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Not Gay as in Happy, but Queer as in Fuck You

Notes on Love and Failure in Queer(ing) Kinship

QUEERS AND QUEER theory have had a troubled relationship to both kinship and the theory thereof. To put it crudely, kinship (theory) has disinherited queers in at least two obvious ways. Due to "our" failure to love "the right way" (i.e. to love the opposite sex) queers are pushed out of the heteronormative family fold and due to the seeming failure of "our" romantic love to miraculously turn into offspring, we are deemed as traitors to the future of the race. At the same time, we might argue that "kinship is the imagined site of our most intimate bonds" (Rodríguez 2014, 29) and that as an institution and an ideal, the family remains the site of some of our deepest (sexual) fantasies, as well as our strongest (political) longings for recognition. Some may say that thanks to the victories of LGBTQ rights activism and the recognition that it has brought about, queer love/desire no longer inevitably leads to a loss of family and futurity. That is, unless we wish to argue that queer inevitably means making familial bonds through camp and community or that it relies on replication, recruitment, and righteousness rather than reproduction and assimilation. Indeed, same-sex love is, in some nations and contexts, recognized and assimilated into the ever-expanding "norm" of reproducing the species and the nation. Others might say that this is only the case for those queers who are fetching, fertile, fortunate, and

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forthcoming in their desire for normal. How do queers make kinship in the space between blood, ink, and love and what makes kinship queer?

In an ethnographic research project entitled "Reproducing Queer Futures in Sweden" I am studying how queers understand and make family and futurity at the intersection of utopian imaginaries, legal regulations, and ordinary everyday life. Elizabeth Povinelli has noted that "*who* should be included and excluded from the ranks of blood and money, property and inheritance, love and affection, and sex" (2002, 219), remains a crucial question for the organization of human collectives, and this includes queers. I am interested in the *affective dimensions* of how kinship is defined and practiced and in who is a relative to and among queers over time. While both kinship and the theorization and legalization thereof, is clearly saturated with feeling and affect (think only of expressions such as "love makes a family" or "hate is not a family value"), affect is rarely explicitly placed at the center of our analysis of kinship as a cultural system. Rather, *love* is the taken for granted starting point for family and thus for (queer) futurity. The question of what makes kinship queer is of course a rather complex and open question. Is it kinship between queers? Between those of the same sex? Or is it queer ways of making kinship? What is clear is that neither researchers nor queers themselves always know what they/we mean. My aim in studying affect in what I for the moment will use the umbrella term queer kinship for, is not to point to an exceptional example, but rather, to gain insights into what new family forms, legal changes, and increasing use of reproductive technologies might tell us about broader questions of belonging, race and nation, and futurity. In doing so, I join a growing field of empirical research and extend the work of queer theorists such as Judith Butler (2002), David Eng (2010), Elizabeth Freeman (2007), Lee Edelman (2005), Elizabeth Povinelli (2002), and Juana María Rodríguez (2014) who have returned to kinship and kinship theory for different reasons and with different arguments, but generally with the aim of rethinking gender identity, modes of relationality, intimacy, and what we mean by family and futurity.

This essay[1] offers some preliminary reflections on the idea and experi-

ence of love and failure and it quite literally has its origins in failure. On the threshold of conception; upon receiving the seminal financial contribution needed to support a gestational (research) process, the womb, that is to say, my brain, crashed and resulted in a year with little ability to conceive of thinking about (queer) conception and futurity at all. The failure of a research project's presumed development according to the ideal plan some of us might imagine our "babies" (research) to follow, is of course not unique to me, nor is the failure of lining up on the assembly line of knowledge (re)production. Like children, (research) projects, while future-orientated and products of love often filled with promise, hardly ever turn out the way we, the parents/researchers might hope or want. Queerly enough, outside of (academic) time, a project, much like a dream of family, can grow sideways, to use Kathryn Stockton's (2009) term for a kind of "irregular growth involving odd lingerings, wayward paths, and fertile delays" that seems inherited by the queer child. Growing sideways into literature rather than ethnography, I began to think about failure, not as a stuck place but as a productive point of departure.

Informed by an overwhelming sense of the seeming inevitability of failure in our times, I began surveying the existing literature and quickly became quite struck by the absence of failure as a possibility. Instead, I found a strong tendency in the growing field of research on LGBTQ kinship and reproduction to cast heroic tales of success, resilience and, above all, love in a dark, hostile heteronormative world. Queers, it often seems, are quite extraordinary in their abilities to make babies and kinship in spite of it all. The main obstacles it seems are always (and sometimes only) heteronormative institutions (including one's own family of origin), lack of legal and/or cultural recognition, or lack of access to technologies and those external forces, it seems, press upon intimate life, at times in challenging ways. Through family-making, it seems, gay has become happy. If queer romantic love ends, it is a happy end in friendship and extended family.

