

MOTHER'S DAY SPECIAL

Lotte Jeffs: becoming the ‘other’ mother and being part of a queer family

One of the countless variations of family that doesn't conform to heteronormative expectations

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LOTTE JEFFS

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I may be imagining it, but I think my seven-month-old daughter, Ettie, has started to differentiate between her two mums. She seems to say Mama more around me and Mum when she reaches out to my wife. We were on holiday with two male friends recently and it could be a coincidence, but I definitely heard her experiment with the syllables “Da” and “Da” when they were around. I didn’t mind — I’m secure enough in my role in her life. I’m not the mother who carried her in my womb for nine months, but the mother who carried everything else (and put up the cot, assembled the Bugaboo, memorised the hypnobirthing meditations and so on).

The joy of being a queer family is that we get to make up the rules as we go along and redefine the idea of a nuclear family. I grew up as an only child with my mum and dad and was close to both my parents. After they divorced when I was 23, my relationship with my mum became even closer. I assume Ettie and I will be good friends as she grows up, but as my wife and I at least plan to have more children, her upbringing and bond with both her mums will be different. We chose an anonymous donor, so we wouldn’t have to factor another person into our parenting dynamic, as we felt this is what would work best for us. But there are countless variations when you’re not bound by hetero expectations — a good friend of mine is the donor and “dad” to a lesbian couple’s son. The mums do the majority of childcare, but he visits them every three months and is involved in all the big decisions.



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It was fun hanging out with our male friends on holiday in LA, sitting in restaurants as a foursome, with the baby sucking on a piece of toast in her high chair next to us. We’d watch people visibly readjust their assumptions about who this baby’s parents were, as my wife and I fussed over her and the boys merely nursed their cocktails. Once, as we were getting out of a cab, the driver turned to my wife, who was sitting in the back with the baby, and said: “Tough job being the nanny, love.” I suppose lots of people make the same assumption — that one of us is a friend, sister or hired help — when we are out and about as a family. But as soon as “mum” plants a kiss on the lips of “nanny”, their minds must be blown.

While my wife and I will fulfil different roles for Ettie, which will evolve fluidly as we all grow, being her non-biological mother doesn’t make me the equivalent of a dad — I’m Mama, different from “Mum”, but her mother all the same.

This will be our first Mother’s Day as mothers. Ettie will be burdened with having to get us two separate cards when she gets older — and can they both be to “the best mum in the world”? — but it’s a small price to pay for the love of two mums.