

Moniz, Tomas. (2016). Rad Families: A Celebration. Oakland: PM Press.

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“Rad Families: A Celebration”, edited by Tomas Moniz, is an anthology of stories composed of various mediums ranging from narratives, letters, “messays”, graphics, interviews, and lists, which share enriching experiences that illustrate the overarching concept of families. In the anthology, Moniz harmonizes the stories into four parts and further categorizes them to produce a cohesive, structured and eloquent array of experiences. Part one starts at “Birth” and “Staying Connected” which transcends to “Gender” and “Failing and Learning”, then “Who We Are” that ties into “Advice” and concludes with “Community and Allies”. These stories multiply into tales about reflections on childhood, philosophical ruminations on identity, the implementation of feminism into everyday parenthood, and the community that extends beyond one’s own family, which nurtures and supports as families do. Both brief and intimate, the stories provide a myriad of perspectives: lone parenthood, feminist, transgender, disabled, non-parent, sex-positive and incarcerated. Ultimately, Moniz believes in the book as a tool for community; it is a literary space bound by string and glue that could reach any one person to celebrate and share in the uniqueness of families.

Moniz’s thesis centralizes on three main themes: firstly, the idea that families are radical; it is through “sharing our stories, honestly, so that others may learn or feel consoled or less frazzled

is one of the most radical things we can do” (p. ix). Chapter by chapter, each of the stories shared are radical in and of themselves because they represent an extended hand to someone in need. Continually, families are radical “because [they] have the gall, the arrogance, to celebrate; it laughs and smiles and trusts and doesn’t hide; it honours the families that we choose to create and understand that parenting is difficult, painful work, but work that will sustain us and could, in fact, change the fucking world” (p. x). Secondly, he emphasizes a sense of community that proliferates beyond any single family and that families can engage in a community that is beyond them, but that can garner insight, provide reassurance, and share knowledge. The foreword of the book by Ariel Gore summarizes this idea excellently: “twenty-five years into this parenting thing, I’m still learning myself through it all, too. This is my community and yours. This book is a celebration of our community” (p. viii). Lastly, families deserve to be acknowledged and recognized. Moniz sets forth the idea that families require celebration; a celebration of the complex and authentic truth of families from the “. . . daunting terrifying, stupefying reality of parenting and family building” (p. xi) and everything else in between.

Within each part of the book, each of Moniz’s three themes are provided by diverse contributors who weave the narrative through their unique experiences. “Rad Families: A Celebration”, is a book that, unlike mainstream parenting books, highlights and uplifts marginalized voices; those whose experiences and lifestyles we forget or overlook when we envision the definition of family.

“Daddy’s Tangled Apparatus: On Infertility” written by Daniel Muro LaMere, is one story that embodies the radical. He draws an account of his infertility and his and his partner’s process

of conception via sperm donor, which reveal to him the adversities that other couples face when starting a family. LaMere recalls “[he] was stricken. Completely” (p. 22) with the yearning to have a child and becoming a father. Though, when he is confronted with his infertility, he recounts: “I hadn’t expected the news. I was devastated. I passed by the gas station, busy with customers, and was aware of how disconnected we all are from the problems of others” (p. 24). In this moment, because of his own suffering, LaMere registers the hardships others face with the intention of starting a family, like “same-sex parents [who] have no choice but to begin with a donor of some sort . . .” (p. 25). With this realization, LaMere continues to navigate the donor process, and eventually his partner is able to conceive. When speaking of the sperm donor experience, he rejoices: “. . . I have no misgivings whatsoever about my decision. Quite the contrary, the levies of my heart are struggling against levels of love and joy I could never have imagined. He is altogether mine, and I am his daddy, and like parents everywhere, biological or otherwise, the task now falls to me to be the best parent I can possibly be” (p. 25). Throughout the process, LaMere demonstrates such grace, resilience, and tolerance for same-sex couples. The experience allowed him to recognize the privilege he has in even considering the possibility of starting a family. His story reveals the intricacies in wanting, making, and raising a child. It is a radical story as it honours the processes of parenthood through the dissemination of a story that is as healing as it is genuine.

