

Happy ever after? Reproduction and Futurity under Swedish Queer Liberalism

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Two white blonde women in white dresses adorn the cover of Jens Rydström's monograph *Odd Couples: The history of gay marriage in Scandinavia*.¹ Backs to queer² photographer Elisabeth Ohlsson's camera, they face the Registrar, a third white ordinarily dressed woman, on the step of a church. Portraying a partnership ceremony, the image captures a moment *before* and *outside* gay marriage and the church. As Rydström's work shows, the Swedish same-sex partnership law of 1995 was distinguished from heterosexual marriage by a ceremonial and legal absence of "responsibility for future generations."³ In a post AIDS era gay and lesbian futurity was imagined as barren and bonded in a registered relation of care for each other; the law largely regulating matters of material wealth, ownership and inheritance.

Yet, the presence of two children in the image anticipate the awaiting kinship trouble: as Rydström points out, many partnershiped couples already *had* children. Some were from heterosexual relations but in the nineties, growing numbers were conceived with assisted reproduction

technologies, both in different private arrangements using home inseminations with friends' sperm and syringes and by obtaining sperm from clinics across the border in Denmark. As the global fertility market began growing, affluent gay men also began adopting and conceiving through surrogacy.

A paradox emerged: Both lesbians using (un)known donors and constellations of multiple (gay) parents were at odds with the Swedish state's idea of gender equal heterosexual two-parent kinship with a heightened emphasis on fathers and mothers.⁴ To better regulate and secure new family forms conceived outside the nation and the law, family law was revised in 2005. Partnered lesbians gained access to sperm from registered donors at Swedish state clinics and new adoption laws to accommodate donor-conceived families. Thanks to "the normalizing force of the Scandinavian welfare state" and its fantasy of equal access, lesbians have gone from monstrous to maternal and the imagined barren partnership has transformed into a potentially fertile marriage.⁵ For a queer generation coming of parental age in an age of fertility medicine and an increasingly privatized public sector, having children is no longer simply an option; it is increasingly expected. As Rydström concludes, today "the same fantasy of matrimonial happiness applies to both same-sex and different-sex couples."⁶

In honor of Rydström's work, this chapter continues where *Odd couples* left off and asks what happens *after* the wedding: how have marriage and children met the promise of happiness "ever after"? Inspired by the futurity anticipated in the cover image of *Odd Couples*, I draw on open ended answers from a 2017 national Swedish survey on paths to parenthood and experiences of having children and focus on what survey results indicate may be a new (non-normative) queer norm: families of two white cis-gendered women.⁷

True to my queer femme killjoy spirit, I propose that if conception and parenthood were the ultimate goals of (gay) marriage, this data suggests not only a desire for reproductive futurity but that the child has replaced the partner or co-parent as the central love object.⁸ Differently put, the happiness suggested by matrimonial and reproductive homonormativity requires that sexuality, desire and sex are aligned with a straight

temporality of kinship and subordinated the assumed central source of happiness: children.

Queer statistics and norms

As a queer feminist ethnographer studying kinship and reproduction, I use qualitative methods; participant observation, interviews and conversations within communities. Through research collaborations with RFSL I got an opportunity to follow a planned national online survey and with a Stockholm focus in my research, I welcomed the opportunity to place the stories I had collected in a broader demographic context. 645 persons completed the digital 56 question survey that offer us a glimpse of a “queer population” and its relationship to children. In particular, the hundreds of lengthy articulate open ended answers provide insights into experiences of LGBTQ family making and living with children in Sweden.⁹

Unsurprisingly, there was significant diversity among respondents, indicating that in 2017 queers engage intensely and regularly with children and imagine and conceive their own families in a range of ways. Yet, 73% identified as women, 60% as homosexual, 21% as queer and 12% who chose “other,” with the most commonly chosen word being lesbian. 58% identified as parents or legal guardians to children, 54% shared parenthood with one other person, and 25% had experiences of separation or divorce. Of the 30% who were planning families, 58% imagined having children with one other person, 21% with several. 7% lived with partners’ children and 6% lacked recognition of their parenthood. 16% had done home insemination with a known donor, 42% had received donated sperm, 2,4% had donated eggs and 2% donated embryos, while few had donated sperm. Among family planners, numbers increased: 25% imagined home insemination, 43% a state clinic in Sweden and 40% imagined going abroad. While the data suggests a range of conception forms and parental constellations, each with different medical, financial and legal implications, it also points to a clear “norm”; the lesbian couple. Without asking about marital status, the terms “my wife” appears over 130

times, whereas “my husband” appears only a dozen times. The sheer numbers clearly challenge the idea of LGBTQ+ equality conveyed in homonationalist discourses about Swedish sexual exceptionalism; fertile bodies capable of gestation have many more options for achieving parenthood, legally and technically.

