Introducing Professor Kathryn Almack

Sociologist Kathryn Almack is Professor of Health, Young People and Family Lives in the School of Health and Social Work, University of Hertfordshire. Much of Professor Almack’s work is inter-disciplinary across areas including family lives, the life course, gender, sexuality, inequalities, health and illness and health and social care policy. One particular area of her research has been lesbian parent family experiences and recently Professor Almack has been revisiting lesbian parent families she first interviewed nineteen years ago.

Top Ten Take-Aways from Get a Grip Blog with Professor Kathryn Almack

1. Social attitudes do not necessarily change at the same pace as legislation. The British Social Attitudes Survey indicates greater tolerance of same sex relationship and parenthood over the years, although not yet quite as much tolerance for same sex parenting as for same sex relationships.
2. One common experience of lesbian parents is continually being asked intrusive and inappropriate questions by others, such as: ‘Who’s the real mum?’; ‘Are you worried your child will be bullied/turn out gay?’ ‘Which one of you is the Dad?’
3. Same sex parents also can experience not being accepted and of feeling invisible (i.e. not represented in the media or considered in policies or practices).
4. For some lesbian parents some of their family members were disapproving of them becoming parents and they have perhaps had less support from wider family, although in many cases, once the child arrived family members did provide support.
5. For many lesbian parents, they did not become parents by accident and planned for male role models to be in their child’s life such as uncles, grandfathers or male friends.
6. Decades of research shows the outcomes across a wide range of measures are no different for children of same sex parents, some research indicates slightly better outcomes in some measures for children of same sex parents. This may be because of the planning and thought that went into the decision to have children and also due to how many same sex parents anticipate and prepare their children for prejudice or challenges and promote acceptance. Dialogue about feelings and openness in same sex parent families is often very high.
7. As children of same sex parents get older they might want to have more details about their conception, Professor Almack has not yet met or heard of a child conceived through sperm donation who expressed a great feeling of loss around not knowing the sperm donor or expressing a strong desire to meet them unlike some adopted children.
8. In Professor Almack’s experience where separation in same sex parent families occurs, the parents both make an enormous effort to continue to parent well together.
9. Schools and other settings should make sure all children feel included, whatever their family structure. They should avoid making assumptions and think about the wide range of family diversity. Mother’s Day, Father’s Day and at other times it is especially important for us all to remind ourselves of the diversity of family life.
10. No matter the structure of the family, what is most important is that children feel cherished and loved unconditionally. It is the quality of any relationship that matters.
Resources Signposted by Professor Almack

Websites:
www.pinkparents.org.uk
www.rainbowfamilies.org.uk

Books:

More from Professor Kathryn Almack


Also follow Kathryn on Twitter @KathrynAlmack

Website:
http://researchprofiles.herts.ac.uk/portal/en/persons/kathryn-almack(5295f0d4-ec49-4848-b88c-0c44e890803e).html

E-mail: k.almack@herts.ac.uk