I may not have been so struck by this tendency in previous research if I had not simultaneously found myself hearing a rather different set of stories as I began to assemble ethnographic materials. These stories

were not gay as in happy or even hopeful stories where love (and legal recognition) conquers all and queers live happily ever after. They were stories of betrayal, loss, custody battles and arguments over property and childrearing. I call these queer as in "fuck you" stories, which is *not* to say that they are queer in the way of revolting against society's normative structures of family and how they press upon us. Rather they are "fuck you" in the affective, intimate sense; the you who I used to look romantically upon, even fuck and whom I now hate, or at least have intense quarrels with concerning what is in the best interest of the child(ren). Here "fuck you" signals a betrayal, a frustration and above all, it seems to me, a contradiction, a sense where the affective does not quite seem to line up with the political, the ideological, or even the legal. Simply put: stories where queer love fails, ends and where kinship ties are broken or complicated by intense affect. While hate may not be a family value, these stories suggest that it is another form of affective tie, one that is central in making family.

Let me stress that by noting these stories, I do not I wish to discount the political urgency in challenging homophobic ideas that queers (will) corrupt children or question the research that certainly suggests that "the kids are alright," as the Hollywood film featuring two lesbians and their donor-inseminated children puts it. Nor do I wish to ridicule research that suggests that "families of choice" are as un/happy as (if not happier than) those structured by biological bonds. I do not doubt the happiness that queers who have been able to fulfill their family-making dreams feel, or wish to suggest that they do not parent in extraordinary ways. I do, however, wonder about a tendency to view queer and queer love *itself* as exceptional and whether legal and political success may perhaps produce a certain kind of happiness duty (Ahmed 2010) assigned to queers who seek to make family. Such a happiness duty is produced by the internalized expectation that by gaining access to and taking part in that which society deems good, namely marriage and family, or – by rejecting these and inventing one's own rules – queers will become gay as in happy. When things do not turn out the way it was hoped for, when happiness does not happen and queers fail to make each other happy in/through

love, the failure is at once ordinary and double; it is the failure of living both queerly and conventionally. Above all, and against these observations, I wonder if queer family researchers are destined to reproduce a model where we have to protect the fragility of queer life in a heterosexist world, rather than look closely at what stories of failure might teach us?

A decade after the family law changed in Sweden, a law that makes it, at least theoretically, possible for same-sex couples to make families and in practice mostly works for lesbians who wish to inseminate in accordance to state regulations, I want to argue that the time has come to both theoretically and empirically study what I will now call "failure" in love and kinship among queers. I take inspiration from Butler who in an essay on kinship and marriage warns us that if we focus only on those who succeed, "the life of sexuality, kinship, and community that becomes unthinkable within the terms of these norms constitutes the lost horizon of radical sexual politics, and we find our way 'politically' in the wake of the ungrievable" (2002, 40). Making space for grief and failure, and taking cue from Judith Halberstam's contention that "in order to inhabit the bleak territory of failure we sometimes have to write and acknowledge dark histories, histories within which the subject collaborates with rather than always opposes oppressive regimes and dominant ideology" (2011, 23), in this essay I attempt to search for some answers by focusing on what we might see as a particular kind of collaboration; between queers and kinship (theory) based in love. Anticipating (my own) failure in this endeavor, and keeping the effects and temporalities of feelings of failure open, I also ask: Can we account for the failure (of queer kinship) ethically?

Queer Lessons from Kinship Theory

In order to consider what love's got to do with making family in the form of marriage and reproduction, and what to do with its failure, I begin by returning to the sore point of kinship theory. As Lauren Berlant (2012) suggests, our parents are our first examples, and for an anthropologist, an exploration of the role of love within kinship could usefully begin with going back to one's academic roots; in my/this case, to the "father"

of American kinship theory, anthropologist David Schneider and his queer feminist offspring.

In *American Kinship: A Cultural Account* ([1968] 1980) and other works, Schneider challenged the universal significance of Western understandings of bloodlines or biological relatedness as the inevitable foundation of kinship by arguing that "the facts of life" are not universally important but in fact relative and part of a cultural system of symbols. Simply put, Schneider argued that Western models have naturalized sexual reproduction as the origin of kinship. In practice, he showed, kin can and does get made without any biogenetic relationship and those who are biologically related can be denied kinship status. For Schneider, intimacy/love is key to kinship. We can easily see how Schneider has been important to the queering of kinship and to opening up the possibility of other forms of family.

According to Schneider kinship as a symbolic system rests on two orders, "nature" and "law," and requires contrasting but mutually dependent elements, blood (that is, shared biogenetic substance, that between parents and children) and *love* (a code for conduct both legitimating the creation of new blood ties and governing the behavior of those who are related by blood). Schneider called love between blood relations "cognative love" (which is nonsexual, or it is incest and there is a cultural taboo against that) and that between husband and wife (or let us say parents) "conjugal love." Importantly, to Schneider, it is the *symbol* of heterosexual intercourse (which is also implicitly understood as the central manifestation of love) that is central in kinship as it mediates and is mediated by blood and marriage. If both are present, it is clearly "kinship" and can result in what he called "diffuse, enduring solidarity" and if only one is, it may or may not. As anthropologist Corinne Hayden notes, for Schneider "gender roles within kinship are inextricably linked to the act and symbol of sex itself" (1995, 43) and indeed, feminist anthropologists soon pointed to the ways in which Schneider's model *naturalizes*, as in takes for granted, heterosexist power relations and heteronormative gender, including the relationship between gender and kinship terms (see also, Collier and Yanagisako 1987).

