# Chapter 1

# Introduction

**A Story**

In each of the chapters of this book, we begin with a story. These are stories we have collected over the years, stories that speak of kinship across a range of settings, that speak of diverse groups of people and species, and perhaps most importantly for this book, speak of how kinship is naturalized through often mundane, everyday, depictions of life.

The first story is an actual story, or more precisely a children's storybook: *King & King & Family* (de Haan & Nijland, 2004). The book is a sequel to the authors' first book, *King & King* (de Haan & Nijland, 2002). The first book has been praised for its sensitive and endearing depiction of a prince who is looking to find someone to marry (at his mother, the queen's, behest), culminating in him meeting another prince whom he marries, upon which they both become kings. Despite this praise, the first book has also been met with considerable controversy, with a number of American states attempting to ban the book, in some locations it being shelved in the adult section (Wachsberger, 2006). In 2007 the then US democratic primary front runners were asked for their opinions on the book, with both John Edwards and Barack Obama supporting it, and Hilary Clinton indicating that she felt the book was a matter of parental discretion.

Perhaps surprisingly, the sequel book, which we focus on here, has met with little controversy. Surprising, we suggest, not because such a book should be met with controversy, but because the sequel tells the story of the two kings welcoming a child into their family. Given widespread and ongoing opposition to gay men having children, it is thus surprising that the book has not been more of a cause for public concern. One explanation for this discrepancy in reactions may be that in the first book the two kings are shown kissing – a scene that provoked outrage from some – and the sequel does not include this type of intimacy. Indeed, this sanitizing of gay couples who have a child is commonplace in public representations of gay families (Riggs, 2011).

So why is *King & King & Family* of particular interest to a book on critical kinship studies? It would be fair to presume that the topic – gay parenting – and the responses to the first book – homophobia, moral panics – are the reason why we chose to open this book with a discussion of *King & King & Family*. This, however, was not our primary reason for focusing on the storybook. Rather, our choice of this storybook was due to the particular ways in which it represents kinship. Specifically, the book is of interest to us given that it depicts kinship through characters who would typically be considered marginal (i.e., gay men). Yet in so

doing it demonstrates one of the key points of this book, namely that the naturalization of kinship as a dominant trope or indeed perhaps a founding logic of western societies – our focus in this book – is flexible enough to encompass all forms of so-called 'family diversity' that come along. To put it another way, western kinship categories as they are normatively understood are fluid enough to incorporate gay male parents into a standardized narrative precisely because kinship *as a technology* serves to locate itself within nature (i.e., it is naturalized).

Let's then turn to *King & King & Family* and explore these claims in a little more detail. The book opens with the two kings leaving for their honeymoon, to "a land far from their kingdom". From this first page, then, notions of home and away, familiar and strange, are evoked. A fear of the strange is voiced by King Bertie on the second page, where he says "I must admit I'm a little worried about the jungle animals", a statement he makes to King Lee who is holding a book titled "Exciting wild life", written by a D. Anger. Here, then, difference becomes a source of fear, a source of potential DAnger. When they arrive at their destination, however, they find that their unusually heavy suitcase contains Crown Kitty, their cat. The strange is therefore neutralized by her familiar presence.

Once the party of three leave for their hike through the jungle, they encounter a range of animals, through which again the strange is made familiar through the operations of anthropomorphism. So, for example, we see two birds who are feeding a worm to a baby bird referred to as "such good parents!", a "papa [monkey] and his baby", and a "hippo family". Through these terms, the potentially radical difference represented by 'wild life' is domesticated through the human language of kinship. Of course our point here is not to suggest that there would be another, readily intelligible, way of talking about non-human kinship. Rather, our point is how human language of kinship can so readily incorporate 'wild life', animals who had previously been represented in a fearful way.

In the pages that follow King Lee and King Bertie continue to enjoy their holiday, though they are concerned at every turn that they are being watched or followed. King Bertie's travel journal recaps "rustling in the bushes", 'something following us in the water", "footprints in the mud", and a snorkel "pipe in the water". On the last night of their holiday King Bertie sighs "[a]ll those animals with their babies... I wish we had a little one of our own"; evoking a standard developmentalist logic in which humans grow up, get married, and have children. And in so doing they extend this same developmental logic, and indeed desire, to non-human animals. Of course when they arrive home, their suitcase is again unusually heavy, though this time because in it there is "a little girl from the jungle", to whom King Lee and King Bertie state "you're the child we've always wanted". The story concludes with scenes in which, in a rush, the Kings "adopted the little girl who had traveled so far to be with them. This took lots of documents and stamps". Then there is a party to celebrate the official arrival of Princess Daisy where "her daddies make a big fuss", and the final image is one of the child and the cat embracing under the caption "[w]hat a happy little one!".

