



Modern Families: Stories of Extraordinary Journeys to Kinship

Joshua Gamson

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The kinds of families we see today are different than they were even a decade ago, some fantastically so, as paths to parenthood have been rejiggered by technology, activism, and law. In *Modern Families*, Joshua Gamson brings us extraordinary family creation tales—his own included—that illuminate this changing world of contemporary kinship. We meet a child with two mothers, made with one mother's egg and the sperm of a man none of them has ever met and carried by the other mother; another born to a man and a woman in Ethiopia, delivered by his natural grandmother to an orphanage after both his parents died in close succession, and then to the arms of his mother, who is raising him solo. We hear the story of a girl with two dads, conceived with one father's sperm and eggs donated by a friend and carried to term in the womb of another close friend who becomes their surrogate; and of two girls, one born in Nepal and the other in India, legally adopted by a woman who is co-parenting them with her girlfriend and a gay male couple. These are not your grandparents' creation stories.

These tales are deeply personal but also unavoidably political. Combining personal memoir and ethnographic storytelling, *Modern Families* tells a variety of unconventional family-creation tales—adoption and assisted reproduction, gay and straight parents, coupled and single, and multi-parent families—set against the social, legal, and economic contexts in which they were made. In these stories, family creation was painstaking and sometimes difficult. Often, parts of biological reproduction took place in a different body than that of the parents raising the child; sometimes, the model of kinship was made up virtually from scratch, often in tension with legally and socially sanctioned versions of family. Becoming parents involved jumping tremendous hurdles—social conventions, legal and medical institutions—with heightened intention and inventiveness, within and across multiple inequities and privileges. It's a bumpy and potholed landscape, as institutional change lags behind the creativity of everyday living, as breaches of family norms remain controversial, and as inequalities haunt the most intensely loving acts. Yet each of these families, however they came to be, shares the same universal joys that all families share.

Mapping the large, complex terrain of the modern kinship, *Modern Families* presents a personal, intimate account of social change from the inside out.

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