On the surface, it may seem as if the practice of same-sex family-making, culturally and/or legally, could fundamentally challenge the idea of sexual reproduction as the foundation of kinship. However, if we consider the idea that *sexual intercourse* as an act and a symbol is what holds kinship together in the context of queer(ing) kinship, something else emerges. This theory of kinship, I argue, is predicated on an assumption of the translation of sex into love, or vice versa; indeed Schneider writes that the core of kinship is that "husband and wife are *lovers* and the child is the *product of their love* as well as the object of their love" (1980, 43). If we say that the very symbol of sexual intercourse is always already dependent upon heterosexuality and gender difference, it may seem that by assuming that, for instance, "husband and husband are lovers" we would queer (our understanding of) kinship. However, if the *symbol* that is the basis for kinship in the Schneiderian sense is in fact that romantic love manifested or translated into sex (or sex into love) and this in turn is what gives rise to the product and object of love, a child, this is not necessarily the case. Here it would rather seem that queer kinship reproduces the hetero-norm insofar as it is *analogous* to heterosexual kinship in terms of its core symbol, love. After all, in order for a non-genetic/non-birth giving parent to adopt a child, they need to be married to the genetic parent and marriage is understood as a symbol of love. The romantically involved couple is presumed to be the basis for reproduction and family-making.

Clearly, both LGBTQ political activism and studies of queer kinship have naturalized the emphasis on love as the foundation of family. In a queer kinship classic, *Families We Choose* (1991) anthropologist Kath Weston argues that the idea that "love makes a family" was the premise of LGBTQ rights to marriage and family in the late 1980s in the United States. "Grounding kinship in love," Weston argues, "de-emphasized distinctions between erotic and non-erotic relations while bringing friends, lovers, and children together under a single concept. As such, love offered a *symbol* well suited to carry the nuances of identity and unity so central to kinship in the United States, yet circumvent the procreative assumption embedded in symbols like heterosexual inter-

course and blood ties." (Weston 1991,107; emphasis mine)

Interestingly, Weston's own work on "families of choice" do not queer the idea that love is central to kinship, even if she centrally challenges both heterosexist understandings of romantic love and the idea that a family needs to include children. Here the queerness of families of choice lies in the idea of opening up a kinship based on love to include the love of friends, exes and lovers; those who are not bound by the conventional understanding of the symbol. Indeed, in Weston's account, the experience of being exiled from the (presumed) unconditional love of families of origin is a central starting point for "families of choice" who are however also founded on love (if not sex). What is less clear in Weston's account is what happens when love ties do *not* transform into enduring bonds over time, when romance does *not* turn into friendship, when friends betray or leave or when sex and love do not follow. In short, the notion of choice in the use of this queer term is always already grounded in choosing love as a symbol and a kind of plot. As Berlant notes, "love plots are marked by a longing for love to have the power to make the loved one transparent, and therefore a safe site on which to place one's own desire without fear of its usual unsettling effects" (2012, 90). By recognizing it as "love," we might say that queer desires, both sexual and familial, become culturally intelligible as symbols in the creation of kinship and family.

That the universality of love understood this way, rather than a queer rethinking of love and desire and its relationship to kinship, has become the taken for granted starting point for LGBTQ kinship is clear from a range of arguments made over the years. The idea that LGBTQ people "have the same human capacity as heterosexual and non-transsexual individuals to fall in love with another person, to establish a long-term emotional and physical relationship with them, and potentially to want to raise children with them. When they choose to do so, they will often want the same opportunities as heterosexual individuals to be treated as a 'couple', as 'spouses', as 'parents', as a 'family'," (Wintemute 2005, 191) is well rehearsed across a range of activist and policy making arenas. Without disputing the idea of equality under the law, we may still ask:

Why is romantic love, translated into long-term emotional relationships and expressed through sex, the route to achieve these rights? Why is romantic love so intimately tied to humanness? And who shall be the judge of what counts as (romantic) love? Invariably, state and cultural recognition invites normative regulation.

What is striking about Weston's and many other recent accounts of LGBTQ family and parenting, both popular and scholarly is the degree to which they are attached to the promise of love "to conquer all." Collapsing sex and (romantic) love, understanding kinship through same-sex marriage and family-making does not disrupt, but rather extend the original model; as a fantasy of "what most people want." Thus, according to this model, if love rights are narrowed down to partnership rights which are inevitably tied to property rights, then if/when love fails, ends, gets betrayed and reworked the law that recognizes us will also protect and keep us in the same fold. Indeed, as queer activists in the United States used to put it: "If you are for gay marriage you also have to be for gay divorce." Even if Katha Pollitt warned long ago that this route "will not only open up to gay men and lesbians whole new vistas of guilt, frustration, claustrophobia, bewilderment, declining self-esteem, unfairness and sorrow, it will offer them the opportunity to prolong this misery by tormenting each other in court" (quoted in Preser 2011, 9), few advocates of marriage and family rights are keen to discuss these matters. Tellingly, Pollitt, being based in the United States where marriage is intimately tied to basic things like access to insurance and wealth rather than to benefits from a (dwindling) welfare state and where its failure secures comfortable middle class lives for millions of divorce lawyers, warns against the costly procedures of court trials because "something about marriage drives a lot of people round the bend" (Preser 2011, 9). Love rights, we might say, include not only security but also the right to proper (costly) procedure when vows are broken and promises fail to deliver.

