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Introduction

Queering Intimacies, Families and Companionships

THE AIM OF this special issue is to provide diverse perspectives on queer intimacies, families and companionships. By shifting away from familiar logics of understanding LGBTQIA+ families and intimacies – as aligning with or transgressing dominant norms of intimacy – this special issue offers novel ways of inquiring into queer relating, both theoretically and thematically. We ask what queer intimacies, families and companionships are emerging and imagined now in the Nordic context and beyond. Importantly, we also inquire into what happens when we take queer explorations in this field beyond the established terrains. In our call for papers, we did not want to limit the kinds of intimacies to be explored as queer or be relevant to LGBTQIA+ people. We chose to have all the three concepts in our title (intimacies, families and companionships) in order to invite contributors to address various queer forms of relating that are not restricted to human relationships, normative forms of kinship or existing heteronormative forms such as the nuclear family.

As anthropological, sociological, feminist and queer studies of kinship and family have consistently argued, there are many challenges in theorizing and researching the range of relationships encompassed under umbrella terms such as ‘kin’ and ‘family’. A key challenge such terms present is that they are deeply imbued with normative cultural and ideological assumptions about what they mean and what they should

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be. These assumptions have centered on Western, white, middle-class experience and are heteronormative, as queer and family theorists have argued (e.g. Dahl 2023; Povinelli 2013; May 2024; Riggs & Peel 2016). It is even difficult to talk about family and kin without stumbling into these assumptions – including the notion of ‘chosen family’ (Weston 1991, 1995, 1998; Weeks, Heaphy & Donovan 2001). Even within the term ‘chosen family’, the notion of LGBTQIA+ family increasingly carries the connotation that family denotes adults with offspring. Hence, we added intimacies, which may provide for more open and wide-ranging conceptualizations of relating. The concept of companionship (Lykke 2018) extends to more-than-human intimacies and can better grasp the multiple intimacies that are not captured by the current vocabularies. At the same time, we are aware that these conceptualizations may also have limitations, but in this special issue we seek to open up new horizons on the study of contemporary everyday lived intimacies, cultural understandings and societal framings.

The starting point for this special issue was the working group *Parisubdenormista moninaisuuteen* (From Couple Normativity to Diversity) organized by Anukka Lahti (University of Eastern Finland) and Pauliina Lukinmaa (University of Eastern Finland) at the Finnish Conference of Cultural Studies in Joensuu, December 2021. After hearing the inspiring presentations on wide-ranging themes and theoretical innovations, Lahti and Lukinmaa decided to launch a call for contributions to a special issue with a broader scope and proposed this to *lambda nordica* with the title “Queering intimacies, families and companionships”. At this point Gender Studies Professor Jaana Vuori (University of Eastern Finland) joined the team. In summer 2022 we organized a workshop for prospective authors and invited Professor Kathryn Almack (University of Hertfordshire) to give a keynote speech about her groundbreaking longitudinal research in lesbian parented families and subsequently to join the editorial team. The event was organized as a two-day workshop where the keynote speaker, organizers and fellow participants commented on papers discussing each other’s work in progress.

Our call for papers invited a critical analysis of the normative forms of intimate monogamous coupledness – and its centrality in what Rubin (1984) called a hierarchical system of sexual value, operating in contemporary Western societies. The critique of normative forms of intimacy has been a central premise of queer theory. The more recent shifts toward legal recognition of same-sex couple relationships (civil partnerships and same-sex marriage) make interrogating the relationship between the normative and the transgressive more complex (Lahti 2015; Wiegman & Wilson 2015). The LGBTQIA+ movements' recent concentration on marriage and family rights has been critiqued as homonormativity that reflects (hetero)normative reproduction in society instead of calling it into question (Edenheim 2019). Thus, it has been suggested that it might be fruitful to look for queer potential elsewhere (Björklund 2018; Björklund & Dahl 2019). Yet, we stress that it is important to pose our questions about queering intimacies, families and companionships in ways that allow us to go beyond stabilizing notions of queer, such as labeling some forms of intimacies as queer and others as non-queer, as heteronormative or nonnormative (Osella 2019).