Here again, in both the surprise arrival of the child, and her envelopment in a standard narrative in which she is the child the two kings have always wanted, difference is assimilated into a logic of the same. While at the start of the story the country to which the kings' travel is depicted as 'wild' and something to worry about, by the end of the book these concerns are gone, with the little girl depicted as able to share her stories with the two kings (using, presumably, the same language), and where she is given a name that arguably reflects the culture of the kings, perhaps less so than her own. The adoption seals the deal, wrapping the new princess in the logic of sameness in which the ever-expansive western narrative of kinship is able to incorporate any difference.

*King & King & King*, then, is not simply a story about gay parenting, nor is it simply an example of the domestication of gay parenting into a standard developmental logic that evokes an incremental rites of passage narrative. Rather, it is also a story in which human kinship norms are able to encompass, indeed domesticate, animal kinship practices. Furthermore, it is a story in which difference is assimilated into a logic of sameness, cross-culturally, cross species, and unregulated across borders.

As we shall see in the sections that follow, the incorporation of what is considered 'nature' into what is referred to as 'culture' is a common theme across this book, just as the cultural is naturalized in ways to make it appear pre-determined. And as we shall argue, concerns about incorporation and naturalization sit at the heart of critical kinship studies as we understand it. The aim of critical kinship studies, then, is to examine practices of naturalization, to think of kinship as a technology rather than as a taken for granted social structure, and to think about the 'human' in human kinship in ways that destabilise the centrality of humanism within kinship studies.

## The Study of Kinship

In this section we provide a brief overview of some of the core tenets of the field of kinship studies, primarily as it has been conducted within the context of anthropology. Importantly, in outlining the field as it has historically been constituted, our intention is not to suggest that there is a clear break between 'kinship studies' and 'critical kinship studies'. Much of the previous work we cite in this section is a direct basis for our account of critical kinship studies. And much of the work we cite in this section is critical in many senses of the word. As such, it is certainly the case that in attributing a label to a body of research (as have Kroløkke et al., 2015), a large part of what we are doing is signaling something that already exists: studies of kinship that are critical of the assumption that kinship is a product of nature - a key point of critique in much of the work that has been undertaken under the banner of kinship studies both in the past and in the present, as we shall see below.

Having said this, what distinguishes this section from the next, is the fact that the research summarized in the present section is arguably informed by a humanist logic. That is, a logic in which human beings and our values and worldviews,

however diverse, are by default treated as more salient or important than those of any other species. More specifically, and given our focus in this book on western accounts of kinship, our suggestion is that much of the work that has been conducted under the banner of kinship studies reifies a very particular western individualistic account of humanity, even if at times such work has involved cross-cultural comparative studies. Our intention in this section in briefly outlining two of the key tenets of previous work in the field of kinship studies, then, is both to celebrate the important insights afforded by those working in the field, but also to suggest why appending, or foregrounding, the word 'critical' to the field introduces a shift in orientation that warrants close consideration, a shift that we outline in more detail in the following section.

The work of David Schneider arguably constitutes one of the key examples of a shift in anthropology from an account of kinship where it had previously been seen as a reflection of nature, to one where kinship is seen as an artifact of culture. Published in 1968, Schneider's *American Kinship: A Cultural Account* provides an in-depth ethnographic analysis of kinship terms in the United States. What has now become a standard feature of work in the field of kinship studies is clearly highlighted in this early work by Schneider, namely in his suggestion that:

> The cultural universe of relatives in American kinship is constructed of elements from two major cultural orders, the *order of nature* and the *order of law.* Relatives in *nature* share heredity. Relatives *in law* are bound only by law or custom, by the code for conduct, by the pattern for behavior. They are relatives by virtue of their *relationship*, not their biogenetic attributes (p. 27).

