parenting, on the other. Since much of queer theory has been predicated, to an important degree, on the exclusion of the reproductive family — straight or queer — as a means of sustaining the normative/non-normative binary, both reproduction and family appear to be destined to inhabit the categories of the normative and the homonormative. Take, for example, the claim in *Queer Times, Queer Becomings* of E.L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen: “For those without children or ambitions to procreate, queers are cut loose not only from parenting responsibilities but from the quotidian temporal rhythms that the familially-oriented community imposes (school, soccer, shopping)” (8). Subsumed under what are stereotyped as the heterorhythms of parental life — “school, soccer, shopping” (non-parenting queers, it seems, never need to go shopping) — queer parenting families are presented as assimilationist and foreclosed from contributing, in conceptual terms, to the expansion and development of queer theory.

In *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*, Elizabeth Freeman embraces texts that offer “ways of living aslant to dominant forms of object-choice, coupledness, family, marriage, sociability, and self-presentation” and that are “out of sync with state-sponsored narratives of belonging and becoming” (xv). Implicit in this critique is the idea that “family” can exist only between the boundaries of “coupledom” and “marriage” and that it cannot participate in “ways of living aslant” that Freeman privileges in the name of queer theory. Parenting families — whether queer or straight — within Freeman’s logic can only ever underwrite normativity. Familial temporality is aligned with “straight” temporality — what Freeman calls “chrononormativity” — whereas queer temporality interrupts straight time, forming “points of

resistance to [the] temporal order” (xxii). For Judith Halberstam, in turn, queer communities create “alternative temporalities” by imagining futures “according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience — namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death” (2).

More recently, however, we are witnessing a cultural turn in which queerness is being located as much in pregnancy, childbirth, and queer parenting models as in other forms of queer social relations. An increasing number of literary texts and memoirs — Dan Savage’s *The Kid* (1999), S. Bear Bergman’s *Blood, Marriage, Wine and Glitter* (2013), Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts* (2015), Julietta Singh’s *No Archive Will Restore You* (2018), and Emma Donoghue’s *The Pull of the Stars* (2020), to name a handful — are queer meditations on pregnancy, childbirth, and the lived examples of cisgender lesbian and gay families, three-parent families, and trans families, among others, who challenge the gender norms of “straight” parenting and reveal the multiple ways of “living aslant” with the reality of children. Rather than reinforcing the normative/non-normative binary, the queer reimagining of pregnancy, reproduction, and parenting is breaking down much of queer theory’s positioning of these experiences within a normative framework.

Reproduction, in particular, has been a sticking point for queer theory. Within the parameters of heterosexuality, families are primarily concerned with transmitting one’s genetic makeup to the next generation and maintaining the species through the specificity of the couple’s genetic traits. Heterosexual families are invested in the creation of kinship through blood, in its literal and metaphorical senses, and are therefore still grounded in the biological prior to any cultural and social determinants. The act of reproduction is literally “the action or process of making a copy of something” (“Reproduction”), which in the case of heterosexual families involves reproducing a version of oneself and ensuring that this “copy” is passed along through a vertical/horizontal relation. This entails what Sara Ahmed terms “[t]he ‘hope’ of the family tree, otherwise known as the ‘wish’ for reproduction,” in that “the vertical line will produce a horizontal line, from which further vertical lines will be drawn” (83). This then creates the “straight line” of heterosexuality and linear inheritance as the son “reproduces the father’s image” (83) and so on. Reproduction and proper alignment are therefore mutually defining ways of transmitting generation and futurity as well as promulgating the cultural values of the normative family. In this manner, the

intersecting trajectories of lineage, generation, hierarchy, verticality, the gender binary, marriage, religion, and schooling reinforce the norms of reproduction and parenting.

On the one hand, queer theory's critique of this model was long overdue, locating as it does how hetero-familial-capitalism reinforces exploitative practices of consumption, progression, and futurity at all costs. On the other hand, it seems that the weight of this critique falls largely on the female procreative body, and as Susan Fraiman argues it tends "to position women, gender, femininity, and feminism as normative 'other' to its antinormative project" (129). In her critique of Edelman's antisocial thesis, she shows how the figure of the woman is made to occupy the place of the "other" to queer theory by being constructed exclusively as the vehicle for procreation and thereby "reduced to biology, heterosexuality, traditional family, [and] coercive normativity" (129). As Fraiman argues, missing is the ability to imagine "queer pregnancy, [and] queerness *within* the cycles of reproduction," so that, though Edelman's thesis effectively deconstructs the relentless logic of heteronormativity, it is at the cost of positioning the female body as the bearer of "a straight symbolic order coded as feminine" (132).

Fraiman's work, published in 2003, forms part of a parallel queer feminist analysis that has resisted, from the beginning, queer theory's disengagement with questions of pregnancy, reproduction, and parenting. In 2002, Rachel Epstein argued that there is a point at which queer negativity's focus on anti-normativity and its intransigent anti-reproduction stance literally throw out "a lot of babies with a lot of bathwater" (51). In tandem with the emergence of queer negativity, queer feminist scholars such as Fraiman, Epstein, Susan Driver, and Joan Nestle provided a counterdiscourse that refused to sideline pregnancy, reproduction, and parenting and focused instead on the erotics and non-normative embodiment of motherhood.

For example, in "My Mother Liked to Fuck': Reading Joan Nestle's Queer Desire for Maternal Desire," Driver follows Nestle's exploration of how her mother — a working-class Jewish woman named Regina — created a vibrant sexual space for herself. Nestle saw her mother as "a figure of sexual transgression and resistance" who fought "against the familial and gender ideologies of her time" (Driver 113). Regina's experience of "marriage and motherhood" is presented "as a part of her life which does not resolve or placate her unruly desires" but "reveal[s] her attempts and failures to accommodate normative familial expectations"

(Driver 114). As Driver shows, for Nestle, Regina's "unruly desires" were an inextricable part of her motherhood, even as they cost Regina "social recognition and belonging" (116). Although Regina's excesses led at times to precarious conditions for the family, Driver shows how Nestle "recogniz[ed] in retrospect that the institutional powers of heterosexuality and class delimit[ed] her mother's choices and their effects on her children" (117). Driver shows how Nestle, in memorializing her mother, refuses to read motherhood as distinct from her sexual desires and drives, thereby relocating the normative/non-normative binary between the social construction of motherhood and its transgression rather than between motherhood and sexuality.

