I moderskapets skugga
Berättelser om normativa ideal
och alternativa praktiker

av

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Abstract


This study explores the relationship between ideals of motherhood and heterosexual normativity, from the perspective of women at the margins of these discourses. The title, *In the shadow of Motherhood*, illustrates the overriding power of the image of motherhood to marginalise alternative experiences. The concept of motherhood, like that of Family, has traditionally signalled the reproduction of the normative; it does not usually encompass the critical scrutiny that would allow for diverse experiences of mothering.

Theoretically, the study is located within the fields of feminist sociology and inclusive family studies in productive dialogue with queer notions of gender and sexuality. Methodologically, it is inspired by narrative analysis and consists of in-depth interviews with eight lesbian, bisexual and heterosexual women grappling with different experiences of motherhood and mothering practices. Some of them identify as mothers while others do not, but by not being biogenetic mothers within a heterosexual relationship they share the position of being outside of what is often considered normal, natural and desirable.

The analysis reveals a considerable variation in the positions, experiences and identities of the participants, particularly in regards to changes over time, which cannot be reduced to binary categories such as heterosexual/lesbian, biological/non-biological, mother/childless or voluntary/involuntary childlessness. The analysis also exposes a deep tension between ideologies of motherhood and lived experiences of care practices. Furthermore, from the perspective of the participants, the boundaries between inclusion and exclusion reinforce and challenge each other, creating spaces of both individual and collective resistance. The study illuminates the need to shift the location of these experiences from the margins to the centre not only in sociological research of family and gender, but also within feminist sociology.

*Keywords*: Motherhood, heteronormativity, normative motherhood, mothering, care practices, significant others, feminist sociology, inclusive family studies, queer theory, narrative analysis.

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