

Queering families: the postmodern partnerships of cisgender women and transgender men

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Abstrak

A feminist sociologist by training, Carla A. Pfeffer studies women whose boyfriends and husbands have not always been recognized as men in the world. The transgender partners of the women Pfeffer interviews often-but not always-take testosterone and/or pursue masculinizing surgeries in order to bring their bodies and others views of them into greater alignment with their identities as men. This, however, may present a unique dilemma for their nontransgender (or cisgender) women partners, many of whom self-identify as lesbian or as queer. The women Pfeffer interviews describe being suddenly perceived as part of an unremarkably heterosexual couple once their transgender partners are recognized by others as men. This may result in social advantages such as inclusion in family gatherings, greater social acceptance by strangers, and the ability to join regulated social institutions. However, these women also describe feeling invisible as they are pushed out of gay and lesbian social spaces and sometimes left unsure of how to describe their own sexual identities and the relationships they have with their transgender partners. In this gripping set of narrative accounts, Pfeffer urges readers to rethink their assumptions about just who and what gets to count as a real family in the 21st century. Moreover, she considers what might be learned through closer attention to (and awareness of) various postmodern reconfigurations of embodiment, families, partnerships, and identity that may bring new meanings to contemporary social life not just for the partners of transgender people, but for everyone.