Further, queering intimacies, families, and companionships does not only mean rethinking the new conceptual categories and forms of human relationships within and beyond institutional, legal and conventional frames (Kolehmainen, Lahti & Lahad 2022). As intimacies, families and companionships always emerge through complex realities, they cannot be reduced to given categorizations of sexualities, genders and relationships. Rather, intimacies always emerge as multi-faceted processes in relational networks that are entangled with discursive, material, natural, cultural and social elements (Kolehmainen et al. 2022; Lahti & Kolehmainen 2020; Lukinmaa 2024). A posthuman focus on entanglements of human and nonhuman agencies can also expand the conventional understanding of queer as non-normativity in human sexuality, pushing us to ask how intimacies, families and companionships might be queered when nonhuman agencies and potentialities are taken into account (see Luciano & Chen 2016).

We bring together scholars from Finland, Poland and England in six

groundbreaking articles and one essay, which share common ground in decentering the couple and the sexual at the heart of queer kinship and families. The contributors develop new analytical tools to grasp multiple ways of emerging queer intimacies, families and companionships. This collection recognizes the diversity of contemporary queer relationships and offers both challenges to and new directions beyond the familiar ways of theorizing and conceptualizing queer relating.

We start with an article by Tuuli Innola, “Co-Becomings of Companionships: Affective Negotiations With the Couple-Form”, which opens up discussions on important life companion(s), such as friends, flat mates, animal companions and ex-partners. Inspired by posthumanist and feminist new materialist thinking, Innola argues that the normativity of the couple-form emerges through affective tensions that may limit the possibilities of co-becomings, for example by troubling the processes of “making sense” of the intimacies. Through this lens, Innola presents an understanding of companionships as dynamic and situated processes which refrain from becoming static. In this process, new ways of relating are made and imagined; co-becomings that include the potential to move away from the normative power of the couple-form and materialize in unexpected ways. She argues that knowledge production as agency is embedded, interconnected and dynamic; a relational process unfolding through situated connections, never settling with ready and closed conclusions.

Joe Jukes follows the theme of comprehending worlds outside the normative imaginary in their article “Just Good Friends: Queer Platonics, Pleasures and Friend-er Trouble in Gurinder Chadha’s *Bend It Like Beckham*”. This article revisits and brings a queer lens to the intimacies and companionships portrayed in Gurinder Chadha’s 2002 film *Bend It Like Beckham*. Jukes’ main argument is that a focus on platonic-but-queer relations opens new lines of inquiry that go beyond the limits of compulsory sexuality. They trace how the film is suffused with queer nonsexual intimacies as well as the portrayal of how the main characters negotiate and trouble the gendered and sexual expectations put upon them by society or family (and football). They invite the reader

to consider how platonic bonds can encompass queer orientations and troubling pleasures. In this endeavor, they are interested in the rise of the terminology of asexuality and the applicability of other-than-sexual understandings of relationships. Through a reading of the friendships in the film, Jukes shows how the queerness of one intimacy or companionship can trouble multiple affective realms. They highlight how assemblages of feelings are composed partly, and importantly, by non-sexual relations and bonds, not just between two parties or friends but also in larger conventions such as the family, including heteronormative forms of assimilatory pressure, which fall disproportionately on the film's South Asian female characters.

Laura Mankki's article "Infrastructures of Migrant Intimacies: Co-Becoming with Housing, People and Places" brings attention to other "affective infrastructures" in her discussion of migrant intimacies. By paying attention to places, housing, feelings and different environments as infrastructures of intimacies, Mankki shows how intimacies emerge as intra-actions of the human and more-than-human. Mankki draws on posthumanist queer thinking to develop a notion of the infrastructure of migrant intimacies, and uses this to compile a picture of migrants' relations that goes beyond normative categories of intimacy. There is some resonance here with Innola's consideration of relationships other than couples. Mankki explores the nuanced connections between intimacies and infrastructures as well as the racialized, classed, global and economic processes involved. Mankki argues that migrants' relations emerge in intra-action with various human and nonhuman elements: housing, people and places as creative, temporary and ambivalent co-becomings of intimacies. Finally, she highlights that it is not her intention to queer her participants but rather, by applying queer theory, she seeks to make visible, unsettle, and rethink migrant intimacies beyond (hetero)normative ideas.

