

COLUMNIST'S PICK Nick Mattos

When Gay People Get Married: What Happens When Societies Legalize Same-Sex Marriage
by M.V. Lee Badgett

American gay and lesbian couples are following in the footsteps of activists worldwide to work in securing legal recognition of their relationships. What can Americans learn from societies in which the activists have won? Economist M.V. Lee Badgett's new study *When Gay People Get Married: What Happens When Societies Legalize Same-Sex Marriage* seeks to provide an answer, reframing the marriage equality debate to examine both sides from a data-centric, global worldview.

Badgett, well known in academic and literary circles as the foremost economist concerned with GLBT issues, approaches this study with a scientist's precision. However, her steely gaze as an economist reveals

the very human and emotional side of marriage, and her findings are often quite surprising. Particularly intriguing is the author's discovery of a statistical connection between rates of same-sex marriage and the degree to which marriage is considered an outdated, bourgeois institution. In societies in which marriage as an institution is considered somewhat tacky and old-fashioned, more gay and lesbian couples wed.

Badgett also explores the "symbolic violence" of so-called separate-but-equal measures, including domestic partnership. These vignettes are some of the text's few breaks into personal narrative, exploring the stories of numerous couples grappling with the realities of making their relationships official. These scenes illustrate the means by which societies reinforce a sense of second-class citizenship for gay couples, and the ingenuity by which gay couples are able to subvert these efforts through things like bringing friends



and relatives along with them to file partnership paperwork.

One problematic aspect of *When Gay People Get Married* is the heavy reliance upon studies of Dutch couples. In the Netherlands, there are four legal options for recognition of both same- and different-sex couples: "Just about the only way a couple can avoid some degree of legal recognition is to live apart," notes Badgett. This is but one example of the fundamental differences between Dutch and American society that Badgett does not satisfactorily address, potentially giving fuel to arguments refuting her work.

Even with the caveat of context, Badgett succeeds in crafting an accessible work that illuminates the complexity and urgency of the political and social issues of marriage. Evenhanded and rigorously researched, *When Gay People Get Married* may be the book that changes the marriage equality debate as we know it. **JO**

COLUMNIST'S PICK Daniel Borgen

Live Through This
by Debra Gwartney

A well-written memoir doesn't simply offer glimpses into a writer's soul, it fully excavates so you utterly relate, find pieces of yourself. There's something special about gleaning wisdom from another's harrowing real ordeals, and few books affect me the way *Live Through This*, Debra Gwartney's critically acclaimed, searing memoir, did.

Live Through This touches on themes of desperation and despair as Gwartney, an assistant professor of English at Portland State University, relives the slow, steady loss of two runaway daughters. As her story unfolds, she explores her personal culpability; she examines precisely how she helped drive them away and how, eventually, they came back together. Their painful separation resonated with me as a gay man, one locked in perpetual struggles with distance between loved ones and myself.

Recalling challenges she faced while

writing, Gwartney hones in on her particular family dynamic. Her children were understandably nervous about the book, though they offered their support and blessing. "When I finished the manuscript," she says, "I gave it to my daughters to read and we then had several long, difficult, loving, stressful conversations about what was on those pages." She adds, "None of us could have predicted the explosive intensity of the actual publication. In the end, I'm still glad it's in the readers' hands."

As I read and reread *Live Through This*, I drew parallels between our lives. Although I never ran away, I empathized with the alienation permeating the book. Her work presents circumstances to which queers can relate—separation from society at large, and barriers between us and those we love.

Gwartney travels the country speaking with readers, other parents and experts who work with runaway youth, shedding light on the subject. "[Many] kids leave home initially



because of their parents' dismay, disappointment, shock (whatever emotion comes up) over the child's growing awareness of his or her sexuality," she says. "That wasn't my particular intolerance—the tensions between my daughters and me had more to do with going to school, their clothing, their hair, things that now seem superficial but at the time were disturbing to me."

"Other parents have trouble accepting their children as gay," she continues. "Intolerance is intolerance, though, isn't it?"

As we pour through her prose, we see how these breaks with family are terribly sad. *Live Through This* offers hope that everyone can find his or her way back. **JO**

Read the entire interview at www.blogout.justout.com and read more about Gwartney and her book at www.debragwartney.com. To hear a segment that aired on "This American Life" about Gwartney's daughters' experience, go to www.tinyurl.com/gwartneyjo.

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