Additional survey demographics matter here: 83% were between 26 and 45 years old and 72% lived around Sweden’s major cities Stockholm, Göteborg and Malmö. 73% reported university education and 6% postgraduate and 55% make more than the median income in Sweden of 309 000 SEK,¹⁰ 26% make over 400 000 SEK annually. Given the gender and average age of respondents, and that the most common job for a woman is in the municipal health care sector (where the median income is 281 000 SEK), these figures are noteworthy. 7% had migrated to Sweden and 13% had at least one migrant parent, mostly from other Nordic and European countries, compared to the 24% of the national population born outside of Sweden in 2017. 8% reported experiences of racism, 18% stated that family members had, and 6% and 8% respectively answered “maybe.” Differently put, the vast majority of respondents belong to the majoritarian white population. The image emerging from survey demographics clearly reflects that of *Odd Couples*: respondent family makers are largely middle-class, white, cis-gendered lesbians raising children in a big city, more highly educated and resourced than average Swedes.

This chapter hones in on this “homo norm” and what this survey tells us about life with children for those most benefitting from rights obtained in an era “after the wedding”; that is in the 2000s. The focus is answers to two open-ended questions: “What do you think having children brings to your life?” and “Have your experiences of family making affected your health in any way, positive or negative?”, generating 410 and 326 responses respectively. Drawing on queer theories of affect, I discuss what Sara Ahmed calls the promise of happiness embedded in children.¹¹ I will argue that understandings of family conveyed here are embedded neoliberal notions of the good life, and as such reflect rather than challenge majoritarian, white middle class values and their heteronormative gender and family ideals.

The promise of happiness: children and family as happy objects

As Sara Ahmed has shown, under neoliberalism happiness is a form of worldmaking; it is what gives life meaning and direction. As “an orientation toward the objects we come into contact with,” happiness is intentional and affective.¹² In a heteronormative world, marriage is often conveyed as a primary happiness indicator, and family and *children* are “happy objects” par excellence.¹³ Happiness as it is normatively understood is thus closely connected to reproductive futurity as a life orientation.

At first, the survey confirms the idea that for LGBTQ+ people, family and children add something fundamentally meaningful to life and does provide happiness. Indeed, “what do you think having children has contributed to your life?” generated hundreds of short and very positive answers such as “everything,” “the meaning of life,” “joy!”, and “happiness.” Lengthier descriptions described becoming better people, feeling normal, finding focus and obtaining an orientation to the future. Given that “happiness” is understood as a hegemonic and normative aspiration, and with very few negative answers, we might conclude that the right to have children has been a success, it has brought happiness.

Indeed, almost all respondents describe children as what Ahmed calls “happy objects.” Working with or caring for the children of others is described as bringing joy and being a preparation for planned parenthood. Many state that becoming parents has made them better people. In particular, having children has led to changed priorities and ways of managing emotions and centering children’s needs also provide clarity in how to engage in other relations:

I have to set certain things aside and let it be more important that my child is well, for instance when and how I engage in conflicts with the other parents. That I have to practice empathy and also practice how to feel where my boundaries are in order to be clear. It is like using all one’s knowledge from previous relations but using them with so much more

care and reflection. Socializing with the child also brings such enormous amounts of love.

Here the child brings love and fosters an ability to engage with other adults, yet those relations are secondary and secured through boundaries between self/child and others.

A strong theme reflected is thus that children provide direction; responsibility, focus, love and meaning. Parenthood, many stress, alters decisions and priorities, rendering other dimensions of life, including romantic relations secondary:

I have a better relation to my family of origin. Unfortunately also a worse relationship with my ex initially but that doesn't have to be due to children. Rather, a child made it clear to me that that relationship was not good enough. Greater pressure on myself to make relations, work and finances work. But also a desire to be more independent. I want to be able to control my parenting myself and this makes me appreciate being alone with my child and make my own decisions more than I did when me and her other mother lived together.