Nita Taivaloja and Varpu Alasuutari's article "Queering Coupledness? Consensual Non-Monogamies in Finnish Online News 2017–2021" maps the ways in which Finnish online media, as an institutional context, shapes and regulates the knowledge, attitudes and understanding

of mono- and couple normativities. Using critical social psychology to analyze the profiles of the people in consensual non-monogamic (CNM) relationships that the five most popular online media provide, Taivaloja and Alasuutari suggest that despite the recent growing media visibility of consensual nonmonogamy, its representations have stayed vague. While CNM relationships are constructed as both valid and beneficial for some, their representation reflects the tendency to rely on the norms of mono- and couple normativities. Thus, Taivaloja and Alasuutari show that Finnish online media provides an ambivalent representation of CNM relationships by both reproducing and deconstructing normative ideas about intimacy. They suggest that there is a growing need to explore the everyday logic of CNM relationships in both research and the media.

Agata Stasińska picks up on this need to explore CNM relationship and decenters the couple in her article “Toward a Multidimensional Approach to Researching (Non)Monogamy in Non-Heterosexual Relationships”. Stasińska employs extensive ethnographic participatory observation and in-depth interviews in Poland, where she was inspired to study nonmonogamy when the topic was raised by participants in her research. In their statements and life narratives, the participants depicted monogamy and non-monogamy as relational choices in a process of navigating between norms and reflections. Stasińska highlights how non-heterosexual couples navigate their relationships drawing on discourses of monogamy and nonmonogamy, both reacting to and resisting Poland’s conservative social norms and sexual policies. Stasińska’s article addresses the need for more nuanced understandings of (non)monogamous choices within non-heterosexual relationships, filling critical gaps in the existing literature on intimate relationships as well as geographies of sexualities and intimacies. In this way, Stasińska offers a significant introduction to develop multidimensional understandings of (non)monogamy and its complexities.

Sonja Anttila, Päivi Palojoki, Jaana Vuori & Hille Janhonen-Abruquah in their article “The Significance of Inner Circle Support for Prospective Parents in LGBTQ Family Formation Processes” seek to decenter the couple at the heart of a rainbow family but also to disrupt

the idea of parents and their children as separate from other relationships around them. The authors consider the role of close relations and forms of support that the prospective parents of LGBTQ families look for and receive in Finland. They also identify the theoretical potential in moving away from the normative discourses of the couple in unexpected ways. They propose a new concept of inner circle relations to scrutinize the negotiated, complex, diverse levels of relations between families and their support networks. They illustrate the multiplicity of connections that LGBTQ families draw upon, including friends, neighbors, people from different generations (including members of their families of origin), to receive emotional, instrumental, financial, informational and appraisal support.

Anna Heinonen's essay "Queering Intimacies at Home: Friendship and Roommate Relations in Finnish Small-Scale Communes"¹ explores the ways in which small-scale communes – living with friends and roommates by one's own choice – reveal both ordinary and unordinary aspects of relationships and households. Taking the home into account as an integral part of the relationships, Heinonen explores how material dwellings participate in shaping and reproducing communal relationships. The article challenges the accustomed logics that frame family households as normative and more permanent, and communal living as belonging to transitional and temporary phases of youth and singlehood. Combining interviews and ethnographic fieldwork conducted in communes in Finland, Heinonen delves into their relational life. She analyzes how intimacy emerges in small-scale communes and how temporal orders of communal living are experienced. Heinonen explores the embodied and haptic aspects of orientations of making meaning in communal spaces. Drawing on queer theory, Heinonen identifies how through the meaning-making and drawing boundaries, the research participants form and define their relationships in a web of relations organically offered by living together in a small-scale commune. The research discloses the radical potential of communal living and highlights participants' ongoing navigation of who can live together, how care can be reorganized, and what trajectories life can take.