Also focusing on Nestle's work in her analysis of butch motherhood, Epstein argues that, in an echo of the traditional view of parenting, "queer theory tends to separate queer sexuality from the maternal" and that it perceives reproduction as "an asexual realm," therefore "constraining and disciplining what should be mobile desires" (51). Reproduction denotes what Driver calls "the static embodiments of women's reproductive sexuality," against "the desiring moments of sexual outlaws,"³ which, cast in these terms, returns us to the desexualization of the mother and highlights queer theory's complicity in perpetuating this logic.

As a countermove, Epstein shows how butch motherhood might create the possibility of a "queer maternal narrative," one "that refuses the separation of motherhood from sexuality, or queerness from the feminine and the family" (42). Following Nestle, Epstein argues that "'butch' is a sexual subject position" (51) and that the butch's complex relationship with the feminine opens up, rather than closes down, ways of reading motherhood alongside a sexual identity. This reading restores sexuality to motherhood as a productive entanglement between the queer body and the pregnant body. The dissonance between the butch's masculine-inflected sexual identity and gender presentation and her experience of pregnancy and motherhood can create what Butler, in *Bodies that Matter*, sees as an openness to the resignification of erstwhile normative identitarian structures. According to Jacqui Gabb, butch mothers can question the model of pregnancy and parenting as being "safe, sanitized and conventional" (16) and offer ways of challenging normative inscriptions of motherhood.

The examples above show how reproduction is neither a "normative" nor a "non-normative" process; rather, it is how it enters culture that

orients it in a particular manner. With the emergence of nineteenth-century models of classification and categorization, the narrative of reproduction underwent a shift from the “natural” to the “normal,” one that Foucault has analyzed as defining modern discursive practices.⁴ Rather than questioning this shift, the founding texts of queer theory have supported it by reifying the binary between those who reproduce and those who resist reproduction. As a result, the fertile engagement among motherhood, butchness, and queer sexuality arguably failed to get the purchase that it deserved as queer theory turned toward other questions of antisociality, temporality, affect, and trauma (Cvetkovich; Edelman; Freeman; Love; Muñoz). Yet today the arguments of these queer feminist theorists are reflected, for example, in the increasing number of trans men who choose to become pregnant. As Myra J. Hird argues, “sexual reproduction is seen as both immutable ‘fact’ and cause of structural differences between women and men” (1), which in turn creates a naturalized relationship between the pregnant body and a feminized model of motherhood. Trans masculine pregnancies can challenge this naturalized identification. In their work on trans men’s genital embodiment, Elijah Adiv Edelman and Lal Zimman explore how certain trans men “linguistically frame” (673) their “female” genitals as desirable for male homosexual encounters so that, through terms such as “boycunts” and “bonus holes,” the “vagina” becomes differently coded or translated as part of a masculinized subjectivity. According to Edelman and Zimman, “In their attempts to overcome hegemonic forces that stigmatize trans embodiment, these individuals highlight their embodied masculinity while simultaneously resignifying their bodily difference” (687). Although these examples construct a specifically eroticized trans masculine body, a similar resignifying process could be imagined to define trans masculine pregnancies. On a continuum with Epstein’s reading of butch pregnancies, the trans masculine pregnant body could defy the traditional markers linking pregnancy and femininity. This unlinking could begin to challenge the naturalized relationship between pregnancy and femininity that has often been deployed as a way of policing the female body.⁵

In American author Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts*, the journey of pregnancy and childbirth is accompanied by her partner’s — trans artist and performer Harry Dodge — transition from female to male. In this part-memoir, part-critical essay, both experiences are carefully traced in terms of their points of connection and their radical differences. Each

wants to support yet is also partly alienated by the transformation in the other as Nelson meditates on the invisibility of the female body and on the anxiety and excitement of her partner's transition: "The surgery didn't worry me as much as the T — there's a certain clarity to excision that hormonal reconfiguration lacks — but part of me still wanted you to keep your chest the way it was" (51). Yet Nelson also carefully maintains the asymmetry of these experiences, never letting the one stand in for the other and exploring the different forms of resistance that she and her partner have had to confront. Motherhood, presented in "nearly every society on earth . . . as the ticket . . . to a meaningful life" (71), seems to be trapped within a foolproof regulatory regime. In defiance of this, Nelson turns to Fraiman's work on the "sodomitical mother," who "aims to return the mother's pleasure to the scene, and to foreground her access — 'even as a mother' — to 'non-normative, non-procreative sexuality, to sexuality in excess of the dutifully instrumental.' The woman with such access and excess is the sodomitical mother" (Nelson 69). As with Driver, Epstein, and Nestle, Nelson claims and celebrates queer maternal sexuality and "the erotics of childbearing" (72), refusing the culturally constructed divide between maternity and eroticism. For Nelson, nursing and nurturing her infant are not "*like* a love affair. It *is* a love affair. Or, rather, it is erotic, romantic, consuming — but without tentacles" (44). As Andrea Fontenot argues, "Nelson shows us what a queer, feminist, and sharp-minded account of mothering can look like, and how urgently we need it" (5).

Nelson's work continues to reflect the ongoing feminist critique of the pregnant body as standing in for a wholesome and naturalized heterosexuality. As early as 1990, Iris Marion Young was arguing that "The pregnant subject . . . is decentered, split, or doubled in several ways. She experiences her body as herself and not herself" (16). "Pregnant existence," Young continues, "entails a unique temporality," to the extent that it is divided "between past and future" (160). In her analysis of contemporary female artists working on the theme of pregnancy, Rosemary Betterton (81) shows how artists such as Cindy Sherman, Tracey Emin, Susan Hiller, and Alison Lapper conceptualize the pregnant body in terms of the monstrous, in the sense of being "unknowable" as well as "intimate," and connecting us "to what makes us most anxious about our bodily selves, disturbing our sense of reality." Hird, in turn, explores the concept of gifting in relation to maternity, arguing that the "embodied 'gifting' [of maternity] is both unpredictable and intrusive — there

is as much possibility of threatening the integrity of bodies as there is of opening up new possibilities” (2). All of these feminist analyses expand how we think about pregnant bodies to reveal their non-normativity: that is, to show how far the experience of pregnancy is from an intelligible, coherent narrative of the self.

Yet, in reclaiming notions of the monstrous and the split self, we must continue to ask what it means to read pregnancy as queer or non-normative. Pregnancy has always generated a certain cultural ambivalence on account of its tie to female corporeality. As far back as Aristotle,⁶ female corporeality has been a source of discomfort, and elements of this discomfort linger in certain strands of queer theory, promoting what Fraiman describes as “a heroic gay male sexuality” (133), which remains “unpolluted by procreative femininity” (132). In light of this, Adrienne Rich pointedly reminds us that “All human life on the planet is born of woman. The one unifying, incontrovertible experience shared by all women and men is that months’ long period we spent unfolding inside a woman’s body” (11). Yet, according to Margrit Shildrick, the pregnant body functions “[a]s the paradigmatic example of the other within the same,” marking “a monstrous insult to the order of the proper” (5). Poised as it is between producing life and signifying the monstrous, the pregnant body has been subject to conflicting modes of cultural appropriation. Tied to the “mysteries” of female sexuality — Freud’s “dark continent”⁷ — reproduction continues to leave its unsettling traces on queer theory. Yet one cannot evade the fact that, in one form or another, every subject born with a uterus — including the more recent phenomenon of trans men and non-binary people who choose pregnancy — has to confront the question of procreation: whether it is possible to give birth and whether or not one chooses to do so.

