

**Moniz, Tomas (Editor). (2016). Rad Families: A Celebration.
Halifax: Fernwood Publishing.**

Reviewed by: Riel Marguerite Zahacy, MacEwan University.

Tomas Moniz's book, "Rad Families: A Celebration," relishes in the imperfections and truths of parenting that are not easily defined. Tomas Moniz celebrates families, whichever way they come, without coming across as disingenuous. It lends itself in the support, de-stigmatization, awareness and every facet of parenting. This book is a reflection of the diversification of parenting and of the people who call themselves parents. The people who chose to share their experiences for this book embody what the author aims to detail: that there is strength in sharing stories and, in turn, builds a support network for those who need do not necessarily need answers but to know that their experiences are valid.

An appealing aspect of "Rad Families: A Celebration" is in its positive, relaxed tone. Every part is a contribution from an array of everyday people: from those who are incarcerated, to people who are trying to conceive, to those who struggle with mental illness. The paperback format acts as a sort of paperbound gathering place for those who are excluded from mainstream parenting literature. The stories are fairly short which makes this book accessible, especially with its informal tone and loose structure. If a topic does not apply or interest an individual person, they are able to find a topic that fulfills these desires. "Rad Families" is broken into several broad categories with a multitude of other topics within each group, making it easier to find precisely what topics interest or relate to a person. Within these sub categories, there are short lists which detail topics like how

to talk to children. These lists add to the overall broad scope of its appeal since the ability to treat children like “other human beings, not like tiny human beings,” and “taking their experiences, feeling seriously” (p. 191). This list also tackles the notion that children are incapable of understanding vast topics such as compassion, empathy and respect. This is an entirely different sentiment than what was echoed in the 1950s and early 1960s: that children should be seen but not heard, undermining their thoughts and feelings. When we think about traditional list structure, they are seen as rigid and encompassing. The lists provide guidelines for parenting but allows for personal application and variation. These are lessons on general parenting tips without being sanctimonious. There is something for every parent to relate to which strengthens the overall narrative of parenting being messy, complex and beautiful in its imperfections.

“Losing My Shit” by Dani Burliston (p. 213) embodies what makes this such an impactful book. The candid descriptions of her mental health journey, along with offering advice to other parents who need assistance allows for a discussion surrounding recurring mental health issues and parenting. Mental health has been stigmatized due to the lack of proper education and awareness. This stigmatization is spread through misinformation about mental illness. In popular media, mental illness is seen as a quirky character flaw, alluring character trait or linked to violent tendencies. An example of this stigmatization in would be the “Sexual Sterilization Act of 1928,” where those deemed to be “mentally unfit” would be sterilized. In 1995, a woman named Leilani Muir sued the province successfully because she was sterilized after failing an IQ test. The Act was repealed in Alberta in 1972; however, this is a reflection of how any sort of deviation would result in the inability to have biological children. It is courageous for Dani Burliston to display

Zahacy

such vulnerability publicly. “It’s hard. We want to protect our little and not-so-little babies from the darkness that accompanies depression... want them to move forward without fear and depression can be a scary-as-shit thing to confront” (p 214). Her narrative is impactful, empowering and instills hope in readers by giving them community based mental health support tips, since “parenting can be an isolating experience...missing daily support since they’re wrapped up in their children's needs (p.15).

“Dear Vivian” by Zach Ellis exemplifies what Tomas Moniz aims to achieve: celebrating families (pp. 95-98). Zach Ellis creates a list, a guidebook, for his daughter to follow if she ever needs advice. The topics range from basic life advice, not using 7-11 as a restaurant, to heart-felt messages about asking anything without fear of judgement or ridicule. Zach Ellis honours, cherishes and supports his daughter by providing the support he lacked growing up. The essay reflects a societal shift that has been occurring within the past several decades: “princess can fall in love with other princess” and “love your body despite what the world might say” (p. 97). There is an acceptance of who she is and who she may become, without any external societal pressures or fear driven advice. The parental, unconditional love that is reflected through this essay has been celebrated and cherished. It is not only a celebration of the bond Zach has with his daughter but of how society has changed since he was a child, being raised by people who did not provide him with adequate support.

“Rad Families” is not only a celebration of family but also a community of families who may have varied experience yet share common ground: love and hope. Anyone could benefit from reading this as it is broad enough to appeal to a range of people yet specific enough to help

individuals go through their own personal struggles. Moniz states: “start anywhere, skip around, look for what you need, make it yours. Pick up this book when you want to feel a little less anxious or worried. Not that these stories have answers, but they might remind you that you are not alone.” Moniz achieves this by picking and sharing everyone’s stories along with sharing every imperfect detail, making this book radical by challenging normative behaviours. I also think this book has a place in academia as it reflects the ever-changing family structure. This book could also be used as a starting point for research, or used as a multidisciplinary source. From biology to psychology, families are a versatile subject. I also believe that the essays, due to their length, may leave some desiring more information but this is a part of the overall appeal. “Rad Families: A Celebration” is an excellent, accessible read that can help readers become open-minded and recognize that parenting is not a linear path, but a gravel road that leads to unexpected places.