Children here provide self-discovery, require work on the self and bring desires for independency and control. Interestingly, while a child can create better relations to heterosexual kin, centering "my child" can render the romantic parental relationship dissatisfying. In (heterosexual) kinship theoretical terms, it seems that consanguineal love is prioritized over conjugal love.¹⁴ Indeed, only one or two respondents describe children as improving happiness in relations with another adult. There is an almost complete absence of discussions about relations to co-parents, other than as challenges.

To that end, the degree to which the gendered and embodied dimension of lesbian motherhood and the centrality of gestation promises happiness is also noteworthy:

My children are the best there is, would be so empty without them, I understand my wife who has a longing for children, that she also wants to have the experience of pregnancy and giving birth. Children are life, that's just the way it is!

Experiencing pregnancy and childbirth are here central to a full life and to not feeling "empty" and a wife may not always share parenthood, rather she longs for what the respondent "has." Both data and previous research suggests that among white middle class lesbians in particular, sharing the experience of gestation and having multiple children (often by the same donor) is increasingly central to parental happiness. Here, lesbian desires for motherhood are lining up with rather than challenging heteronormative femininity ideals organized around biological labour. Coupled with a Swedish ideal of equality through sameness, possibilities for differently gendered positions in lesbian motherhood seem to have narrowed rather than expanded among these respondents.¹⁵

There are exceptions, however. For instance, one respondent explains:

I have always wanted to be with a person who would want to give birth to a child and so I have done all kinds of things to support my partner in becoming pregnant, going through the pregnancy, giving birth and taking care of it. I am very happy and content that the little baby exists that brings happiness and smiles to my life. I also feel 'complete' somehow.

Here the orientation is to the birth-giver and the promise of happiness resides in the act of supporting and caring for a partner through a pregnancy; a form of labour that provides "completion" and a sense of family and intimacy. Unlike the majority of respondents, happiness for this respondent comes from a (gendered) division of biological and reproductive labor.¹⁶

A strong theme is that children provide a sense of change and maturity, a new stage, and a more meaningful life orientation. One writes that "becoming a parent is the biggest, best and most comprehensive change I have made in my life." Children require "learning new things, learning to handle challenges, depth and purpose, away from the superficiality of gay

life” or “normality.” Such responses describe a temporal break; before and after having children, whereby becoming a parent is tied to “growing up.” Many describe the gay life involving “partying” as a phase now replaced by the “maturity” of parenthood. Children thus provide a break from previous queer sensibilities, offer something to live for, give life more depth and a sense of priority, purpose and structure, and make you a better person or better at prioritizing and taking responsibility. Differently put, parenthood becomes a straightening device, a sign of adulthood and of a repronormative rather than a queer temporality of earlier (childless) generations of LGBTQ people.¹⁷ This is not surprising, given that as David Eng notes, in an era of rights he calls queer liberalism, “the position of parent has become increasingly a measure of value, self-worth, and ‘completion’” and furthermore, that “possession of a child, whether biological or adopted, has today become the sign of guarantee both for family and for full and robust citizenship, for being a fully realized political, economic, and social subject.”¹⁸ Statements such as “I love the parental gig!” or “I am happy to be a parent to my child, see her development, belong to her, provide for her” convey a sense that raising children is “happy labour” performed by queers as citizen-workers.

If children provide orientation, seeing the world through their eyes and engaging in family involves a different kind of “backward feeling,” that of relating to biological kin, a sense of “living in the here and now” and a strong sense of (hopeful) futurity:

It is an incredible valuable journey into their wonderful world and thoughts and ways of seeing the world. They are the world’s and society’s future and a new generation. It is wonderful to be part of their development.

Having children here provides both belief in and a power to shape the future. Casting children as “an innocence not tainted by norms” and parents as “part of forming an individual”, suggests that happy parenting involves opportunities to “make an impression”, be “a role model” and “show alternative ways of living.” Interestingly, what is conveyed is a rather familiar self-sacrificial form of motherhood:

My child is the most important of everything in my life, I would do everything for her, at the same time I need personal time and my own interests to feel good (difficult to find time), and I don't want to burden my child that she is everything to me, I want her to feel loved but free to go her own way. My child gives meaning to my life and makes me like myself more, I see myself in her and feel proud of her and of myself.