This may all be good and well, but in terms of theorizing queer kinship, with Berlant we might ask, "what does it mean about love that its expressions tend to be so *conventional*, so bound up in institutions like

marriage and family, property relations, and stock phrases and plots" (2012, 7)? Is (queer) kinship imaginable outside of legal or cultural structures that naturalize love? To be fair, many queers, like Weston, argue that queers divorce better, happier and that exes continue to be part of the "family of choice." Living and researching in queer settings one certainly sees a lot of beautiful examples of happy endings and new family forms of many kinds. In the Swedish context, the failure of marriage and the separation of parents are perhaps even part of ordinariness, and thus not even all that complicated. Yet, I want to argue that in stories I have heard, the end of the romantic love, that gave rise to the yearning for children, can also reconfigure understandings of relatedness and relationships to those children. The ways in which the biological, the legal, the economic, and the affective are entwined and sometimes clash in stories of failure of romantic love, especially that which has resulted in a shared love object (child), are complex and understudied. Returning to Schneider's insights, we might begin to understand why in moments of love's failure the significance of "biological" bonds, including between children (for instance, who have the same donor), seem to gain salience and why social bonds are only intelligible if they are understood as analogous to biological ones.

If, as Schneider and his followers have argued, *duration* is central in the cultural meaning of family, and if a child, following Schneider's understanding, is both the product of love and the object of love for the lovers (formerly) known as partners, we can easily see how legal recognition of parental rights is central for ensuring such duration as a form of every day practice when love/intimacy fails. When sex and/or love, or sex as the metaphor for love and thus family *fail* and leads to divorce and separation, it is the law that ensures that what was once the manifestation or product of love (the child) continues to be equally shared as an object of responsibility and of course, ideally as a shared object of love. Duration is not romantic love, in the sense of desire, cohabitation and/or friendship but rather, *triangulated* through a shared object: the child and the relationship and responsibilities to it. The questions of whether kinship must be constituted through love and a shared love object, the

child and what makes the affective ties to/with children endure when romantic love turns into less pleasurable feelings between parents, and above all, how differently positioned family makers explain and make sense of their relations, remain understudied.

The Failure of Queer Love

If we leave the Schneiderian symbolic structure of kinship and instead consider Butler's (2002) fertile suggestion that when we give up quarreling over whether or not heterosexuality is and should remain the origin of culture (and kinship), we can ask a range of questions pertaining to how kinship, identity, and belonging is practiced within same-sex families, such as: What ideas of love are unconsciously conveyed to and adopted by children, how are origins understood among adopted and donor-conceived children (and their parents, I would add), and what cultural narratives are available for understanding identity? What kinds of ideas of love, space, intimacy, and so on are passed on to children of these brave new families? Studying such questions, I suggest, might help us understand the affective dimensions of kinship beyond those of love. This requires that we consider the uneven temporalities of kinship affects through a (relationship) life course as well as the range of intense affects at work, including romantic and friendly love, (a)sexual desire, their manifestations in and beyond reproduction and the inevitable possibilities of failure and trauma. With Butler, I argue, we can move beyond the question of whether "chosen" families are more complex than or equally (un)happy to heterosexual ones. Placing failure, in the sense of a rupture in spatialized intimate ties at the center, we find a whole range of cultural investments in the very idealization of kinship as constituted through love.

Marilyn Strathern offers us a provocative angle on this. She argues that in our cultural logic, "a child is thought to embody the relationship between its parents and the relationships its parents have with other kin. The child is thus regarded as a social being, and what is reproduced is a set of social relations. At the least, the child reproduces parents' relational capacities in its own future capacity to make relations itself."

(Strathern 1992, 31) If parents, queer or straight, have terrible relations with other kin, if love turns to hate, then what is reproduced by the child? What kinds of relations are understood to be, and actually are reproduced, by a child of a (divorced) same-sex couple? By a child with multiple parents? Divorced parents? A single parent? If we focus on the relational capacities of parents, then this means that the *relations and affects* of and between parents need to be at the center of reconfiguring (queer) kinship. If relations are constituted through acts and if, as Freeman, inspired by Bourdieu argues, "kinship is a set of *acts* that may or may not follow the officially recognized lines of alliance and descent, and that in any case take precedence over the latter in every day life" (2007, 305), we open up for an understanding of kinship that has little to do with love and blood but that nevertheless forces us to consider affective responses and relations. This, I argue, means that both the acts of parents vis-à-vis one another as well as vis-à-vis children would be of interest to the theorist of queer kinship.