This statement follows a lengthy and detailed examination of American kinship categories, in which Schneider distinguishes between categories that are treated as though they are constituted by nature (what he refers to as unmodified categories, so for example 'mother', 'father', 'sister'), and those that are constituted by law (what he refers to as modified categories, so for example 'foster child', 'mother in-law', 'step-father'). What is important about the quote above, however, is that it draws attention to the fact that while unmodified categories are treated as though they are a reflection of nature, in fact they are *naturalized* categories that are a product of a cultural order. This is thus a central premise of kinship studies: that anything in regard to human kinship that is treated as 'natural' is more correctly that which has been 'naturalised'. In other words, unmodified categories such as 'mother' or 'father' (which in the context of Schneider's data referred to women and men who had conceived and birthed children together as a product of reproductive heterosex) are not simply a reflection of 'natural' relations between men and women. Rather, they are the product of a wide range of cultural institutions that 1) normalize heterosexuality, 2) privilege reproductive heterosex, and thus 3) provide environments that are conducive to this mode of conceiving children.

Schneider went on to develop these points about the naturalization of particular kinship relations in his next major work, *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (1984), where he states that:

> The distinction between genealogy and norm or role *seems* to permit us to say that genealogy is structurally or logically prior to norm or role. But that priority follows directly from the definition of kinship as genealogy and not from any empirical or independent consideration. It is purely a matter of definition. The structural and logical priority of genealogy is built into the premises embodied in the way in which kinship is defined. There is nothing 'structural' about it (pp. 129-130, italics in original).

Here Schneider makes the point that while the supposed naturalness of genealogy (as a mode of inheritance, seen as a product of genetic relationships between kin) is treated as producing a norm in which genetic relatedness is valued, in fact both the privileging of genetic relatedness and the emphasis upon tracking genealogy through genes are the product of a very particular (in this case American) way of understanding kinship.

Building on the work of Schneider, both Marilyn Strathern (1992) and Janet Carsten (2004) – two more leading voices in the field of kinship studies – explore how particular forms of kinship are naturalized; Strathern by considering English kinship patterns, and Carsten through cross-cultural work undertaken across a range of sites, including China, Sudan, Northern India and Madagascar. Strathern takes the work of Schneider, and suggests further that not only is kinship "the social construction of natural facts", but that in the context of British kinship "nature has increasingly come to mean biology" (p. 19). This suggestion by Strathern is vital in its emphasis upon the particular aspects of British kinship that have become naturalized. Specifically, Strathern suggests that biology – referred to above as genetic relatedness – is what has been naturalized as kinship. This is a key point that we will return to in the next chapter, where we discuss the points of critique that constitute the basis of critical kinship studies.

Also responding to Schneider's work, Carsten (2004) explores in detail how folk understandings of kinship – what Schneider depicts above as the assumption that the 'fact' of genealogy determines norms of kinship – require ongoing interrogation in order to understand how particular kinship practices become naturalized. As she suggests:

> Kinship may be viewed as given by birth and unchangeable, or it may be seen as shaped by the ordinary, everyday activities of family life, as well as the 'scientific' endeavours of geneticists and clinicians involved in fertility treatment or prenatal medicine… But increasingly, this separation, which is undoubtedly central to Western folk understandings of kinship, has itself come under scrutiny (p. 6).

Here Carsten emphasises the point that any distinction between how kinship relations are formed, understood, and practiced is arbitrary, given the commerce

between the ways in which particular modes of family formation are privileged and thus naturalized. Further, Carsten suggest that such naturalization results in medical practices that support or bolster modes of family formation that are privileged (i.e., genetic relatedness). This in turn shapes what counts as kinship, and how we experience our lives as kin in a relationship to social norms about what counts as kinship 'proper'.

A second key thread in the field of kinship studies, and one that follows on from the critique of the naturalization of human cultures, is that of the role of sex – and specifically the binary conceptualization of men and women and the resultant naturalization of heterosex – in the production of western kinship categories. Schneider suggests as much in his 1968 text, where he proposes that "sexual intercourse is an act which is undertaken and does not just happen" (p. 32). Whilst Schneider's elaboration of this claim that heterosex is actively produced rather than incidental is tantalizing brief and to a certain degree opaque, it has subsequently been taken up in significant detail in the fields of both kinship studies and gender studies, perhaps most notably in the work of Gayle Rubin (1975), who comments that:

> Lévi Strauss concludes from a survey of the division of labor by sex that it is not a biological specialization, but must have some other purpose. This purpose, he argues, is to insure the union of men and women by making the smallest viable economic unit contain at least one man and one woman (p. 178).