This suggests that under queer liberalism parents should sacrifice their own needs, and that personal pride comes from the child's ability to be independent, yet while a child is everything to its parent and thus performs emotional labour for parental happiness, it should not feel pressured by having this position. Children, it seems, must also perform emotional labour; providing meaning to parents. As Ahmed argues, (middle class) life in late modernity is characterised by a "happiness duty"; we are expected above all to strive towards happiness. As a "gift", access to marriage and assisted reproduction offers that promise, but comes with an expectation or obligation of happiness that might require downplaying negative experiences.¹⁹

Some answers do indicate that queer ways of having children are not always simple paths to happiness, that an orientation that promises a good future can be an aspiration to feel better, even if it doesn't happen:

I don't see family making as only having children, but my partner and I moving in together and planning a family made me feel so much better, and more stable. This means that even if I feel bad I know there is a good future. However, it pains to have to explain the process to friends who live in heterosexual relations and to correct people who call a donor a "father". That hurts your heart and at times it feels heavy and unfair that in a general sense we don't have an equally friction free path to forming a family.

If as Ahmed notes, when children come out, parents or family members often worry that they will be unhappy, the inclusion of LGBTQ+ people in the reproductive nation might be read as an invitation to share in the normative and expected happiness of family-making promised by queer liberalism. This respondent stresses that family can take many forms, but

it is becoming a cohabitating couple that creates a good and stable feeling and a clear sense of futurity, even if one continues to “feel bad.” Here heterosexual kinship norms persist and deviations *still* cause pain and “unfairness.” Differently put, inclusion remains conditional and partial and “unhappiness” persists in what should be happy.

In this survey, it seems that lesbian parental happiness does not reside in living and parenting in any particular queer way; in fact, there is little in the survey that indicates any unique kind of queer parenting happiness. Rather, happiness is shaped by its proximity to the gender and kinship norms of families of origin, the white middle-class majority and by being recognized as a parent. This focus on children as happy objects, often at the expense of individual needs and even (queer) relational joy is striking, especially given how, as Rydström delineates, generations of lesbian feminists fought against marriage and self-sacrificing motherhood. Grown up and vested with the opportunity to extend national and familiar lines, no matter the hardships and sacrifices, the promise of happiness that comes with having children outside of heteropatriarchy but firmly lodged in state-regulated late modern middle-classness, are nevertheless “worth it.”

In sickness and in health?

In light of the above, answers to the question concerning impact on health gave quite a different, much less happy image. While some reported “feeling more normal” or “less depressed”, a much larger number conveyed that paths to parenthood and having children also lead to depression, anxiety, unhappiness, divorce and poor health. Reasons varied, but accounts of resource and time-consuming fertility procedures, not being recognized as a parent by various institutions and people, repeated questions about the donor (or “missing father”), and stressful co-parent adoption procedures were prevalent, pointing to how parenting under unequal circumstances impacts health. Experiences of denigrating interactions with other parents, conflict with co-parents after break ups,

custody battles, loss of contact with children due to lack of recognition of parental rights, and not having access to resources for children's wellbeing convey struggles with heteronormative institutions and legal frameworks. When one is not aligned the right (straight) way, the assumed happy object (a child or family) does not provide the happiness it promised.²⁰

One theme is the lack of *shared* happiness on the path to having children. Many feel with a partner's more vulnerable situation. One writes "my partner was struggling during the process when I was trying to get, and became, pregnant, due to others' attitudes and the discriminating legal system, which in turn affected me. I have been down during the first months of parental leave." Here the arrival of a child does not provide the expected happiness; the lack of recognition of the parental constellation gets in the way. The couple becomes one in its orientation both towards the child and towards society, feeling the same way. The strenuous process can impact the relationship to the breaking point:

Me and my exwife tried to inseminate in Sweden. It was a long and privacy-violating process in relation to health care. It wore a lot on our marriage. We were in disagreement about the need/meaning of having children and I feel like the long process made our standpoints worse: one really wanted children and the other was continuously ambivalent. In such a long process there is no room to switch roles and be ambivalent both of us. In addition, both have to keep up appearances towards health care. Too long waiting times create unnecessary suffering for couples waiting for insemination.

Here the co-mothers' struggle with what it meant to have children was exasperated by a long and strenuous process and expectations to present as a couple with a shared orientation. Queers must convince state agents of their intention and ability and conflicts must remain concealed. By the time the child arrived, the promise of shared happiness was lost. Many describe how stress and worries about the procedure, being subjected to various demands such as weight loss, or lack of knowledge and help on the way impact health in negative ways. Others describe how years of fertility treatment, birth injuries and miscarriages impact hopes for parenthood.