A queer feminist reading asks for a different way of seeing and hearing the pregnant, birthing body. In the past two decades, memoirs and literary fiction rather than pure theory have taken a vanguard role in expanding how we can imagine reproduction and parenting anew. In Indo-Canadian author Julietta Singh’s poetic memoir *No Archive Will Restore You*, the experience of childbirth is inserted into a broader meditation on pain, for not long after giving birth Singh suffered from an extreme neurological condition that required “emergency neurosurgery” (60). She distinguishes the pain of childbirth from her later intolerable bodily suffering by tracing the different sounds that her body emitted. These sounds, which cannot be recuperated by language, nevertheless

speak the body in different ways: “In both childbirth and neurological pain, I became a human whose language was utterly lost to extreme sensation. And in both contexts, I not only felt but heard myself become other than myself, other *to* myself” (62). In preparing for birth, Singh and her birthing partner quickly abandon childbirth classes, which teach them “nothing about the sensation of childbirth” (63), and begin watching “documentary footage of mammals giving birth” (64). This transfer from human to animal, and understanding the human *as* animal, offer a radical departure in how to think of the birthing body outside the conventions of gender. As Singh notes, “I still wonder over how different our births and lives would be if we were not so rigidly trained into gendered forms of articulation” (64). Indeed, for her, the embodied experience of different modes of suffering challenges gender distinctions and the rigid social shaping of gendered responses. Singh argues that “the high-pitched screaming of pop culture’s singular representation of childbirth” (64) creates a birth narrative that is both constraining and inaccurate. She asks for “access to other forms of necessary, embodied noise-making. A genre and gender shattering sound archive” (64). By focusing on the different registers of sound as a way of redefining the embodied experience of childbirth, Singh’s memoir adds a new critical dimension that queers childbirth through the dissolution of boundaries between human and animal, pain and comfort, sound making and birthing.

If we follow Foucault’s analysis that modernity is defined by the historical shift toward “a bio-politics of the population” (*History of Sexuality* 139), in which the management of life takes place through “the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations” (140) by means of institutions such as the family, then reproduction functions as a necessary norm, whether it is being encouraged in countries such as Canada or capped in countries such as China and India. However, the broader narrative of population control that drives the discourse of normativity belies the fundamental strangeness of reproduction. As Singh’s memoir shows, every birth functions as a particularized non-normative narrative in itself, one not reducible to statistical data, so that normativity becomes the fragile, and often failed, attempt to secure the destabilizing effects of reproduction within a coherent frame. Although in itself this might be a reason for normative constraints, harnessing the disruptive force of reproduction could also offer a new kind of resistance to gender and heteronormative disciplinary frameworks.

Naturalized ties to reproduction are also severed by alternative kinship formations, such as those of blending, fostering, and adopting, creating family structures that more productively might be thought of as assemblages rather than nuclei. Although heterosexuals also participate in these alternative familial models, they are the basis of many queer and trans parenting families. Queer families are cyborg families in Donna Haraway's formulation, participating in available socio-bio-techno-medical advances through which "The cyborg skips the step of original unity, of identification with nature in the Western sense" (385). Queer families are not "natural" in the stable, fixed, Judeo-Christian meaning of the term; they are produced and imagined rather than reproduced; they are hybrid in Gloria Anzaldúa's sense of mixing, choosing, and embracing of queer difference. Queer parenting families therefore produce improper alignments always in excess of the linear and the straight, even as they participate in the familial institution. In this sense, queer parenting families can help to redefine what it means to belong to a norm and encounter normativity "on something other than oppositional terms" (Wiegman and Wilson 2).

In Irish Canadian author Emma Donoghue's *The Pull of the Stars*, set during the Great Flu of 1918 in a Dublin maternity ward, the confluence of childbirth, contagion, and queer desire is concentrated in a three-day period that asks us to look closely at the embodiment of childbirth and radically re-evaluates the normative assumptions that surround it. The narrative follows Julia Power, a nurse, left in charge of the maternity ward of women approaching labour who have also contracted the flu. Bridie, her young, inexperienced helper from the local orphanage run by the nuns, proves to be an invaluable asset as the two women immerse themselves in caring for their desperate patients. Like Singh, Donoghue asks us to feel, see, and hear these women — already poor, malnourished, and downtrodden by marriage and the draconian dictates of Catholicism — in ways that demand a new kind of attention to the body in labour and to the often-distressing conditions under which women have given birth. We encounter one of Nurse Power's patients, Honor White, who has no husband and "for the crime of falling pregnant . . . was lodging in a charitable institution where tending her baby and those of other women was the punishment; she owed the nuns a full year of her life to repay what they were spending on imprisoning her for that year. It had a bizarre, circular logic" (172-73). Yet, in this all-female ward of birthing mothers and professional

and non-professional medical staff, labour is presented as an event just as necessary, profound, and grimly heroic as the war raging beyond the hospital doors. When one of the male orderlies dismisses the women for not paying “the blood tax” — the tax of going to war — Nurse Power replies “I saw red. Look around you, Mr. Groyne. This is where every nation draws its first breath. Women have been paying the *blood tax* since time began” (180). At the close of the novel, when Bridie herself has succumbed to the flu after a night with Nurse Power on the hospital roof, and a sharing of their first kiss, Nurse Power decides to leave the hospital with a surviving infant whose mother has also become a victim of the deadly virus. As she heads home to a brother rendered mute by the war, a new queer family is born. In Donoghue’s novel, the boundaries between what constitutes the normative and the non-normative no longer hold as the ravaging effects of the flu invade the “natural” act of childbirth and as birth and death become intertwined in a random and arbitrary embrace. In this damaged world, queer desire emerges out of the radical destabilizing of recognizable frames of reference. Such disruptions of the normative, as Donoghue shows, can be imagined across time and place.

