

The Unexpected Challenge of Parenting in a Queer Relationship

The first time I realised parenting in a queer relationship was going to be (extra) challenging was in a birth class.

The second time I had the realisation, I had just given birth and our minutes old baby was making a beeline for my breast.

After that, it was no longer a realisation but a thought. And one which, on most days, I had multiple times.

It had never occurred to me that biology would be the thing that threatened to sabotage the queer foundations of my relationship.

Biology has never really been a 'thing' in my relationship. My partner and I share clothes and make-up and accessories and, being bisexual, it doesn't really even play a role in the bedroom. If it feels good, we do it.

Unlike in previous relationships I've had with straight men, our focus isn't on getting hard or getting wet or getting anywhere really. It's on experiencing something together — sharing something — wholly and completely.

We hoped that pregnancy and parenthood would be the same.

The biological changes that my body underwent when I was pregnant, and post baby, shouldn't have been a shock to the system, given every woman experiences them and I knew about them prior to being/becoming pregnant.

And they weren't. What they were, however, was a shock to my relationship and the values upon which it is built — in particular the value of equality.

Pregnancy and mental illness

The support I've received since getting pregnant has been wonderful. But confronting. Because up until now most of my doctor's visits were related to my mental health, and they'd played out quite differently, writes Kat Kats.

I remember the first time I felt our baby kick, feeling a deep kind of ecstasy and guilt, simultaneously.

It was by far the most intimate and beautiful thing I'd ever experienced and yet I couldn't share it with my partner.

As joyous a moment as it was, and as understanding a partner as he is, it hurt him.

It hurt both of us because in one moment, one teeny little act had suddenly created an experience that we couldn't share but, more than that, that forced us into very rigid and very non-fluid roles — something we had actively resisted in our relationship.

There's an inherent rigidity to parenthood, and to pregnancy for that matter, that makes it feel all consuming.

It's all those words we hear parents use all the time. Routine. Mundane. Groundhog day. Relentless.

Once baby arrives your life suddenly exists in small compartments that are dictated by your baby's needs and movements: by its ability to sleep and self-soothe; by its biological rhythms and impulses. There's very little wiggle room.

And at the same time, you're completely winging it. It's the most unfree sort of freestyling you'll ever do.

When you become a parent you enter So. Many. Systems. The medical system. Mothers' group. Your baby's intricate system. The maternal child health system. The daycare system. Once they're a little older, the kinder system, then the schooling system.

Life is full of systems, that's true. And systems can be, and are, useful. But they also encourage and promote fixed roles and I think now, in retrospect, that's the challenge I wasn't expecting from parenthood.

My queer, non-binary, feminist brain just wasn't prepared for how many fixed roles there'd be and for how quickly I, and my partner, would be forced to assume them.

Two of my closest friends who are in a same-sex relationship are currently trying to have a baby and so, between us, we've been talking a lot lately about our queer experience of the pregnancy and parenthood journey.

We talk logistics and eco nappy brands and pram covers but the thing we always circle back to is this idea of partnership and how important the idea of equality is to our relationships. In a heterosexual relationship, equality, though it may be recognised as important today, traditionally has not been assumed.

Within a queer relationship, however, equality tends to be the cornerstone of the relationship — something that's been fought really hard for — and so, when that comes under threat, so too do the very foundations of the relationship.

The terrifying thing about this is, is that with pregnancy and parenthood it's not merely the usual social or political culprits that threaten this equality. In addition, it's your very biology — your offspring.

Parenting with PTSD

For Kat, managing her psychological disability is a full-time job. So is parenting her eight-month-old. And making time for both doesn't add up.

In the process of writing this piece I shared some of my thoughts with my obstetrician (who's most wonderful by the way) and she shared her own very sensible, but I thought quite enlightening, observation:

"Same-sex couple, straight couple, single parent, queer — I've had everyone walk through my door. The thing I've noticed is that actually, we all end up dealing with parenthood quite similarly in the end. People end up figuring it out in terms of how it fits into their life."

I like it. I like it a lot. It doesn't completely acknowledge that everyone's experience of parenthood is different — despite us all responding to the experience with similar, if not the exact same tools — but it does acknowledge that actually, there is some sort of an equal ground that we all share, as parents collectively but also within our own relationships.

And that's the chaos and mess and tears and confusion that is a baby/toddler/child/teenager.

Poo, thankfully, doesn't discriminate.