The diversity of research into LGBTQIA+ families challenging concepts of family and kin

As our summary of articles demonstrates, this special issue both builds on existing research on queer kinship and families and takes it into new terrains (see Björklund & Dahl 2019; Dahl & Gunnarson-Payne 2014). In the first two decades of the twenty-first century, LGBTQIA+ people's relationships and families have finally gained some social acceptance and legal recognition in many countries. New reproductive technologies and adoptions enabled some LGBTQIA+ people to form new kinds of families with children. There was also an "explosion of research on LGBTQIA+ families, reproduction, and kinship both in and beyond the Nordic region" (Björklund & Dahl 2019, 7). During this historical shift, queer desire was often made intelligible through LGBTQIA+ couple relationships and families with children, especially in the public domain (Butler 2004; Lahti 2015; Warner 2000). Researchers often concentrated on the 'doing' of these families (Morgan 2011; see also Takács & Kuhar 2011) and the social, structural and legal means of building these partnerships and queer parenthood (Heaphy et al. 2013; Moring 2013; Mizilińska et al. 2015; Rydström 2011).

Even today, it is a challenge to find spaces within which to confront and renegotiate the dominant norms, modes and language of family, kin and parenthood (Wahlström Henriksson & Goedecke 2022). In particular, given the socially constructed nature of children's needs, there has been little moral space to radicalize parenthood (Almack 2006; see also Vuori 2001). The language to theorize and explain alternative models of family remains limited. Moreover, many LGBTQIA+ people continue to choose to live childfree or to live intimate lives that are not arranged so centrally around monogamous couple relationships (Clarke 2018). To imagine intimate lives beyond (nuclear) families, we need to consider other close relations such as siblings, neighbors, cousins, in-laws, and caregivers (Eldén 2024).

Indeed, anthropological, sociological, feminist and queer studies on kinship and family have long been problematizing that there is any given core for family and kin relations. Families in different contexts

are very diverse, and relatedness is not necessarily biologically given. In addition, the significance of family and kin relations varies for different people and groups (e.g. Weston 1998; Carsten 2000, 2004; May 2024). The development of different analytical perspectives, points of focus and study approaches helps scholars to recognize the multiplicity and complexity of queer kinship and family and to identify a variety of objectives, questions and strategies for research.

First, they can be studied as how they are done or practiced in everyday lives of people. Family studies has seen a shift from theorizing what family is or should be to how it is done in people's everyday lives and relations (Morgan 2011; May 2024, 32–34). A second option is to study how different people live and experience intimacy, family and companionship, including how they identify themselves as members of some constellation. Affective and emotional ties are important here – but it should be kept in mind that family studies have overstated positive affects such as love and underestimated negative aspects of family life and kinship (Edwards & Strathern 2000). For example, queer people might get support as a happily married same-sex couple, and yet be dismissed or not taken seriously in their grief over a failed relationship (Lahti & Kolehmainen 2020; Lahti forthcoming). The third perspective is to consider how families, kin, intimacies or companionships are culturally imagined, understood and represented. The fourth approach is to study how intimacies are institutionally and legally framed and governed (e.g. May 2024, 45–72).

In addition to these four aspects, families, kin, intimacies and companionships can be studied in different dimensions. These dimensions include material and economic frames and the division of labor between different actors. Who does what in the household and how the household economy is structured is one aspect here, historically a very important issue for feminist politics and sometimes named as social reproduction (Deckard & Houlden 2024). Another dimension is generational reproduction: conception, pregnancy, reproductive technologies, contraception and adoption, to name some issues which have been widely discussed in queer and feminist studies and politics (Dahl 2023; Homanen 2021;

Nordqvist & Smart 2014). Finally, family and kin, and to some extent also other close and intimate relations and companionships, are very often defined by housing arrangements and who lives in the same home (Carsten 2004, 31–56). Further studies may shed light on different compositions of families, kin, intimacies and companionships. Here we differentiate between aspects of couple and multiple relationships between adults, which often but not always include sex between the partners; generational relationships between parents and children; siblinghood, generational or horizontal kin relationships; other kin relations; and relationships between human and nonhuman animals. Kin relations that are not bio-genealogical have been especially important for queer people.