Once children arrive, other challenges emerge, including a constant worry about children's well-being. Many also point to a lack of personal or "free" time, and especially time for exercise. The expectation of self-sacrificial parenthood can in other words cause unhappiness, especially when it clashes with expectations of autonomy and self-discipline that characterize the neoliberal subject.

One's sense of embodied gender identity can also be negatively affected by normative ideas of pregnancy and parenthood. Indeed, to not desire inclusion in the term "mother" and insist on queerness can lead to abuse:

I felt bad about being seen as a mother, and that I have and still am seen like that in many meetings with people. I got gender dysphoria for the first time in my life, both by my body changing and by how I was treated because of it. And that our family could look like a nuclear family in the eyes of others. That is one thing. Then I am also negatively impacted of course when I am openly trans and a parent. That people think I'm weird. That they can snort when my kids call me Mapa. That they scream things after us, fucking faggot, dyke, fucking neuter and sort of whatever. I get so tired of having to deal with how others view me and our family. In periods I have been on sick leave for fatigue syndrome since the kids were born.

Despite an "inclusive" legal framework that recognizes queer families, persisting gendered norms and expectations on parenthood generate contradictory feelings for parents who are queer. Here queer invisibility and discomfort in presenting as a "pregnant woman" or a "nuclear family" and the risk of being the subject of trans and homophobic violence both lead to fatigue and sickness. As gender-nonconforming and trans experiences stand out across the survey, pointing to persistent normative discourses and acceptable non-heterosexual parenthood ideals.

Navigating a legal system premised on biological and dual parenthood involves many challenges for queer parents, including uneven distributions of responsibility and rights and a lack of ability to make formal decisions, not being treated as "a real" parent, or feeling kept hostage in a relationship out of fear of losing a child. Queering kinship further, for instance,

through forming multi-parent families or going beyond the law also strains parental relations:

It is much more tiring than I thought to have children with a friend. It is something else to be parents together than to be friends. It takes a lot of energy and a long time to find a good approach to how to share parenthood. Having children is also a lot more emotionally and physically demanding than I thought. Since my white partner pressured me to have children I have felt bad about it. Despite the fact that I love the child and can't imagine living without it. I often think about what a mistake it was and wish that someone would have literally stopped me.

For this respondent it is relations with other adults that make life with children challenging. Being “pressured” here points to unequal relations of power, and furthermore, “friendship” as a basis is not devoid of potential challenges. While queer parents frequently invoke a kinship grammar of choice and intent, there is little room for regret.²¹

As shared “happy objects” having children with others clearly conjures up contradictory feelings. 20% of respondents live with children part time and many share responsibility for children with others they do not live with or who are not parents of, and very few comments describe this in terms of happiness. 30% plan to have children and 6% state that they are involuntarily childless. If children are central to life happiness it is not surprising that their absence generates bad feelings or that it is difficult to describe positive feelings about it. Many also describe break ups and arrangements that have taken years to resolve, often indicating that biological motherhood remains privileged.

A few do describe how changing constellations brought about a different sense of life fulfillment and completion and how new forms of family and romantic love can bring happiness:

I had children when I was pretty young (23) and I can hardly imagine my life without children...in two periods I have been a single parent with children every other week, which was partly pretty heavy due to love trouble and bad finances. Today, when I am happily ‘out’ and with a

wonderful woman who also has children, I enjoy being a parent like never before! We have such a cozy and fun time with the children who are growing up so much and are increasingly interesting in their thoughts and interests. I feel that the four children we have together have become a 'litter' and really feel good together. Everyday life can be hectic, but every-other week life provides more space for couple time and interests.

If coming out is one path to happiness, sharing parenthood part time is here what allows time for a romantic relationship. As nearly half of lesbian marriages involving children end in divorce, and many respondents have children from previous marriages, divorce is hardly odd and often brings new love and happiness.²²

Finally, it is worth stressing that the survey indicates that queers are certainly involved in children's lives: 27% are godparents or guardians and 35% identify as important adults in the life of a child. While marriage and family law encourage couple-centred families, growing numbers of children are growing up in what above is called "litters," with multiple parents of several genders, some recognized and others not. As the (national) family form gets increasingly queer and multiple, what is odd "after the wedding" is perhaps how among those who can have babies without sex and sex without making babies, the promise of happiness now involves an orientation towards a different object than that which defines queer identity, namely children.

