

When Queers Reproduce

Encounters with Race, Affect and
the Market in Contemporary Australia

Keaney, Jaya. 2023. *Making Gaybies: Queer Reproduction and Multiracial Feeling*. Duke University Press. (218 p)

WHAT DO QUEERS reproduce when we reproduce? What does it mean to “choose” conception mode in a global fertility market where gametes and wombs are racially coded commodities and disembodied services? How do queers “make do” within the constraints that state legislation, gender and material resources place on differently positioned intending parents? What kind of stories of origin and relation emerge when love and intent alongside genetics are used to create familial belong through likeness? *Making Gaybies: Queer Reproduction and Multiracial Feeling*, the first non-US centred monograph on this topic, explores queer reproductive futurity when kinship is no longer always and only heterosexual (Butler 2002).

Based on 27 interviews with a fairly diverse, but mostly young, resourced and white dual parent families recruited in Melbourne and Sydney’s sizeable queer communities, gender studies scholar Jaya Keaney’s study places race as an affective technology at the centre of queer reproduction. With queer analytics and methods from cultural studies, *Making Gaybies* follows the journey of queer conception among a growing number of multiracial families that have emerged as a result of (the lack

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of) new regulations around donation and assisted reproduction in the global fertility industry. While potentially challenging a central axiom of Euroamerican kinship system, namely that a person's race is inherited from their parents, *Making Gaybies* shows that race among queers, in fact, operates as a technology of intimate attachment from (planning) conception into everyday parenting and how the glue of likeness or resemblance is central in creating belonging.

The book consists of five beautifully written chapters, each beginning with vivid depictions of family life gleaned from interview encounters. Keaney delves into the embodied nature of shared story-telling, acknowledging silences, discomfort, and contradictions in the diverse narratives about paths to parenthood and understandings of relatedness. Placing these within larger historical, cultural, migratory and (trans) national frameworks, Keaney skilfully weaves together anecdotes, fieldwork glimpses, and conversations to paint a picture of the ways in which race literally operates at the heart of queer reproduction. As an engaged and nuanced critic, Keaney offers an exemplary way of accounting for the complexities of studying one's own community and the entangled relationships of ethnographic research. Positioned as a mixed-race queer subject, she takes the ethics of "studying across" queer communities seriously, even in the moments when interlocutors' own perceptions of race are quite challenging to grapple with. Multiracial feeling, this book shows, is less reflective of a colorblind queer world than the effect of queer reproductive assemblages caught in sticky webs of inequality that shape gender, sexual and racial differences. Informed by critical race theory, poststructuralist and new materialist theories of gender and affect, Keaney moves away from the "sameness" of "same-sex" kinship. "Origin stories" delineates the genesis of this timely contribution to intersectional queer studies, shedding light on assisted reproduction within the broader context of the contemporary queer imaginary. "Assembling queer fertility" outlines the complexities of contemporary queer reproduction in Australia, highlighting the interplay of choice and constraint within the global and national fertility market. Challenging reproductive "rights" as consumer choices, Keaney highlights legal,

medical, ethical and intimate barriers faced by differently positioned queers. “Making do”, illustrates how queers navigate constraints of gender, citizenship, class and race, and legal frameworks deeply entangled with histories of settler colonialism, racism and heteronormativity and work within these limitations. While 40% of the children of interviewees are of color, multi-racial families are not always the result of a desire for such a reproductive futurity, but rather equally an effect of market logics, financial costs and limited access the needed donors and gestational labor.

“Crafting likeness” and “Racializing wombs” respectively deepen the analysis by honing in on the substances and relations of reproductive arrangements by exploring different understandings and uses of likeness as a bicultural idiom. Across interviews sperm and egg emerge as technologies and agents of heredity and kinship and carry racial, ethnic, cultural and national meanings. While the fertility industry commodifies and categorizes race, for parents, likeness is more complex. As a practice crafted in an ongoing and multifaceted process where factors such as public recognition as a family, the importance of a sensible origin story, differing ideas about cultural and ethnic heritage, and imagined traits of different national and ethnic groups are all part of the story.

Illuminating gendered differences, gestation and wombs are frequently devalued or downplayed parts of queer conception stories. For gay male parents, gestation and childbirth are viewed as necessary means toward parenthood, yet they are frequently portrayed as services devoid of significant kinship value. In contrast, among lesbian parents, gestation is often central to the kinship story and to parenthood. Indeed, gestation is ripe with paradox; on the one hand, the market’s promotion of “co-IVF” – carrying one’s partner egg/embryo – is cast as a queer way to operationalize gestation’s centrality for kinship, on the other hand, surrogate gestation involves a radical denial of the role of epigenetics and the material circumstances of the surrogate. The troublesome erasure of gestational labour is linked to other inequalities and extractions upon which the fertility market relies. While genomic models of race and genetic grammars of kinship reproduce a heterosexual romantic

plot of egg and sperm, the leaky, life-giving and gestating body emerges as “categorically separate from the substance believed to bestow race and identity” (115). In response to this kinship trouble, Keaney argues for a queer re-theorization of the social and thus of relatedness. Can we, she asks, “conceive of belonging to one another, however partially or temporarily, beyond the logics of the gene, law, and property?” (139)

“Love makes a family” explores possibly the most significant dimension of queer understandings of kinship, the idioms care and intent. Indeed, according to Keaney, love is so central to queer narratives of kinship origins that it can be understood as a reproductive substance. In moral terms and cast as simultaneously universal, “equal” and a choice, love makes queers especially well positioned parents, as children are never “accidents.” This chapter is a brilliant analysis of how race comes to matter affectively as a technology of intimacy even as love is understood as “colorblind” or capable of transcending racial inequalities. Indeed, it is love as moral righteousness that justifies (white) queers’ choices and interpretations of their children’s lives. As all children in this study are very young, it remains to be seen how they will tell their own stories in the future.

In “Manifest care”, Keaney brings her queer feminist critical race informed critique to a close with a manifesto. Aligned with postcolonial feminist scholarship, she sheds needed light on the deeply gendered and racialised aspects of gestational work and the persistent sexual and racial differences in queer reproduction. Keaney emphasizes the loss of kinship models centered on care and solidarity, noting how contemporary queer families participate in rather than challenge unequal and extractive reproductive logics.

Indeed, *Making Gaybies* shows that queer kinship in contemporary neoliberal Australia is about as far from that of San Francisco in Kath Weston’s equally groundbreaking book *Families We Choose* (1991) as Kansas is from Oz in a favorite queer story of seeking new frontiers. For fertile and financially free friends of Dorothy down under, the emphasis on love, equality and a choice of gametes, technologies and rights in the right pregnant mix attributes little significance to the gestating leaky

bodies in which gaybabies grow from queer families' origin stories. If choice has long been the central idiom of queer kinship, entangled in increasing biomedicalization, marriage rights and family recognition, the happy gaybyboom raises new questions with regards to choice itself. Be it queers' own choices of donors, surrogates and co-parents (or, as in the case of Sweden, choices made by medical staff), Keaney's discussion of what we can learn about the ambivalent affects of race from queer reproduction is groundbreaking. Any queer qualitative researcher grappling with questions of how to study what we also partake in and find a position from which to offer one's interpretations, can learn from Keaney's ethical and nuanced account that ends on a hopeful note, that "a robust queer love politics (that) can foster antiracism, if it embeds at the heart a willingness to be undone by differences of many kinds, as they collide in the intimate encounter of parenting and all our other kinships" (180).

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