Alongside *The Pull of the Stars*, in which families are broken apart and reconstituted in new ways, various queer and trans authors have been exploring how social models of affinity replace biological models of kinship, pushing the idea of the family in a different direction, away from the genetic copy and toward a mix of biology and nurture, producing an alternative orientation, and emphasizing relationality over genetic ownership. In this sense, to be a queer parenting family is to come to reproduction sideways, so to speak, whether children are obtained through artificial insemination, adoption, surrogacy, blending, and so on. There are families in which one mother carries the eggs of her female partner so that genetic motherhood and gestational motherhood become separate, and the fetus becomes part of two different female bodies, further challenging the social and biological categories of heterosexual motherhood. There are also, of course, a significant number of queer families who share children from previous heterosexual relationships; until rights to adoption and insemination became available, this was one of the few existing avenues for forming a queer parenting family. Such families therefore shift the narrative of reproduction in unpredictable ways, which in turn can lead to alternative means of performing the family. Indeed, it is precisely on account of queer parenting

families' failure to produce exact genetic copies through their progeny that the binding narrative of the natural in relation to familial structures can be further put into question. Rather than reproducing an already scripted narrative governed by norms and social expectations, the idea of the family can become a more open-ended, yet-to-be-determined space of possibility.

If we can continue to dismantle and to refashion the underlying essentializing, patriarchal, and heteronormative assumptions about conception, pregnancy, and childbirth, then what about the experience of parenting itself? What does it mean to be a queer parent? How can queer parenting challenge and question the assimilationist forces of the nuclear family as well as their assimilationist trajectories of thought? For Nelson, queer parenting is an extension rather than a negation of queer theory's model of the chosen family; whether families are "composed of peers or mentors or lovers or ex-lovers or children or non-human animals . . . , queer family making [is] an umbrella category under which baby making might be a subset, rather than the other way around" (72). Her text repeatedly foregrounds how the normative can be challenged not through an oppositional, binary model but through a radical extension of categories that can flow into one another. For Nelson, "any bodily experience can be made new and strange," and "no one set of practices or relations has the monopoly on the so-called radical, or the so-called normative" (72, 73). Her text reminds us that queerness should function as a form of opening up, of expansion and generosity, rather than as an outright refusal of particular modes of classification.

In American author Dan Savage's witty memoir about adoption, *The Kid*, the experience of gay male adoption and parenting is explored in terms of both its affinities with and its differences from its heterosexual counterpart. Savage notes how, for straight couples, adoption is often a last resort and a sign of failure, and when he and his boyfriend, Terry, attend their first adoption agency meeting they are surprised by its "funereal tone" (21-22). For them, in contrast, adoption signals a new life-changing opportunity. Gays and straights are also confronted with very different kinds of questions about parenting; straight couples are expected to become parents, so that "'Why?' is not a question straight people having kids are required to answer" (60). Instead, "Straights who don't want to breed, or are unable to do so, are the ones who have some explaining to do" (61). For gay men, in contrast, the "why" question is

asked at every opportunity. Each group is therefore perceived as coming from an opposing ontological starting point.

Savage and his boyfriend also applied to become adoptive parents by means of an open adoption model in the early years of the turn to queer parenting: “We were fags; no other fags had successfully adopted through the agency before, and it’s not so common for gay men to have kids at all” (129). The norm, in this sense, was against them, in terms of both straight culture and queer culture. Melissa, their birth mother, a “gutter punk” living on the streets, chose Dan and Terry precisely because, as she told them, “You just weren’t like the others” (132). Dan and Terry are selected because Melissa perceives them to be outsiders like her. The three of them are bound by a queer affinity, recognizing in one another their flouting of norms even as they seek to create a family. The memoir also describes how, since adoption is not tied to the maternal body in the same way, it can free straight couples from conventional gender roles. In the adoption meetings, Savage met Jack and Carol: the husband would be “the stay-at-home mom,” and the wife would be “the bread-winning dad” (144).

The memoir confronts both the pain and the joy of open adoption; it is a splitting apart as well as a creating of family. As Dan and Terry said goodbye to Melissa at the hospital and took their baby home, “We were unprepared for all the planning and check-writing and seminar-going to end in a moment of such blistering pain. Sitting in the van finally a family, we felt no joy at having become fathers” (215). The experience of that pain and the loss that it entailed were also what convinced Savage that open adoption is the only correct avenue to pursue: “But to see Melissa’s pain at the moment she gave up that baby, and to feel pain ourselves at that same moment, drove home the logic of open adoption, its absolute necessity” (215-16). As they left the birth mother behind, Savage and Terry also realized that, as two gay dads, they would always be confronted with the “mother” question: “These were questions, we realized on that flight to Chicago, that we’d be answering for the rest of our lives. Where’s Mommy?” (228). In the case of Savage and his partner, parenting has to be actively reinvented in opposition to the norm of blood ties and the gender binary, leading Savage to the understanding that parenting is “an act of will, . . . the people there in the middle of the night, the people taking care of the kid” (234-35). Rather than a naturalized, preordained relationship, parenting is a conscious engage-

ment to take responsibility for, and to respond to, the needs of another human being.

Although queer parenting narratives offer a deconstructive reading of the norms regarding pregnancy, childbirth, and parenting, sociological approaches also attempt to redefine the meaning of parenting through a queer lens. However, queer family studies scholars have faced distinct challenges in trying to map out queer familial configurations. Sociological analyses in support of queer parenting families have often found it necessary to show how these families are “as good as” their heterosexual familial counterparts. Such analyses are cast in terms of either “sameness” to or “difference” from the norm, with the result that queer parenting families are analyzed and evaluated almost exclusively within the template of what Dorothy Smith calls the Standard North American Family (SNAF).

Often in response to the attacks put forward by the Christian right, sociological approaches argue how the queer family can be as “good” as the straight family, how children are not harmed by being in a queer family (Chan et al.; Tasker and Golombok), and how there might even be advantages to belonging to a queer family (Stacey and Biblarz). Yet having the SNAF as the primary reference positions queer parenting families as intelligible only through the lens of the normative, white, heterosexual, nuclear family, notwithstanding the huge variety of kinship structures within current heterosexual families as well as queer ones. That this heterofamilial lens should remain dominant attests to the ideological force of the nuclear family model, even though, as Laura Mamo accurately points out, “Nothing within biology demands the nuclear family” (5).

More recently, in *Queering Motherhood: Narrative and Theoretical Perspectives*, Margaret F. Gibson has edited a collection of essays on a range of “queer motherhood” experiences, from an analysis of Thomas Beatie’s trans male pregnancy to maternal eroticism to issues of mothering and disability, among others. For Gibson, “queer” is a valuable theoretical tool for rethinking motherhood and parenting in that it “questions any notion of faithful reproduction, of more of the same, or even of predictable notions of variation. Queer brings the political and the social into a self-conscious connection with the intimate” (1). According to her, to “queer” motherhood is to question the foundations of social formations, expected ways of organizing human relations, and the shapes of institutional models, forming what she calls “a truly

expansive project” (2). More specifically, such a project needs to involve a stripping away of the conventions and norms that fix parenting within the rhetoric of good citizenship and proper participation in the body politic and to examine how the experience of parenting also questions, shatters, and undoes the coherence and stability of the self. A queer theoretical framework can use the tools of anti-normativity to explore parenting from the inside out and to foreground its precarity and vulnerability as well as its accompanying sites of resistance.