We might say that debates over how to organize the joint interest and stakes in the child (always cast as in the best interest of the child, not the parent, even if it is clear that the very failure of the parents to model relationships and love will inevitably imprint *something* on children, even if it is solely the cultural idea that "biological bonds" do not break while romantic ones do), reflect what Povinelli calls a general understanding that "the relationships defined by these parent-child links provide the presuppositional grounds for a number of other social relations, such as property, affect, and ritual" and even that culture itself continues to in many ways be "conceived as an incrustation on the parent-child link" (2002, 225). To what extent does a (queer) kinship that naturalizes (romantic) love as the basis for family (or its disintegration) challenge such an understanding? With Povinelli, a queer question might be to ask, "why are these the grids that appear across such diverse social and geographical spaces in the public struggle for recognition" (2002, 216)? With the arrival of adoption/insemination law, the idea that there are two parents and thus only two recognized as legal guardians of a child, what Povinelli calls the genealogical grid as an organizing feature of the

state's administration of queer subjects, is expanded. A queer kinship based in romantic love that translates into offspring, clearly does not in itself fundamentally challenge the heteronormatively defined core of kinship, rather it analogizes it.

The Failure of (Middle Class) Equality to Transcend Biology

At this point, it needs to be made clear that in order to theorize kinship through failure we must inevitably begin by asking: Failure of what and by whom? Thus far I have largely explored the question of romantic love as the basis of kinship and what happens (to kinship) when it fails. Needless to say, neither sex, nor love, nor (any other) reproductive technologies are transhistorical, given, or guaranteed to transform a dream of futurity and meaning into a child nor does an attempt to procreate guarantee happiness and futurity. When it comes to procreation, failure is a more common outcome and feeling than research in queer kinship studies has thus far alluded to and the literature on reproductive loss among for instance lesbians is limited (Craven and Peel 2014; Walks 2007; 2014). An inventory of queers whose dreams of having children have failed and sometimes, as a result, also their relations could easily chart a trail of tears and reveal a hidden history of failure, not only of the laws to realize dreams but of queer reproduction to transcend heteronormative understandings of gendered parenting.

Think of the failure of changes in adoption law to actually realize or secure the dreams of many gay men to parent insofar as international adoption is heavily regulated, think of the frequent failures of reproductive technologies ranging from IVF to the turkey basters, think of the failure, even of sperm clinics in ensuring that they deliver "the right sperm" (Hudson 2014). Think of the rates of diagnoses of children with special needs, think of the clashes of careers and childcare, think even of the failure to "transcend" the attachments to biology and "who the real parents are." Indeed the list could go on. Perhaps, as a queer family project coordinator suggested in a conversation, in the wake of access to reproductive technologies, dealing with failure has become increasingly difficult and urgent as a research question. Clearly, with the *right* to form

family and the technologies that open up new possibilities, sometimes comes a sense of both pressure and entitlement and thus with a politics of refusal that means that the meaning of the question, "Is having children a right?" has dramatically changed. Of course, we could ask not whether it *is* queer but rather *what* is queer about the insistence on the right to have children? Should children even be a queer project? What happens to different ideas of kinship than those that repeat the ever-expanded genealogical grid and the nuclear model? Indeed, queer(ing) kinship rapidly becomes a riddle of ungrievable and unthinkable dimensions of life that would fall within what Halberstam coins, "the darker territories of failure associated with futurity, sterility, emptiness, loss, negative affects in general, and modes of unbecoming" (2011, 23). Stories of (reproductive) failure in queer contexts are those where dreams fail, where futurity does not include children, or where negative affects around the reality of having children are made central. Can such failures be understood in kinship terms, as acts, relations and inheritances?

Looking at the question of failure more locally and within the speculatory premise of this essay, the growing number of (unhappy) divorce/separation stories I have encountered suggests that the failure of (romantic) love is at times intimately tied to the pressures of living up to certain kinds of (queer) ideals. Among the urban lower middle to upper middle class LGBTQ families that I know and study, family-making is commonly understood as a given purpose of life (what makes us human is the desire to have children) or as a radical act (to parent otherwise). Quite frequently queers pride themselves of being open-minded, inclusive, and aware. At times arguments for having children invoke what might be called a "therapeutic" model, that is a desire to parent motivated by a wish to be "better" parents than they themselves had. This desire is of course not unique to queers but the focus of such desires are likely to be the effect of a particular set of unhappy childhood memories tied to queerness. If parents were homophobic or gender normative, then queers will not be. If parents were ashamed of their queer children, gay parents will not be. If parents had an unequal and gendered division of labor, queers will not have. In short, these parents will be better at lov-

ing their children, reproduce better capacities to love and to make relations. Bearing Strathern in mind, what happens if such a promise fails?

