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# Mary Robertson, *Growing Up Queer: Kids and the Remaking of LBGTQ Identity*. A Review

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Mary Robertson's *Growing up Queer: Kids and the Remaking of LBGTQ Identity*<sup>1</sup> is an analysis of how youth at Spectrum, a drop-in center for queer youths in an urban city in the United States, make meaning of their queer identity. Robertson emphasizes how youth reshape the label of 'queer,' by defining what it means to them, and rejecting specific identity politics. For instance, youth at the drop-in center refuse to identify with what they see as antiquated gender and sexuality binaries. A monumental contribution in Robertson's work is the amount of information on the various ways that youth make meaning in the past and present of their gender and come to terms with their sexuality. Specifically, Robertson's research plays close attention to the role socialization plays in youth's social construction of their gender and sexual identities.

Organized into six chapters, *Growing Up Queer* introduces Spectrum and situates the youth in a frame of resilience in order to argue how the current perception of queer youth is in a "state of crisis." Robertson advocates for queer youth and sheds light on the ways they are a part of social movements. Throughout the text, Robertson discusses different ways the youth at Spectrum experience societal policing of their gender and sexual identities. She identifies the forces of societal policing as whiteness, heteronormativity, and the norms of middle-class ideals. Also, Robertson's study illuminates how the youth from Spectrum disrupt these notions. Another significant discussion in the text is on transgender youth. Robertson's argument situates increased transgender awareness within LBGTQ youth's non-binary and gender fluidity. In order to shed light on this topic, Robertson discusses the different ways the youth at Spectrum resist gender binaries through anti-identification and the remaking of queer identity.

When discussing the present climate, Robertson argues that we are in an extraordinary moment in history because there is an increase of visibility and normalization of queerness. Rather than homing in on where queer desires come from, Robertson focuses explicitly on the way youth develop and associate their desires with queerness. Brilliantly conducted, Robertson uses ethnography, participant observation, and in-depth interviews with youth who identify as queer and who are members of a queer youth drop-in center. Through her research, Robertson—an assistant professor of sociology at California State University who specializes in gender, sexuality, and LBGTQ research topics—secures her status as an expert scholar of Queer Studies.

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Her work with the youth at Spectrum depicts a new generation where queer children have more agency to negotiate their gender and sexuality than previous generations.

One of Robertson's significant findings is that the youth at Spectrum distinguish the difference between gender and sexuality in their queer identities. Through fieldwork at Spectrum, Robertson observes that the youth identify as queer through a gendered lens, rather than a same-sex desire label. However, Robertson's argument lacks an emphasis on intersectionality. While Robertson found the youth to be generally well acquainted with mainstream LBGTQ identity politics, they view these politics as limited to the gay rights movement. In turn, the youth at Spectrum make meaning of the term queer as opposing societal norms within mainstream LBGTQ politics. A noteworthy strength of this text is its definitive guide to comprehending the difference between sexuality, sex, and gender through the eyes of a new generation of queer youth. Robertson distinguishes the differences between these three categories while simultaneously showing how they are interwoven. Her concise, clear distinctions are very timely in today's political climate.

Robertson's observations highlight the social construction of gender and sexuality. Another fundamental strength in this research was her argument that the youth become gendered and explore their sexuality, as opposed to assuming that they already are queer. The youth oppose the assumption by challenging gender norms and ideals surrounding their sexuality. With this lens, Robertson depicts how the youth take control of their agency, and how the center serves as a platform for the youth to socialize and make meaning of their gender and sexual orientations. In addition, she also includes social media in her analysis as a central tool for agency. Robertson's observations highlight the social construction of gender and sexuality.

This book is not without limitations. The sample of participants was racially diverse and had a range of sexual orientations; however, there was a lack of representation of asexuality. Visibility of asexuality is important because it is a valid sexual identity that is often overlooked in Queer Studies. Spreading awareness of asexuality is crucial to the dismantling of the patriarchal society we live in that centers around reproduction—a goal aligned with the overall value of the text. Another limitation consists of geographical influences. While the findings of Robertson's study is monumental to Queer Studies, the findings do not necessarily reflect the experiences of rural queer youth. Future research of queer youth in rural areas is needed to expand on Robertson's work. *Growing Up Queer* is a book that would appeal as an introduction for those interested in Gender, Sexuality, and Queer Studies. It would also be useful for graduate seminars on special topics of gender and sexuality. This is an exemplary book of how to conduct an ethnography and would be instrumental in advanced graduate Qualitative Methodology courses. Lastly, specific chapters of this book can be adopted into undergraduate courses in Sociology of Gender, Introduction to Women and Gender Studies, and Introduction to Queer Studies.

*Notes*

<sup>1</sup> Mary Robertson, *Growing Up Queer: Kids and the Remaking of LGBTQ Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2019).