Furthermore, much of the normalizing rhetoric that underwrites the nuclear family is grounded in the assumption of whiteness, which arguably feeds into a homonationalist critique when extended to queer parenting families.⁸ As with the SNAF, such families tend to be coded as white and middle class and bypass both the challenges and the specificities of middle- and working-class gay and lesbian families of colour. This supports the homonormative and homonationalist understanding of queer parenting as reinforcing the claims of the white neoliberal state as morally superior. In *Invisible Families: Gay Identities, Relationships and Motherhood among Black Women*, Mignon Moore flags the dangers of this white coding, arguing that the assumption of middle-class whiteness fails “to de-center the White gay subject as the norm” (2) and ends up reifying the very category that a queer feminist reading aims to dislodge. In her analysis of black lesbian motherhood, Moore argues that the queer “anti-categorical approach to identity” functions as a problematic framework “for explaining how people who have had their entire lives structured around race experience identity categories” (5). She calls for different ways of approaching how we think about lesbian families, which include “discourses of Black respectability, racial socialization, race consciousness, and structural experiences with racism and racial discrimination” (3).

Within these categories, Moore foregrounds aspects that challenge and expand notions of normativity in different ways, such as how black lesbians often come to motherhood through the pathways of heterosexuality, bringing children conceived in a heterosexual relationship into a later lesbian one. As mentioned, though this occurs in white queer populations, it appears to be more prevalent in black communities. The issue of “Black respectability” is also fundamental in that it engages in a distinct relationship with sexuality. Although white lesbian sexuality has had to contest the norms of family and often religion, black lesbian sexuality has had to confront a broader range of norms, including the

construction of black female sexuality as “immoral” in relation to the middle-class standards of white female sexuality (Moore 10). When it comes to lesbian parenting, blackness remains tied to a comprehensive reading of black sexuality as hyper and excessive, whereas whiteness is filtered through the homonationalist lens of Western liberal values.

As Moore notes, such a construction of black female sexuality, dating back to the nineteenth century, has led to the “politics of Black respectability,” through which “Black middle-class women collectively sought to create alternative self-images in order to shield themselves from pervasive stereotypes about and negative estimations of their sexuality” (10). As a result, “a vulnerability around intimacy developed within Black communities” (10) and rendered black lesbian sexuality more precarious since it inevitably challenged as well as participated in the politics of black respectability. Yet, as Moore argues, these added challenges also “offer an active expression of Black women’s sexual autonomy” that can expand the norms of black respectability and create new familial models within black communities (12).

To this extent, the increasing presence of queer parenting families helps to highlight the constructed, chosen, and volitional quality of many contemporary family formations — straight and queer as well as across racial groups — as being a part of what Judith Stacey calls “a permanent condition of family diversity and dissent” (29). Rather than positioning queer parenting families as the exemplars of homonormativity — as much of queer theory has tended to do — they reveal the capacious heterogeneity of normative structures themselves, particularly with regard to how we imagine the family. For Stacey, this forms part of a larger shift in familial formations, through which “[p]aths to parenthood,” whether straight or queer, “no longer appear natural, obligatory, or uniform, but are necessarily reflexive, uncertain, self-fashioning, plural, and politically embattled” (29).

As with reproduction, the ubiquitous quality of parenting tends to dilute both its specificity and its uniqueness. Yet, as memoirs show, every parent experiences it in a particular and intensely personal and embodied way so that every birth or adoption is a unique narrative. On the one hand, this dissolves the normative/non-normative boundary in that any particular experience of parenting can never fit neatly into its institutional, normative shell. On the other hand, families are necessarily shaped and fashioned by the terms of those norms, following the regulatory codes and disciplinary frameworks demanded by their

socio-political contexts. How, then, can a queer parenting disruption take place? I would argue that the addition of queer and trans subjects to the parenting population not only expands the possibilities of how parenting might evolve and develop but also helps to cast a more focused and probing eye on parenting as a unique event. By coming to parenting volitionally, or creating new queer families from past heterosexual beginnings, queer parenting follows neither a predetermined script nor a prescribed narrative. Queer parenting, in contrast to straight parenting, is neither assumed nor expected, which gives it a new kind of versatility. As memoirs and literary works on queer parenting reveal, the focus is repeatedly on the willful, invented quality of parenting, invoking Butler's call to take seriously the need for fantasy as "part of the articulation of the possible" (*Undoing Gender* 28). Queer parenting begins with fantasy and creates narratives yet to be conceived of, in this sense "establish[ing] the possible in excess of the real" and pointing to an "elsewhere" (29) that can offer glimpses of the unthought-of and yet-to-be-imagined as well as refusing the constraining rigidity and disciplinary logic of the status quo.

In the memoir *Blood, Marriage, Wine and Glitter*, Canadian author S. Bear Bergman unsettles normative expectations in the opening chapter: "Oh, wait. Right. My husband was going to be the one getting pregnant. This has been a fact of my life for so long that I forget it's even a thing, but it is" (17). At the same time, within this "extraordinary" circumstance, the experience of pregnancy follows the same highs and lows as for cis women so that "The story is either boring or extraordinary, depending on the lens through which you regard it" (19). Bergman's memoir firmly establishes the experience of pregnancy and childrearing within a queer model of the family based on affinity rather than blood: "We establish for ourselves cells of belonging, where we can feel fully known and accepted and also mentored and able to mentor others. Families" (23). The very term "family" therefore expands into a queer space and time, and as in Nelson's memoir it redefines the boundaries of what the term can encompass and include.

Yet these redefinitions require both work and imagination, a willingness and an ability to reconfigure social relations through a lens that can move between domestic and public social spaces, intimacy and friendship, the world of children and that of adults. Although the nuclear family is predicated on a certain conception of privacy, autonomy, and orderliness, queer parenting families work on opening their

borders and letting in those who would not normally appear to belong. Bergman talks of “the glitter family” as those who have been pushed to the margins and reconstitute themselves as a family through alternative configurations: “Glitter is known to be shiny and unruly, easy to get and hard to get rid of. I love the drag connotations and the femme visibility of it, as well as its unmistakably queer sensibility” (28). For Bergman, the glitter family is the imagined family of marginals that becomes possible and real and can include children, trans dads, drag queens, and multiple others.