A health care professional with whom I discussed my research and who works primarily with white middle class lesbians, most of whom are equipped with feminist and queer ideals, explained that no children are better dressed, no families have more well-organized homes and well-rounded activities for their children than those headed by LGBTQ_ people. This points to how ideals of queer family-making and reproduction often reflect, require, or lead to, middle class integration. This is of course not surprising as such. As Eng has argued, "for white middle class subjects in the era of late capitalism, the position of parent has become increasingly a measure of value, self-worth, and 'completion.'" Furthermore, he contends, "the possession of a child, whether biological or adopted, has today become the sign of guarantee not only for family but also for full and robust citizenship" (Eng 2000, 7). In urban Sweden, white middle class gays and lesbians through their deep financial, emotional, and ideological investments in family-making have more in common with other middle class subjects than they do with other "marginalized" groups, including gender queers, racialized others and sexual deviants who are forced to reside in the margins of capitalist societies. Freeman even argues that, "'chosen family' is a peculiarly queer-unfriendly model, however friendly it may be to bourgeois lesbians and gays, for it presumes a range of economic, racial, gender, and national privileges to which many sexual dissidents do not have access – often by virtue of their sexual dissidence itself" (2007, 304). It is worth bearing in mind Eng's contention that, "the desire for parenthood as economic entitlement and legal right […] seems to stem in large part from an unexamined belief in the traditional ideals of the nuclear family as the primary contemporary measure of social respectability and value" (2010, 8). Halberstam (2005) has called the temporal logic in which queers become assimilated into family life "reproductive time" and Lisa Duggan (2003) has called it "homonormativity." It seems that to queer kinship, including among queers in late capitalism, we must address the affective dimensions of these processes and also what Ahmed (2010) has called

the promise of happiness as an individual project that can also become an obligation and thus its inevitable ties to love as the premise of reproduction. Furthermore, the particular form of failure of romantic love that results in financially and emotionally costly quarrels over shared (love) objects and other belongings must be examined in their class-specificity.

On this point, it is interesting to note that existing research on lesbian family-making, both in Sweden and internationally, shows that the "goodness" of lesbian and gay parenting (despite a presumed absence of a "role-model" or knowledge of/relationship to the other contributor of genetic material) often hinges on an assumption about equality as either inevitable once you are outside of the heterosexual structure of the nuclear family, or as at least a desired norm and aspiration. (Gender) equality, in the context of Sweden, is in many ways a middle class ideal (Dahl 2005) and an ideological question more than a material one. Centrally, true equality between queer adults/parents is often understood in terms of stressing the equal significance of both (or all) parents to the child that in turn often hinges on a denial of any significance of blood relatedness.

Let me give an example from a comprehensive and pioneering study of Swedish lesbian families. Through qualitative research, Anna Malmqvist (2014, 6–7) shows that equality is an important value in lesbian family-making and she identifies what she calls three equality scenarios among her informants, all of which interestingly pivot around the role of *biology and love* in the triangulation of parents/lovers and child. Differently put, they pivot around the degree to which the birth giving parent takes on the heteronormative role of "woman"/mother. In the first, equality between lesbian parents is understood to come naturally or without effort and this is understood to be a result of making no distinction between the two parents in terms of their (genetic) relationship to the child. In the second, "conflict marks the struggle for equality" but it remains a goal that can be achieved. In the third, equality is difficult to obtain and here biology (birth vs. social motherhood) is understood to explain what often resembles a heteronormative division of labor between man and woman within a family.

Malmqvist's work shows how to many lesbians the realization that parenthood is not equal between the parent that gives birth and others, neither in the eyes of society nor to the child, comes as a surprise. Indeed, as one of her informants say, "maybe you think you're immune to certain problems, but in the end it doesn't matter that much that you are two women" (Malmqvist 2014, 7). Here the failure to be immune to cultural conceptions of biology, and to some extent its cultural translation into (affective) divisions of labor, becomes a failure of (lesbian) equality to transcend difference. In contrast to research on equality in heterosexual couples, however, Malmqvist suggests that for lesbians, "when equality is idealized, the idealization empowers the dissatisfied parent to challenge her partner" (2014, 7), implicitly suggesting that lesbians *do* arrive at equality. Malmqvist's conclusion regarding differential parental roles is that "having the view that biology is important seems to correspond to a nurturing practice that, in turn, strengthens the birth mother's relationship with the child, so that one could argue that the ideology is self-fulfilling for those who draw on a *biologistic* repertoire" (2014, 9; emphasis mine). In emphasizing "biologism" as an explanatory framework that organizes behavior, Malmqvist's social constructivist argument here closely resembles that of most gender researchers, namely that biology is not a "truth" but rather dangerous, essentialist ideology that should be fought and transcended in order to obtain equality. Equality in parenthood and thus, relationships, requires the denial of "biological" bonds, a rejection of a "biologistic repertoire."

If we consider the weight of kinship theory and how it seeks to resolve the conundrum of the diverse meanings of blood, descent, and love, we may arrive at a more complex understanding of *how* it is that the *symbol of love*, manifested in coupledom, conjures up so much meaning and affect and thus lead to a sense of failure in overcoming the significance of blood. In a groundbreaking article on genes, gender, and generation published nearly twenty years ago, Hayden built on Schneider in an analysis of lesbian family-making through insemination and argued against the idea, suggested by Weston's work, that queer kinship renders biological ties obsolete. Hayden stressed that even if the insemination

model was by no means "representative" of gay and lesbian kinship in the United States at the time, it was noteworthy that "biology is made both explicit and mutable in these visions of a distinct family configuration" (1995, 42). I agree with Hayden that "lesbian kinship provide important grounds on which to theorize biology as a symbol that is continually refigured within the field of kinship" (1995, 44). Indeed, as she states, "the creative lengths to which many lesbian mothers go to inscribe their families with genetic continuity speak eloquently to the tremendous, continued salience of biological relatedness" (Hayden 1995, 54).