Queer welfare state (neo)liberalism and its discontents

Rydström ends *Odd Couples* with a different image: that of the future of "the child-rearing same-sex couple, with a place at the day-care centre, schooling problems, and family therapy."²³ Today this image is stronger than ever; arguably an integral part of the Swedish nation's self-image as progressive. Paths to parenthood and its happy familial outcome are featured in reality TV shows and glossy magazine articles and in growing

numbers of blogs, podcasts, novels and films and for the millennial generation reproductive futurity is imaginable. In this chapter, I have probed this further by considering the promise of happiness that marriage and children are assumed to contain through reading the results of a national survey on paths to LGBTQ parenthood and drawing on queer theories of affect.

The survey as a whole suggests that white middle class lesbian couples are the norm in rainbow families and that to them children are happy objects, if not always the outcome of matrimonial happiness. It also illuminates how LGBTQ subjects under queer liberalism are encouraged to view ourselves as citizens and consumers by entering into and benefitting from marriage and rights to procreation obtained in an increasingly marketized world. To that end, data reveals that (queer) reproductive futurity is increasingly realized at the intersection of a privatized welfare state and a growing global fertility market at a time that is shaped by “an increased individualization and a commodification of human reproduction.”²⁴ Indeed, expanded family law and a pronatalist welfare state willing to include people with wombs into the biopolitics of national reproduction has made lesbians, and to some extent, gay men “further incorporated into (neo)liberal regimes of rights and recognition, of marriage and kinship, of markets and property, and as reproductive actors and agents of the state.”²⁵ As the main site in which recognition and neoliberal subjecthood is constituted, this market is in turn fuelled by the affective pull of success and happiness. In drawing attention to how this dream often fails to live up to the promise of happiness, my point here is not to critique queer families for failing to be “sufficiently transgressive or consistently radical,” but rather to propose that reproductive futurity under queer liberalism is in fact animated both by what Kadiji Amin calls a disturbing attachment to normality and by the statistical normality of failure to obtain happiness.²⁶ Significant numbers have, of course, had family therapy too.

As David Eng notes, queer liberalism and homonationalism lack “acknowledgment of the ways in which sexuality and race are constituted in relation to one another, each often serving to articulate, subsume, and frame the other’s legibility in the social domain.”²⁷ This survey similarly

demonstrates that happy family making is more difficult for those who deviate from gender, sexual, citizenship and kinship norms. Those who are racialised as non-white, along with transgendered people and those whose mental or material resources are limited face greater challenges in obtaining the happiness embedded in family making. Having children aligns some queers and not others with a nation where fantasies of the (gay) family continue to be built on whiteness and likeness as desirable features. To that end, it is worth recalling that such seemingly deviant subjects “are in fact not aberrations but, rather, constitutive of a normative queer liberal rights project itself.”²⁸

While children often become the centre of (white) queer kinship, not all live happily ever after, even if being white, cisgendered, able-bodied and resourced makes one better equipped to reproduce the nation. While marriage is not required for procreation through assisted reproduction with donated gametes via tax-subsidized health care today, only bodies with functioning wombs between 25 and 38 years of age, adhering to normative BMI standards and whose health and material resources are deemed sufficient are eligible. The kind of recognition obtainable by non-gestating or non-genetic parents depends on modes and sites of conception. Legally, a child cannot have more than two parents, the donor’s status affects parental recognition, and conceiving in your own bedroom, outside the nation, and/or with a surrogate is more costly and legally complicated. While the global fertility market relies on and exploits inequality as its main reproductive resource, making children into the central objects of happiness with the state’s help, requires willing “donors” who make it through strenuous screening processes in order to “match” intended parents and who are willing to be registered and “found.” Even if queers are not categorically excluded from (national) kinship in the 2020s, it is clear that eggs, sperm and wombs are central kinship materials of interest to the state’s understanding of (normal) identity development and that whiteness persists as a norm. All this suggests that the desire for and promise of happiness is conditional and not equally within reach.