In terms of mainstream North American culture, the most sustained representation of a queer family has been the Mitchell-Cameron-Lily triad in ABC’s *Modern Family*. Having run for eleven seasons from 2009 to 2020 and won multiple Emmy awards, the show is one of ABC’s most successful shows. A mockumentary family sitcom, with characters directly addressing the camera at intervals, it is based on the lives of three Los Angeles family “types”: the conventional white suburban heterosexual family with three kids; the rich white retired businessman who has found a new, younger, sexy Colombian wife, with her son; and the white gay male couple with their daughter adopted from Vietnam. Although there are elements of the show to criticize, in particular the examples of stay-at-home moms, *Modern Family* nevertheless contains much original and boundary-pushing material. The queer family stands out not only because it is the most sustained representation of a sitcom queer family on contemporary television but also because of the unabashed “gayness” of the dads, who nevertheless successfully raise their daughter, Lily. The character of Lily has been accused of being “just a punchline, or a vehicle for Cam and Mitchell’s storylines” (Fowle), but Lily “moments” have been collected on the internet and, seen together, reveal her own cultural queerness because of her upbringing. As sharp and witty as her dads, Lily both sees right through their occasional anxiety as queer parents and mercilessly mocks their gay, camp tastes.

As a character, Lily is also given a certain freedom of representation. For example, in season three, when she is about five years old, she is the flower girl for a straight couple’s wedding, friends of her dads. Dressed in a ludicrous blue gown that lights up, which Cam chose, she gracefully strews petals down the church aisle, only to start saying the f word when she reaches the altar. This scene is a good example of the show’s engagement with stereotypes on the one hand — Cam’s choice of a drag queen dress for his daughter — and its subversion of conventional

heteronormative spaces, such as church weddings, on the other. Because sitcoms rely on humour and characters that need to remain familiar and intelligible, *Modern Family* successfully creates a queer family that fans have come to love and has managed to stay queer within the conventions of the genre.

Although many queers — in terms of both lived experience and cultural representation — are persuasively expanding the definition of the family and resisting the label of homonormativity, recognizing the defamiliarizing quality of parenting, especially in the early years, is far from being the exclusive domain of queer insight. Memoirs by heterosexual women such as Rachel Cusk compellingly capture the experiences of extreme alienation and estrangement to which early parenting can give rise. Yet this is precisely where “queer” and “straight” lose their oppositional modality in that the normative/non-normative binary is displaced from queer/straight to that of parent/child. As Stockton has argued, it is the child who becomes “queer.” This is reflected in short-story collections such as Ariel Gore and Bee Lavender’s *Breeder*, in which there is no particular distinction between “straight” and “queer” mothers since the queerness resides elsewhere. As the focus shifts from the relationship between adults to the relationship with the child, however “queerly” the family is configured, it is the queer strangeness of the newborn that dominates, with its fragility, helplessness, and otherness requiring a new way of thinking about the human. Although parenting can benefit from a queer gaze, it is already rendered strange by the presence of the infant.

From such a vantage point, it is a small step to read parenting memoirs through a queer lens. For example, in Cusk’s *A Life’s Work: On Becoming a Mother*, parenting an infant challenges all of the normative frames of reference that Cusk has known. As she and her baby leave the hospital, “All that is clear at this point is that I have replicated, like a Russian doll. I left home one; I have come back two” (50). This doubleness is itself experienced as queer, as chosen and not chosen, and as familiar and alien. Cusk describes this as “the suspicion of deep unfamiliarity, entertained in the glare of the utterly inescapable” (50). What she undergoes is a radical re-evaluation of her own subjectivity, with the sense of having lost her moorings, her sense of self, and her stability: “The fact is that I know neither what it is to be myself nor to be a mother” (55). Not only does motherhood produce a splitting of the self — “I am surprised to discover how easily I have split in two.

. . . Like a divided stream, the person and the mother pay each other no heed” (56) — but also it splits one from the world, separating the parent from the regular rhythms of the social. As Cusk navigates the city with her newborn, she is pursued by “a feeling of social anxiety, of terrible, private unease” (56). By becoming a parent, she has become, at least temporarily, a “queer” subject in the sense of no longer participating in or belonging to the norms of her world.

Cusk also experiences a new relationship with temporality that echoes Freeman’s concept of queer time. Freeman describes “straight” time as “chrononormative” time, a temporality that follows the rhythms of both reproduction and capitalist production framed by the ideology of progress or relentless forward movement. Queer time, in contrast, “elongates and twists chronology” (x), and resists “the repronormative time of parenting” (xv), moving backward rather than forward. However, for Cusk, parenting an infant also reworks forward-moving temporality since “The day lies ahead empty of landmarks, like a prairie, like an untraversable plain” (63). The time of parenting often seems to stand still, and Cusk has “a curious feeling that [she] no longer exist[s] in synchronicity with time, but at a certain delay, like someone on the end of a transatlantic phone call” (211). Although the infant itself is growing and changing, the parental experience can make one feel as if time is slowing down so that temporality unfolds in a perversely illogical and “queer” fashion.

This encounter between the normative process of childrearing and its queer embodied reality — present in both straight and queer memoirs — creates a point of convergence between what are often perceived as disparate worlds. Yet, if all parenting can be read as challenging normalizing conventions, does this then undo queer theory’s claim to non-normativity as a specific challenge to the nuclear family? Analyzing the intimacies of early parenting in particular helps to show how boundaries are necessarily porous and always subject to contestation in terms of how their parameters are deployed. The role of queer theory should always be to remain vigilant in terms of how norms police and constrain us, and it is important to unpack how parenting continues to be defined by notions of propriety, property, and authority — in a word, *normalcy*. Yet the increasing presence of queer and trans parenting within this sphere can help us to rethink parenting as a productive site of contestation, transformation, challenge, failure, and loss as well as the more conventional readings of fulfillment and futurity.

And, though not all queer families will parent queerly, every queer family has to confront how it will engage with the conventions and norms of parenting already in place, from how the child will come into being (through insemination, adoption, surrogacy, the help of a donor, whether anonymous, known, or involved) to which subject position each parent will inhabit. For example, in *Detransition, Baby*, by Torrey Peters, Reese, a trans woman, “want[ed] to be a mom. She wanted it worse than anything” (8). As Reese imagines this as an impossible desire, her ex-lover, Ames, who has detransitioned back to being a man, has accidentally made his boss, Katrina, pregnant. In this chaotic encounter between past and present temporalities, shifting genders, and fraught relationships, the three of them decide to create a family. As two become three via this detransitioning narrative, the conventional gender and cis boundaries are upended and defamiliarized, and the structure of the family is reinvented. Such narratives make possible innovative kinship structures and continue to push the boundaries of what is imaginable. The model of the family can be redesigned radically to include previously unheard-of configurations and new alliances. In this sense, queer and trans families can include complex relationships that challenge conventional labels of mother and father and that, as Dana Berkowitz argues, “unpack the very construct of a gender role model” (125): the bioparent, the non-bioparent or parents, the rethinking of the roles of biology and blood ties, of their simultaneous presence and absence, of the reconfiguration of how child and parent are connected.