Twenty years later it is clear that lesbian families via donor insemination has become *the most common model* of nonheterosexual family-making, if not queer kinship, in Sweden and other places. Following an intense discussion over the need for "role models" and the status of known/unknown donors, access to insemination has been possible for married and co-habiting same-sex couples under a certain age for some time.[2] The couple norm now trumps heterosexuality; with single motherhood still under suspicion. Due to the continued emphasis on parenthood as heteronormatively gendered and due to the affective cultural investments in mothers, we could argue that lesbian family-making is in many respects the only culturally intelligible model in its combination of biological and social parenthood regulated through marriage. Symptomatically, almost all research on LGBTQ families in the Swedish context is based on this model and for good reason; it remains challenging to conceive of family otherwise, legal changes not withstanding and even finding other models is empirically challenging. Given this and what kinship theory teaches us about love and blood, law and nature, we could ask: Why does it come as a surprise, to both lesbians and those who research them, that it matters in kin relations who carries the child? Why is this understood as a failure of transcending "biologism"?

Hayden's argument that through the use of biological substances among lesbians, the social mother can be understood as having a *kinetic* relationship to the child, takes us down a different line. Hayden proposes that the social mother can be symbolically understood as the one who "places a substance in motion" (1995, 52), and also the one who ap-

propriates the generative power – which is the realm of male authorship, symbolizing the image of agency and biological creativity – associated with paternity. Social motherhood, Hayden argues, is not about becoming or representing maleness, but about *recognition* within a model that disperses "genetic" relatedness across several parents, and I would add, continues to require a womb somewhere. On a symbolic level, the "uncertainty" inherent in paternity with regards to its role in conception (after all, the fetus gestates in one body), and that always haunts heterosexual reproduction, might become embodied by the social mother. Understood this way, the "failure" to transcend heterosexism in terms of division of (affective) labor, as well as the failure to embody "equality" could be understood differently. Perhaps lesbian motherhood through insemination thus succeeds at reproducing the very same kinship model that produces equality as always already a failure of an ideal (Dahl 2005).

A project that places failure at the center of queer kinship can usefully challenge the idea of equality as obtainable through same-sex relations. In doing so, it might take its cue from Rodríguez who notes that "as in all other areas of queer life, racial and class differences abound, and the inequalities they reveal are illuminated through an analysis of family and kinship" (2014, 37). When tales of lost love or failed equality reflect the impossibility of making family in other ways than those concerned with the child or spouse as property or genetic relation, has queer kinship failed to be queer? Rodríguez (2014) reminds us that there is a difference between the right to *form* family and the existence of children in queer relationships; the latter of which may not be predicated on the same utopian ideals. As Rodríguez argues, there is a disconnect between the idea of the white middle class gay family as that which drives a lot of LGBTQ politics and the reality of a lot of queer people of color raising kids, and my preliminary research supports that similar trends exist in Sweden. Indeed, as Rodríguez argues and as the tragic case of the "failure" of white reproduction, that the case of the white lesbian couple with a brown child through "mistake" (see Hudson 2014) that has recently circulated, suggests, "in biological reproduction, race – whether it be daddy's blue eyes or mommy's red hair – becomes part of what is

reproduced and fetishized, and it is this racialized sameness, named and recognized through phenotypic similarities, that is most often used to recognize our status as parents, conforming the project of racial and national reproduction" (Rodríguez 2014, 44). What is reproduced when queers reproduce national ideals of gender equality?

The Ethics of Studying Failure?

This somewhat polemical essay has raised more questions than it has offered answers. Chances are that some readers are affected as in provoked by this approach. Let me thus in closing stress that I offer this not only as a meditation on failure, but rather that I am pregnant with hopes and fears. However, in considering contemporary reproductive and other family-making practices among queers, I wish to do more than study (and defend) my own community (Dahl 2011) and insist on kinship (more precisely: sisterhood, not to be conflated with cis-terhood, as in sisterhood between cis-women) with my research subjects. I want to also dare to travel in the register of criticality, even with regards to ideas, political projects, and people that I love; precisely because I have stakes in the futurity of queerness, however we define it.

It is true that as myself a post-fertile end limb of a biological family tree my own biological clock is lacking more than my breasts are leaking. Given the affective investments in family and reproduction there are inevitably those who may wish to extend the family line of standpoint theorizing and who may have already deemed me unfit for belonging or to study queer desires to procreate; because how could I possibly know what it *feels like*? Yet, as a barren dyke academic and fairy goddess bitch to half a dozen kidlets, whose parents I also have relationships with, I *do* include myself in a legacy called "we are family" and I remain affected by the effects *and* affects of (queer) kinship practices among colleagues and kin, friends and lovers. I depart from a position of enmeshment in the queer complexities of love and failure and seek to practice what anthropologist Danilyn Rutherford has called a mode of "kinky empiricism." Such an approach "deploys methods that create obligations, obligations that compel those who seek knowledge to put themselves on the line by

making truth claims that they know will intervene within the settings and among the people they describe" (Rutherford 2012, 465). This approach is an intervention, but it is one that also comes with obligations and I suggest that an ethics of accounting for failure could start there.