The articles in this special issue highlight intimate relations and companionships between adults and children or young people both from the perspective of everyday life, experiences, materialities and affects (Innola, Stasińska) and cultural representations and norms (Jukes, Taivaloja, and Alasuutari). Taivaloja and Alasuutari focus on mono- and couple normativity to show how, ultimately, experiences and norms cannot be separated. Innola and Jukes focus on the potential for queering aspects of relationships. Innola examines how material practices and meaning-making become entangled in the co-becomings of companionships in both limiting and subversive ways. Jukes, in turn, shows how tuning into affective intimacies in platonic-but-queer relations opens up new lines of inquiry, and alternative pleasures, that go beyond the limits of compulsory sexuality. Mankki also focuses on everyday experiences, but from the perspective of how they unfold as intra-action of human and nonhuman elements such as housing arrangements and other infrastructures of intimacies. In her essay, Heinonen analyses how communal living arrangements participate in shaping the intimacies in relationships between the people that live together in small-scale communes. Anttila, Palojoki, Vuori and Janhonen-Abuquah concentrate on the generational, horizontal and chosen supportive (kin) relations of LGBTQ families with children, looking at how parents configure their relations with other people to empirically propose a notion of inner circle relations.

With these considerations of the different approaches in family, kin, intimacies and companionship there is still much potential for addressing under-researched areas and queering the field. Next, we will show how affect and posthuman theoretization combine different perspectives in innovative ways, and how this makes it possible to explore relational lives beyond familiar categorizations and understandings.

Unexpected intimacies – posthumanising queer intimacies, families and companionships

The potential to imagine queer intimacies, families and companionships beyond the couple and the sexual described in this special issue comes from multiple sources. Relational affect theory and posthuman theorization provide tools for conceptualizing intimacies, families and companionships in alternative ways (Luciano & Chen 2015; Kolehmainen et al. 2022). By paying attention to relationalities, affectivities and entanglements that connect us to human and nonhuman others, it becomes possible to queer the notions of intimacies, families and companionship in novel ways.

Queer theoretical approaches are uncompromising in their critical analyses of sexuality- and gender-related norms, restrictive identity categories and the shoring up of heteronormative lifestyle(s) in various societal and cultural-political contexts (Lahti 2019). Yet, anthropocentrism and humanism are inherent in much queer theory (Giffney & Hird 2016) and more-than-human perspectives remain underdeveloped (Kolehmainen, Lahti & Lahad 2022). Recently, scholars have asked what queer intimacies might look like when imagined beyond the familiar anthropocentric forms (Luciano & Chen 2015; Lykke 2022; Kolehmainen, Lahti & Lahad 2022; Irni 2020).

In posthuman thinking, intimacies are not limited to human relationships. Rather, intimacies always emerge in relational networks that are entangled with nonhuman, material, cultural, and discursive elements in unpredictable ways (Kolehmainen et al. 2022; Hyvärinen 2017). Central to posthuman philosophies is the idea that humans cannot be thought of as separate from nature and their environment, but

rather always in entangled, co-becoming relations with nature and the environment, other animals and organisms, science and technology (Åsberg & Braidotti 2018). The boundaries of human subjects are porous. This means that we are always in intimate relations with our surroundings – such as bacteria, technology, algorithms and different materialities. Moreover, sexuality- and gender-related norms function differently depending on how they come together with other elements in relational assemblages from intersecting (power) relations into multiple bodies and intimacies (Kolehmainen et al. 2022; Lahti forthcoming). Following this, for example, grieving a same-sex relationship does not exclusively involve interactions between human bodies (Lykke 2022; Lahti forthcoming).

Affect theoretical and posthuman approaches thus challenge the assumptions that intimacy could be traced only in certain relational forms, such as sexual relationships and families, or happen only in intimate encounters between humans (Latimer & López Gómez 2019; Kolehmainen et al. 2022). Latimer and López Gómez (2019) encourage us think intimacy through all its richness: the heterogeneous materiality of the intimate, all the human and nonhuman beings involved, the affects that emerge in multiple networks of intimacies and the extensions of the intimate to terrains that challenge normative notions. Posthuman thinking thus allows us to ask how intimacies, families and companionships might be queered when we acknowledge that our lives are entangled with an abundance of queer intimacies that we may hardly notice in our daily lives (Luciano & Chen 2016; Kolehmainen et al. 2022).