From the visual disruption of two fathers pushing their baby’s pram, to the pregnant trans masculine body in the maternity ward, to the butch-femme couple overseeing their toddler in the playground, the range of queer and trans interventions in what continues to be the highly normative culture of the nuclear family creates spaces to perform parenting differently. Whereas straight parents enter a world of heteronormative assumptions that can be hard to challenge should they choose to, queer parents have fewer prescriptions and are forced into a realm of self-invention “to socially construct parenthood” (Goldberg 114), from which tasks each parent should take up to what they choose to be called: from gay dad, lesbian dad, trans birth dad, to biological mom, non-biological mom, queer mom, to trans parent, et cetera. Although these might appear to be just labels, they can also shake the foundations of the school, the playground, or the maternity ward; they are discursive

and embodied alternative subject positions that intrude on and help to reconfigure normative institutional spaces.

Yet inhabiting non-normativity within a highly normative institution is also an ongoing challenge that can involve feelings of discomfort and of being placed off kilter. As queers enter the realm of parenting, they not only disrupt the configuration of the heterosexual nuclear family but also question its foundational premise. More specifically, by their very existence, queer parenting families implicitly ask which kinds of families are viable and desirable. In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick presciently argues that “The number of persons or institutions by whom the existence of gay people — never mind the existence of *more gay people* — is treated as a precious desideratum, a needed condition of life, is small, even compared to those who may wish for the dignified treatment of any gay people who happen already to exist” (42). Sedgwick’s essay was published in 1990, yet this fundamental fact has not changed. In spite of lesbian and gay marriage, the right to have children, equal treatment in the workplace, and so on, queer bodies are not necessarily wanted or desired bodies. They remain, at some level, outside the narrative that constitutes the social, as Edelman has concisely theorized. Very few individuals, it seems, would choose to have queer children; being tolerated, and even loved, if you become queer is not the same as being desired or wanted *as a queer subject*.

At stake, once again, is the question of reproduction — both biological and cultural — and therefore of families. What Sedgwick foregrounds is a rejection of the desirability of the queer child since that child cannot fit into the relentlessly normative familial script. In this sense, the queer child is outside desirable reproduction, as is the queer parent that the child might become. This makes it all the more urgent to create families in which queerness is valued and desired. Although queer parents cannot reproduce queer children any more than straight parents can avoid them, this very unpredictability in terms of where and when queer children will appear generates possibilities for change. Queer subjects will emerge where and when they do, without prescription or warning, in unforeseeable ways. This randomness, in turn, defies the linear transmission of knowledge and inheritance and further interrupts the thrust of normativity.

If the role of queer bodies and queer theory is to disrupt norms — foregrounding their constraints and/or making them more capacious — then the time has come for queering reproduction and parenting. Not

only do these embodied life experiences touch on multiple domains — desire, embodiment, temporality, language, norms, to name a handful — but also they determine the shape and direction of the social and the political. Reproduction and parenting are ontological realities that defamiliarize, alienate, challenge, and disrupt as well as satisfy and fulfill. They shape how we think about kinship, social relations, and citizenship, and they repeatedly resist neat binary alignments. Reproduction and parenting encompass both/and rather than either/or: nature and nurture, fulfillment and loss, public and private, familiarity and strangeness, normativity and non-normativity.

As I have shown in this essay, the complexity of reproduction and parenting and their cultural expressions — both queer and straight — work to destabilize the fixed binaries that have evolved around the trope of the family, and they offer ways to rethink this oppositional logic in terms of leakages and slippages, and fluidity and disruption, the very things that queer theory has always valued. The queer turn to parenting should not become the “other” of queer theory but serve as a way of expanding how we think about key categories such as reproduction, pregnancy, childbirth, and parenting, and how we create, fashion, and sustain our norms. As Berkowitz writes, “After all . . . all our families are queer; lesbian, gay[, and trans] families simply show us this with added intensity” (129). Alongside an increasing range of alternative familial models, queer parenting families are in an effective strategic position to engage with and challenge the pervasive discourse of familial normativity; they can function as the Trojan horse within the walls of what historically has been the most conservative of institutions. And, by its very existence, the “queer” in “queer parenting families” helps to change the terms not only of how families can be imagined but also of how queer theory imagines itself.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I would like to thank my partner, Emma Donoghue, for her generous and ongoing support during the writing of this essay. I also acknowledge the extremely thoughtful and constructive comments of my second reviewer.

NOTES

¹ See Duggan, who coined the term “homonormativity.”

² The theory of arrested development has been attributed unfairly to Freud, who wrote in a letter to an American woman about her son that “Homosexuality is surely no advantage, but it is nothing to be ashamed of, no vice, no degradation; it cannot be classified as an illness; we consider it to be a variation of the sexual function, produced by a certain arrest of sexual development” (“Historical Notes” 786-87).

³ This is from an unpublished paper (Driver, “Feminist Sublimations”) quoted in Epstein 51.

⁴ For an analysis of the discourse of norms that emerged in the nineteenth century, see Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.

⁵ I am very grateful for discussions with my student Levi Hord in thinking through the implications of trans male pregnancies.

⁶ Aristotle writes that “we should look upon the female state as being as it were a deformity, though one which occurs in the ordinary course of nature” (461).

⁷ Freud referred to female sexuality as a “dark continent” in the following passage: “We know less about the sexual life of little girls than of boys. But we need not feel ashamed of this distinction; after all, the sexual life of adult women is a ‘dark continent’ for psychology” (“Question” 212).

⁸ See Puar, who coined the term “homonationalism.”