Rubin's essay-length elaboration on this claim clearly demonstrates the ways in which the cultural normalisation of heterosexuality serves the purposes of capitalism, namely to ensure the production of surplus capital via the production of a particular social unit – namely the heterosexual couple – through which the gendered division of labor operates to both encourage reproduction, and thus encourage the production of labour. As such, and as Rubin suggests, western kinship patterns, in which reproductive heterosex and the genealogical transmission of relatedness and inheritance are naturalized, serve to ensure the production of surplus capital. Donna Haraway (1991) demonstrates how the logic of capitalism has long underpinned the study of kinship, where the supposed complementarity of the sexes serves to naturalise kinship as the founding institution of culture:

> Perhaps, many have thought and some have hoped, the key to the extraordinary sociability of the primate order rests on a sexual foundation of society, in a family rooted in the glands and the genes. Natural kinship was then seen to be transformed by the specifically human, language-mediated categories that gave rational order to nature in the birth of culture. Through classifying by naming, by creating kinds, culture would then be the logical domination of a necessary but dangerous instinctual nature. Perhaps human beings found the key to control of sex, the source of and threat to all other kinds of order, in the categories of kinship (p. 22).

This quote from Haraway both repeats our earlier suggestion that the study of kinship has primarily been the study of *human* kinship, and pre-empts the importance of the work of Haraway in what is to come in terms of our elaboration of what we understand as constituting critical kinship studies. For Haraway, sex 'in nature' has historically been perceived as a threat that needs to be controlled. Kinship, then, serves to regulate and 'contain' sexuality so as to produce only one type of sexuality – reproductive heterosex – as both viable and regulated, ironically by suggesting that it is natural, whilst at the same time requiring its naturalization through cultural practices in which it is enshrined as a norm. Judith Butler (2002) has referred to the ironic naturalization of heterosex through the depiction of kinship as the founding trope of culture as a 'conceit', in her suggestion that:

> Although we may be tempted to say that heterosexuality secures the reproduction of culture and that patrilineality secures the reproduction of culture in the form of a whole that is reproducible in its identity through time, it is equally true that the conceit of a culture as a self-sustaining and self-replicating totality supports the naturalization of heterosexuality and that the entirety of the structuralist approach to sexual difference emblematizes this movement to secure heterosexuality through the thematics of culture (p. 35).

Here Butler (2002) importantly brings the kinship studies critique of the nature/culture binary together with the role of sex, in order to suggest that kinship structures themselves are an allegory for culture as the 'taming' of nature, as she goes on to suggest:

> The story of kinship, as we have it from Lévi-Strauss, is an allegory for the origin of culture and a symptom of the process of naturalization itself, one that takes place, brilliantly, insidiously, in the name of culture itself. Thus, one might add that debates about the distinction between nature and culture, which are clearly heightened when the distinctions between animal, human, machine, hybrid, and cyborg remain unsettled, become figured at the site of kinship, for even a theory of kinship that is radically culturalist frames itself against a discredited "nature" and so remains in a constitutive and definitional relation to that which it claims to transcend (p. 37)

Although not directly referencing Schneider in her account of theories of kinship that are 'radically culturalist', we would suggest that Butler's theorizing is directly applicable to a critique of Schneider's early work, one that will lead us into the following section where we further unpack what is 'critical' about 'critical kinship studies'. In elaborating how culture is naturalised through practices of kinship, Schneider (1968) suggests that:

> Human reason does two things. First, though it builds on a natural base, it creates something additional, something more than what nature alone produces. Second, human reason selects only part of

nature on which to build. This is because nature itself is composed of two distinct parts. One is good, the other bad; one is human, the other animal. Human reason selects the good part of nature to build on; it can set goals and select paths, judge right from wrong, and tell good from bad. The family, in American kinship, is defined as a natural unit based on the facts of nature. In American culture, this means that only certain of the facts of nature are selected, that they are altered, and that they are built upon or added to. This selection, alteration, and addition all come about through the application of human reason to the state of nature (p. 36).