Community is the second theme traced throughout Moniz’s book and can be exemplified by Alicia Dornadic’s “Dear Stranger, Thank You”, a list-like ode of gratitude to the anonymous individuals who have aided, reassured and supported her in everyday parenthood. In each line,

Dornadic illuminates the strangers in the network of families that extend beyond her own. She begins: “Dear woman at the park who picked up and consoled my toddler when she fell off the slide. Thank you” (p. 51). The stranger’s action is of pure kindness and which embodies the structure of a community that nurture and support beyond their own; the woman practices great care for Dornadic’s child, despite being unknown to them. Raising a family is a complex learning process for everyone involved and sometimes all we need is a little help, some reassuring words and empathy for others’ experiences. Dornadic continues: “To other moms I barely know, who are overworked and underslept, and return my 3 a.m. texts with an “I’ve been there too.” What would I do without you?” (p. 52). Furthermore, her experience amplifies that underlying bond that unites families; it is with the awareness of their struggle that cultivates compassion. Dornadic closes with “. . . finally, to future strangers whose paths I will cross, the ones who hold the door, share a story or snack, help out in some other small way. Thank you” (p. 52). Nevertheless, the bonds that we forge within our own families possess great strength, but it is sometimes in the ones formed with strangers, who have found themselves in similar circumstances, that allows us to learn from and empathize with one another.

Finally, Moniz expresses that the family deserves to be celebrated. With all of the nuances and intricacies in the experiences of a family, there is truth, and that truth calls for acknowledgement and recognition. “A Reinterpretation of Tears” by Roger Porter recalls his unfamiliar relationship with parenthood, influenced by the abandonment of Porter by his father; and his “subversive act” (p. 115) of commitment to his infant daughter. Porter outlines that “[he] rarely if ever saw [his] father” (p. 115) and that he “became a lot more comfortable with his absence

than [he] was with his presence” (p. 116). This absence translates into confusion when he enters parenthood. He states: “I wanted to be in my daughter’s life so she could know what it was like to have a father, but I didn’t know how to do it” (p. 116). Porter’s abandonment influences his catapult into parenthood as he has no baseline for what role a father should play. He reinterprets a moment, where he failed to attend to his daughter’s cries. Porter recalls an incident where his father neglects to address his cries as an adolescent and avows: “That was the day I learned to transcend my manhood in order to be a good father. I promised to listen to her cries in order to interpret exactly what she needed . . . Indeed, my daughter was the first female I learned how to effectively communicate with. She became my entire weekend, she was my focus, and she became my identity. That was the day I promised I would never leave her” (p. 118). Through this, Porter seeks to reshape his daughter’s future, preventing the same injustices forced upon him to happen to her. He promises to learn what parenthood entails – for the sake of his daughter but for also his own. His story personifies the theme of celebration; Porter, although replete with unfortunate experiences in childhood, overcomes and reconstructs his identity and narrative. If anything, this is a story that deserves acknowledgement and recognition for the determination and perseverance it exudes.

This book is a fruitful manifestation of what a family entails: bonds that are unrelenting and rooted in love, the messy and beautiful that composes parenthood, and the chaos of learning and growing. Moniz’s intention in compiling and editing the book was to illuminate the complexities and radicality of families, celebrate this structure, and join in community that extends outside one’s own family. Additionally, this book would be a unique resource for study by post-secondary students and instructors in disciplines such as Sociology, English, Anthropology,

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Psychology Gender Studies, and Nursing, to name a few. It would be an asset for any class relevant to the studies of childhood, families and parenting. I found the book to be incredibly enjoyable as well as impactful. Though, I found it lacked a strong intercultural perspective on parenthood; it still centers itself mainly on a white radical narrative of family. Future editions could focus on including more pluralistic perspectives in order to draw an even more diverse assortment of experiences.