WORKS CITED

- Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Duke UP, 2006.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Aunt Lute Books, 1987.
- Aristotle. *On the Generation of Animals*. Translated by A.L. Peck, Loeb Classical Library, 1943.
- Bergman, S. Bear. *Blood, Marriage, Wine and Glitter*. Arsenal Pulp Press, 2013.
- Berkowitz, Dana. “Theorizing Lesbian and Gay Parenting: Past, Present, and Future Scholarship.” *Journal of Family Theory and Review*, vol. 1, no. 3, 2009, pp. 117-32.
- Betterton, Rosemary. “Promising Monsters: Pregnant Bodies, Artistic Subjectivity, and Maternal Imagination.” *Hypatia*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2006, pp. 80-100.
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex.”* Routledge, 1993.
- . “Imitation and Gender Insubordination.” *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, edited by Henry Abelove et al., Routledge, 1993, pp. 307-20.
- . *Undoing Gender*. Routledge, 2004.
- Chan, Raymond W., et al. “Division of Labor among Lesbian and Heterosexual Parents: Associations with Children’s Adjustment.” *Journal of Family Psychology*, vol. 12, no. 3, 1998, pp. 402-19.
- Cohler, Deborah. *Citizen, Invert, Queer: Lesbianism and War in Early Twentieth-Century Britain*. U of Minnesota P, 2010.
- Cusk, Rachel. *A Life’s Work: On Becoming a Mother*. Fourth Estate, 2001.
- Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Duke UP, 2003.
- Dean, Tim. “The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory.” *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, vol. 121, no. 3, 2006, pp. 819-28.
- Donoghue, Emma. *The Pull of the Stars*. Little, Brown, 2020.

- Driver, Susan. "Feminist Sublimations, Queer Disidentifications: Losing Touch with Maternal Sexuality." Unpublished paper, 2002.
- . "'My Mother Liked to Fuck': Reading Joan Nestle's Queer Desire for Maternal Desire." *Journal of the Association of Research on Mothering*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1999, pp. 112-20.
- Duggan, Lisa. "The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism." *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, edited by R. Castronovo and D. Nelson, Duke UP, 2002, pp. 175-94.
- Edelman, Elijah Adiv, and Lal Zimman. "Boycunts and Bonus Holes: Trans Men's Bodies, Neoliberalism, and the Sexual Productivity of Genitals." *Journal of Homosexuality*, vol. 61, no. 5, 2014, pp. 673-90.
- Edelman, Lee. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Duke UP, 2004.
- Epstein, Rachel. "Butches with Babies: Reconfiguring Gender and Motherhood." *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2002, pp. 41-57.
- Fontenot, Andrea. "Unpacking Maggie Nelson's 'The Argonauts.'" *KCET: Artbound*, www.academia.edu/13998790/_Unpacking_Maggie_Nelsons_The_Argonauts.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan, Vintage Books, 1979.
- . *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. Translated by Robert Hurley, Vintage Books, 1978.
- Fowle, Kyle. "Modern Family Embraces Change, if Only for a Moment." *TV Reviews*, AV Club, tv.avclub.com/modern-family-embraces-change-if-only-for-a-moment-1839113883.
- Fraiman, Susan. *Cool Men and the Second Sex*. Columbia UP, 2003.
- Freeman, Elizabeth. *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*. Duke UP, 2010.
- Freud, Sigmund. "Historical Notes: A Letter from Freud." *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, vol. 107, no. 10, 1951, pp. 786-87.
- . "The Question of Lay Analysis." 1926. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, edited and translated by James Strachey, vol. 20, Hogarth Press, 1953-74, pp. 183-250. 24 vols.
- Gabb, Jacqui. "Imag(in)ing the Queer Lesbian Family." *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering: Special Issue on Lesbian Mothering*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1999, pp. 1-20.
- Gibson, Margaret F., editor. *Queering Motherhood: Narrative and Theoretical Perspectives*. Demeter Press, 2014.
- Goldberg, Abbie E. "Lesbian Parents and Their Families: Complexity and Intersectionality from a Feminist Perspective." *Handbook of Feminist Family Studies*, edited by Sally A. Lloyd et al., Sage, 2009, pp. 108-20.
- Gore, Ariel, and Bee Lavender, editors. *Breeder: Real-Life Stories from the New Generation of Mothers*. Seal Press, 2001.
- Halberstam, Judith. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York UP, 2005.
- Haraway, Donna. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, edited by Wendy K. Kolmar and Frances Bartkowski, McGraw-Hill, 2005, pp. 384-94.
- Hird, Myra J. "The Corporeal Generosity of Maternity." *Body and Society*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2007, pp. 1-20.
- Love, Heather. *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Harvard UP, 2007.
- Mamo, Laura. *Queering Reproduction: Achieving Pregnancy in the Age of Technoscience*. Duke UP, 2007.
- McCallum, E.L., and Mikko Tuhkanen, editors. *Queer Times, Queer Becomings*. SUNY P, 2011.
- Modern Family*. Created by Christopher Lloyd and Steven Levitan, ABC Network Series, 2009-2020.

- Moore, Mignon. *Invisible Families: Gay Identities, Relationships, and Motherhood Among Black Women*. U of California P, 2011.
- Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York UP, 2009.
- Navas, Francisco. "The New American Family: Trans, Gender Queer, Nonbinary, Two-Spirit." *The Guardian*, 20 June 2019, www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2019/jun/20/american-family-trans-gender-queer-nonbinary.
- Nelson, Maggie. *The Argonauts*. Graywolf Press, 2015.
- Peters, Torrey. *Detransition, Baby*. One World, 2020.
- Puar, Jasbir. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Duke UP, 2007.
- "Reproduction." *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, 20 Aug. 2020, www.merriam-webster.com.
- Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. Norton, 1976.
- Savage, Dan. *The Kid: What Happened after My Boyfriend and I Decided to Go and Get Pregnant*. Plume, 1999.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Epistemology of the Closet*. U of California P, 2008.
- Shildrick, Margrit. "Posthumanism and the Monstrous Body." *Body and Society*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1996, pp. 1-15.
- Singh, Julietta. *No Archive Will Restore You*. Punctum Books, 2018, punctumbooks.com/titles/no-archive-will-restore-you.
- Smith, Dorothy E. *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*. U of Toronto P, 1987.
- Stacey, Judith. "Gay Parenthood and the Decline of Paternity as We Knew It." *Sexualities*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2006, pp. 27-55.
- Stacey, Judith, and Timothy Biblarz. "(How) Does the Sexual Orientation of Parents Matter?" *American Sociological Review*, vol. 66, no. 2, 2001, pp. 159-83.
- Stockton, Kathryn Bond. "Growing Sideways, or Versions of the Queer Child: The Ghost, the Homosexual, the Freudian, the Innocent, and the Interval of Animal." *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children*, edited by Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley, U of Minnesota P, 2004, pp. 277-315.
- Tasker, Fiona, and Susan Golombok. *Growing Up in a Lesbian Family: Effects on Child Development*. Guilford Press, 1997.
- Wiegman, Robyn, and Elizabeth A. Wilson. "Introduction: Antinormativity's Queer Conventions." *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2015, pp. 1-24.
- Young, Iris Marion. *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory*. Indiana UP, 1990.