In other words, my interest in divorce, rupture, and the "failure" of (queer) love is not primarily driven by a desire to be a queer family killjoy or to simply keep up with theoretical trends that following Halberstam (2011) would suggest that failure itself can be understood queerly, as a particular mode of militant, political sensibility. This is partly due to the failure of failure to be queer in the context of my research. Yet, as I have alluded to in this essay, there are a range of reasons for why we might want to theorize failure and loss as not the exception but rather something common with regards to queer love and family dreams.

The question is in fact rather simple: When *love,* defined as the love of friends or lovers, is the affective glue of (families of) choice, how do we explain and account for failures in friendship and love? Most of us know that loss, rupture, and break-ups are as much part of the story of love as happiness and success. As I have indicated, my research thus far suggests that tying the knot or having children is no guarantee to make love last even if it certainly makes ties bind. This hardly comes as a surprise, and yet, it seems that if Weston's (1991) classic account remains the origin story of how queer kinship as families of choice is imagined as robust and meaningful, most work that has followed has said very little about failure and loss within queer kinship itself. I am wondering if the political need to insist on queer love being good love has made for reluctance against addressing this topic.

Jens Rydström (2011) notes that following the marriage boom that came from the change in partnership/marriage law in Sweden in the late 1990s, divorce rates are now high among same-sex couples. The virtual baby boom that has erupted across Sweden since the early 2000s has mostly involved lesbian couples, since adoption of other children than those birthed by a partner has proven to be challenging in practice. While before the law changed, making family involved costly international reproductive travels to insemination clinics or to the homes of

friends, the possibility of accessing donor sperm via the welfare state, has made lesbians less interested in involving additional parents. Has queer kinship failed to become or remain queer? In many instances, LGBTQ families have contracts that far exceed those of even the most propertied of straight couples in their attempts to predict failure and loss and to secure their own connection to the child. Like wills, such documents are significant artifacts in the materialization and maintenance of relations. As I argued above, they may ensure *duration* of relations between family members, but they tell us very little about affective ties and kinship acts.

While the growing and rich tradition of empirical scholarship that highlights the successes of LGBTQ parenting and its ways of reworking kinship down to the level of oedipal dramas and processes of subjectification may be cause for political celebration (lower levels of child abuse, high levels of tolerance of gender and sexual variance, deep engagements of parents in the lives of children, and so on), I want to argue that the breakdown of love, perhaps in its ordinariness, may tell us more about the affective dimensions of kinship, about understandings of futurity and duration, about ideas of belonging.

Politically, we could argue that access to a specific and highly regulated range of reproductive options and to legal recognition of relationships and parents, also forces people increasingly into conventional relationships, and thus that for nonheterosexual families failure also comes at a much higher cost in a heteronormative world that already does not understand your family. Certainly, we could turn to research on divorce and to the discourse on happy endings, or to a range of work that addresses the reality, rather than the ideal, of family-making and indeed, this field is broad and complex. But if our concern is the relationship between queer and kinship, in theory and practice, we may need to ask different questions.

As Freeman has put it, "the crux of the issue for queer theory might be this: What would it mean to 'do kinship'? How could that be separated from heteroprocreation without losing sex, eroticism, and other bodily modes of belonging, exchange, and attachment?" (2007, 305)

This is a provocative and interesting question both politically and intellectually, but on an affective level; it seems to me that failure at being *queer enough* is also a possibility. I think we need to study and argue for not only the normality and frequency of gay parenting and family forms or the *potentialities* of queers making family otherwise, but also what stories of heartbreaking ruptures in the imagination of love as the ground for queer futurity through reproduction have to offer not just for therapy, but also for theory. As Halberstam argues, "while failure certainly comes accompanied by a host of negative affects, such as disappointment, disillusionment, and despair, it also provides the opportunity to use those negative affects to poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life" (2011, 3). As such, failure also "allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development with the goal of delivering us from unruly childhoods to orderly and predictable adulthoods" (Halberstam 2011, 3).

As the numbers of gays and lesbians who make families grow, it seems that those who "recruit" and insist on the importance of lovers and friends as part of an ever expanding family of choice or a community and those who procreate with the use of reproductive technologies and legal arrangements expand the genealogical grid rather than make a radical break from it. The question of "who" to include and on what grounds remains central not only for the organization of nations, communities, and kinship, but for the success and failure of what is variably called rainbow, chosen, or queer families as they are constructed at the intersection of the biological, the legal, the cultural, and the affective. Staying with the trouble of the confrontational dimension of queer thinking may prove to be a failure, but I want to keep considering not what gay as in happy (endings), but rather what queer as in fuck you who I am no longer making love, sex, and family *with* tells us about understandings of relatedness, biology, and kinship practice. I do so inspired by the late José Esteban Muñoz (2009) who proposed that queer is the not yet, the ephemeral potential of our aspirations and dis-identifications, and if that is the case, it is not so much that queer kinship has no future (Edelman 2005), but perhaps instead that it remains the site of our most utopian longings.

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NOTES

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2. The age limit varies between countries, and in the case of Sweden, can also vary between different counties. Generally, women over 40 cannot expect insemination or access to other assisted reproduction technologies, and the age cap for using frozen eggs are 45 (SKL 2014).