Some scholars claim that the posthuman turn is also a turn away from the question of dehumanization of queer, Black and indigenous people. However, we do not agree. There is no direct connection between a particular ontological view and politics. Yet, Jane Bennett (2010) has noted that hierarchical thinking, which sees the human as exceptional and places it above nature, easily leads to other hierarchies between different groups of people and even civilizations. Chen (2012) has analyzed how the distinction between human and inhuman, animate and inanimate is constantly made through racialized and sexualized lines, with politi-

cal consequences. Thus, Luciano and Chen (2015) rightly ask whether the queer has even been fully included in the category of human. In this special issue, posthuman approaches make it possible to be curious of, and pay attention to, what kind of “other forms, other worlds, other ways of being” – queer intimacies and surprising ways of relating – might emerge when the human connects with the other-than-human (Luciano & Chen 2015, 186).

In her article, Innola stresses that her posthuman analysis of companionships goes beyond taking nonhumans into account as important life companions. Her concept of affective negotiation emphasizes the affective and material-discursive nature of bodies, events and experiences through which companionships co-become. She shows eloquently how the couple-form becomes part of these affective negotiations, through which the companionships become in multiple and often contradictory ways. Also Jukes, in their groundbreaking analysis of *Bend It Like Beckham*, utilizes affect theory to think queer intimacies beyond familiar sexual categories. In Jukes’ analysis, asexuality does not necessarily refer to asexual persons or identities, but rather to affective intimacies in non-sexual relations like friendship. This approach allows Jukes to imagine alternatives to the dismissive and regulatory sex-normativity of “just friends”. Drawing from posthumanist queer thinking, Mankki, in turn, analyses human and nonhuman elements (e.g. the sea, the climate, a room, a cafeteria, a shopping mall, and colleagues) that enter relational webs, where they gain agentic power, to create what she calls infrastructures of migrant intimacies. They emerge as creative, temporary and ambivalent co-becomings of intimacies that do not fit easily either with white (hetero)normative or popular queer notions of intimacy.

Decentering the couple and the sexual in queer intimacies, families and companionships

The articles in this special issue tap into a central contemporary trend in queer inquiries into intimacy as they decenter the couple and the sexual. This does not mean to downplay the importance of sexuality or sexual desire, which lie at the heart of many queer intimacies. Rather, shifting

the focus away from normative relationship forms and familiar sexual identity categories might draw our attention to (less sexual) queer intimacies and political potentialities that may otherwise go unnoticed. Emerging co-becoming companionships (Innola) and nonsexual intimacies that do not center on sexuality (Jukes, Mankki), make it possible to revisit and reevaluate some older concepts such as Foucault's "friendship as a way of life" (1997) and Weston's "chosen families" (1991, 1995, 1998) in this particular historical time. In a famous interview Foucault (1997) suggested instead of discovering "in oneself the truth of one's sex, but, rather, to use one's sexuality, henceforth, to arrive at a multiplicity of relationship(s)". Thus, as Alasuutari (2020, 169) points out, Foucault calls on readers to shape relationships into new forms, asking "What relations, through homosexuality, can be established, invented, multiplied and modulated?" Following this line of thought, a renewed focus on friendship can lead to new forms of intimacy and alliance that do not resemble institutionalized family and couple relationships (Alasuutari 2020).

In Kath Weston's analysis of the emergence of chosen families in lesbian and gay communities in the late 1980s and 1990s, many queers saw friendship as the most reliable and enduring kinship relationship in a homophobic society, where coming out as lesbian or gay often meant rejection by one's biological relatives. Now placing nonsexual companions and networks of friends at the centre of one's intimate life is becoming more common across LGBTQIA+ and mainstream cultures in Western societies (Roseneil 2007). We see this theme emerging in the articles of this special issue: Innola identifies a common thread for companionship as the experience of sharing life with someone or something of vital importance that is not a partner within a couple relationship. In their analysis of *Bend It like Beckham*, Jukes explores the potential for queer desire, relations and politics in platonic bonds that are nonsexual or need not be made sexual: friendship, siblinghood, team relationships and the joy of playing football together. Mankki focuses on the heterogeneous materialities and spatialities of emerging migrant intimacies to decenter heterosexual bonds within this complex web. Anttila and her

colleagues challenge the idea of the relationships between parents and their children as separate from the other relationships in the inner circle of an LGBTQ family.