Two decades after the scene of Rydström’s cover image, the promise of happiness and futurity that having children involves remains ambivalent. While growing numbers willingly participate in a deeply biopolitical

project of reproducing the nation and navigate the state's desire to manage kinship through rules of blood and law and ongoing assessments of mental and physical fitness of bodies, gametes and relations, it is worth remembering that this is not the only option. To many queers, the slogan "we are family" remains more than a demand for reproductive choice. Indeed, many continue to find happiness in other forms of affinities and to reproduce and make kin, love and community in "unrecognized" ways. Along with the contradictions the survey presents, this queer fact perhaps promises a different kind of happy ever after; one that recognizes that there is nothing odd about "bad feelings" in intimacy, indeed pain, loss, struggle and change are a part of (queer family) life itself.

Endnotes

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- ¹ Jens Rydström, *Odd couples: A history of gay marriage in Scandinavia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011).
- ² Queer is in this article both an umbrella term for non-normative sexualities and genders (LGBTQ+) and a term that refers to gender identities and sexual orientations beyond binary gender and heterosexuality whereas same-sex, lesbian and gay relations and identities assume binary gender and sexuality.
- ³ Jens Rydström, “Legalizing love in a cold climate: The history, consequences and recent developments of registered partnership in Scandinavia” *Sexualities* 11, no. 1–2 (2008): 207.
- ⁴ Roísín Ryan-Flood, *Lesbian Motherhood: Gender, Family and Sexual Citizenship* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
- ⁵ Rydström *Odd couples*, 163.
- ⁶ Rydström, *Odd couples*, 176.
- ⁷ Research for this article, including the privilege of working closely with RFSL’s projects for families, was conducted within the project “Queer(y)ing Kinship in the Baltic Region”, funded by the Baltic Sea Foundation.
- ⁸ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, (Durham: Duke University Press 2004).
- ⁹ RFSL is the Swedish federation for LGBTQI rights and it owns and stores the survey entitled *Nationell enkät om hbtq-personers erfarenheter och behov kopplat till föräldraskap och umgänge med barn* (“HBTQ persons’ experiences and needs related to paths to parenthood and engagement with children”). Distributed through RFSL’s digital channels and on social media (Facebook) in early 2017, respondents commented on the length of the survey, and yet, 620 of 645 participants answered all open-ended questions. All translations of questions and responses are author’s. Thanks to Lina-Lea Zimmerman, Veronica Berg Hulthén, Sofia Klittmark and Anna Dahlqvist for many years of discussions and for generously sharing insights and expertise.
- ¹⁰ See <https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/statistik-efter-amne/hushallens-ekonomi/inkomster-och-inkomstfordelning/inkomster-och-skatter/pong/statistiknyhet/slutliga-inkomster-och-skatter-2016/>.
- ¹¹ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); David Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the*

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- Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer time and place* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).
- ¹² Ahmed, *Promise of Happiness*, 24.
- ¹³ Ahmed, *Promise of Happiness*, 6.
- ¹⁴ David Schneider *American Kinship: A Cultural Account* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).
- ¹⁵ Susanne Pelka, "Sharing motherhood: Maternal jealousy among lesbian co-mothers", *Journal of Homosexuality* 56, no. 2 (2009), 215. Cf. Ulrika Dahl, "Becoming Fertile in the Land of Organic Milk: Lesbian and Queer Reproductions of Femininity and Motherhood in Sweden" *Sexualities* 21, no. 7 (2018); Anna Malmqvist, *Pride and Prejudice: Lesbian Families in Contemporary Sweden* (PhD diss., Linköping University, 2015), 195–217.
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- ¹⁸ Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship*, 101.
- ¹⁹ Anna Malmqvist and Karin Z. Nelson, "Efforts to Maintain a 'just Great' Story: Lesbian Parents' Talk about Encounters with Professionals in Fertility Clinics and Maternal and Child Healthcare Services" *Feminism & Psychology* 24, no. 1 (2014).
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- ²³ Rydström, *Odd Couples*, 165.
- ²⁴ Gunnarsson Payne, "Grammars of Kinship", 24.
- ²⁵ David Eng and Jasbir K. Puar, "Introduction: Left of queer", *Social Text* 38, no. 4 (2020): 3.

²⁶ Kadji Amin, *Disturbing Attachments: Genet, Modern Pederasty, and Queer History* (Durham: Duke University Press 2017): 9.

²⁷ Eng, *Feeling of Kinship*, 4.

²⁸ Puar and Eng, "Introduction", 3.

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