Moreover, both public and academic interest in consensual nonmonogamy and open relationships is growing (Scoat & Campbell 2022), creating potential for reimaging queer intimacies beyond the couple. In this special issue, Taivaloja and Alasuutari analyze the growing popular interest in consensual nonmonogamy in Finland. Stasińska shows that when same-sex couples in Poland do and make sense of their relational choices, they do not draw a stable distinction between monogamy and nonmonogamy. Historically non-monogamous relationships have been especially associated with gay men's culture (Klesse 2007) and lesbian separatist communities have sought alternatives to traditional patriarchal forms of family (Jackson & Scott 2004). However, in most research conducted with polyamorous people, most participants are from privileged groups – they tend to be white and middle or upper class (Sheff & Hammers 2011). To build on the work of Stasińska, Taivaloja and Alasuutari, more research is needed on what kind of privileges, norms and (affective) inequalities organize non-monogamy and open relationships.

In this introduction we have highlighted a multiplicity of perspectives on queer intimacies, families and companionships and shown how studies, conceptualizations and theorizations change according to their socio-cultural contexts. This special issue provides considerations for a range of new approaches to studying intimacies, families and companionships, with an invitation for these to be extended in future. Many areas of the field remain under-researched and there is still much potential for queering intimacies.

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queer theory, affect theory, and recently, posthuman perspectives. Lahti has published numerous studies on affective inequalities and intimacies, in both queer and heterosexual relationship contexts, as well as on singlehood and LGBTIQ+ breakups. Her interdisciplinary research spans the fields of gender studies, social sciences, cultural studies, and critical psychology. She has contributed to high-quality journals such as *Sociology*, *Journal of Sociology*, *NORA – Nordic Journal of Gender and Feminist Research*, and *Subjectivity, and Feminism & Psychology*. Additionally, she co-edited the volume *Affective Intimacies* (Manchester University Press 2022) and a special issue on Affective Intimacies in *NORA* (2021). Her co-edited Finnish book *Family and Personal Relationships Under the Rainbow* was published in 2020.

PAULIINA LUKINMAA is a postdoctoral researcher at the School of Humanities, University of Eastern Finland. Her research interests focus on the everyday practices of LGBTIQ+ activism across various contexts, with emphasis on transnational networks, cultural exchange, and identity formation within these processes. Pauliina's ethnographic PhD research (2018–2022) explored the formation of LGBTIQ+ activism in St. Petersburg during the late 2010s under an increasingly authoritarian regime. Her current project (2023–2026) examines Russian-speaking LGBTIQ+ activists in the Baltic states since the onset of Russia's full-scale war of aggression in Ukraine in 2022. She is particularly interested in how these activists shape their activism and express solidarity in geopolitically charged times. In addition to this, Pauliina is involved part-time in the *Menopausal: Exploring Diversity, Awareness, and Activism* project (2024–2028), where her sub-project examines the social changes surrounding the menopause awareness movement in Finland, aiming at advancing gender and age equity.

JAANA VUORI is a Professor Emerita in Gender Studies at the University of Eastern Finland. Her research interests include parenting, migrant integration work, and research methodology.

KATHRYN ALMACK is a Research Professor of Family Lives and Care in the School of Health and Social Work at the University of Hertfordshire. Kathryn is a sociologist whose research over the past 25 years has addressed issues relating to LGBTQ family lives across the life course. Interests have focused on family lives and other close relationships of care in people's lives, addressing the meanings, moralities, obligations and the 'doing' of everyday family and parenting relationships. Kathryn's doctoral study (1998–2002) investigated the lives of lesbian couples having their first and subsequent children in the context of their relationship and she did a unique follow up study with these couples (and some of their now adult children) 20 years later. Kathryn is currently leading the LGBTQ+ pathway of IncludeAge (2022–2026), a study exploring community inclusion of people aged 40+ who identify as LGBTQ+ or who have learning disabilities.

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NOTES

1. The essay is Heinonen's Lectio Praecursoria, a short presentation given by the doctoral candidate prior to the public defense of their PhD dissertation in Finland. It introduces the research topic in an approachable way to the heterogeneous audience members, aiding them to follow the academic conversation during the examination.