Whilst we would want to be clear that in this quote Schneider is summarizing his ethnographic findings in terms of how American people at the time, through their folk narratives of kinship, understood the role of kinship in regards to the imposition of culture upon nature, there is a degree to which Schneider reifies the binary of nature and culture, human and animal, even at the moment where he seeks to problematize these binaries. In other words, by treating as axiomatic the equation of the human with both 'the good' and 'culture', non-human animals are relegated by default to 'the bad' and 'nature', and thus potentially outside of kinship. Of course the point of Schneider's work, and all those we have cited in this section, is to argue precisely that both culture and kinship are the product of particular human ways of partitioning the world into binaries that serve to reify human ways of being. Our concern, nonetheless, is with whether or not something slips to the wayside in this type of account, that is that human kinship patterns are but one way of thinking about being in the world. As we suggest in the following section, arguably what constitutes a core component of critical kinship studies is to render visible the human in kinship studies, not simply by adding in non-human animals to our account of kinship, nor by claiming to know what kinship means for non-human animals. Rather, we suggest, critical kinship studies seeks to examine how technologies of human kinship are part and parcel of the construction of humanness (which is positioned in opposition to those who are not considered human), and thus to be 'critical' when we study kinship is to interrogate the anthropocentrism that is at the core of humanist accounts of kinship.

## Defining Critical Kinship Studies

We have already indicated above that, in our view, critical kinship studies takes as its central focus the need to move beyond a humanist account of kinship, one in which human understandings of kinship and human kinship practices are treated as the only forms of kinship and only ways of being possible. Importantly, we do not mean to suggest that kinship studies should just be reduced to a naïve form of animal studies, wherein all animals (including humans) are treated as equals in the face of kinship, and where our attention turns primarily to human/non-human animals interactions. For us, such an approach would simply naturalise particular things as 'kinship'. Instead, and following Haraway (1989; 1991; 2008) and others whose work we outline below, we believe the focus of critical kinship studies is twofold: 1) to examine

which humans are central to understandings of human kinship; through which practices such understandings developed; and how boundaries are drawn in terms of what constitutes human kinship, and 2) to examine how understandings of human kinship are always already defined in a relationship to other species. For as Haraway (1991) suggests:

> [D]espite the claims of anthropology to be able to understand human beings solely with the concept of culture, and of sociology to need nothing but the idea of the human social group, animal societies have been extensively employed in rationalization and naturalization of the oppressive orders of domination in the human body politic. They have provided the point of union of the physiological and political for modern liberal theorists while they continue to accept the ideology of the split between nature and culture (p. 11).

Importantly, our definition of critical kinship studies (and our enactment of it in subsequent analytic chapters) does not entirely mirror Haraway in terms of exploring histories of human abuse of animals in the quest to define what properly constitutes 'the human'. Nonetheless, we take as vital the point that understanding human kinship requires decentring humans, a point made by others such as Marie Fox (2004). Or perhaps more precisely, it requires decentring a humanist account of the human species, in which humans are taken as self evidently the centre of the world - an assumption that potentially prevents us from understanding the practices we engage in through which we construct the category 'human' itself.

By definition, humanism is about the centrality of the human subject looking outwards, with the presumption that no one is looking back. As such, humanism functions to objectify or indeed 'thingify' other species, treating them either as objects who do not look, or as things to be instrumentalised in the service of human needs, as 'property' within regulatory frameworks (Fox, 2010). Yet as Haraway suggests, whichever way other species are understood, they are central to how humans understand ourselves. This is evident in the quote from Schneider that we included earlier, where the rational human chooses the 'good' in nature from which to construct culture, a claim that is only possible through comparison with other animals who are left with the 'bad' of nature.

Of course the converse of these objectifying practices is also true with regard to humanism. Within a humanist logic, human parts can be accorded personhood, as we will explore in more detail in the following chapter and in chapter five. Donated organs, for example, are often thought by recipients to contain the 'spirit' of a deceased person, and human cells are treated as containing the truth of a person via their DNA. In this sense, kinship may be claimed by organ recipients in regards to the donor's family, just as those who donate embryos may claim that a child born of their donation is their kin, or the kin of their own children (Nordqvist & Smart, 2014).

In addition to this logic of personifying body parts, we would suggest, are the operations of capitalism referred to earlier. Specifically, the good human citizen

is compelled to pursue life at all costs: through medicine, surgeries, transplants, and all manner of interventions that serve to treat humans as a vital, indeed central, feature of this planet. In his comparative account of transhumanism and post humanism, Richard Twine (2010) suggests that the former, which brings with it all of the valorized interweavings of human bodies and technologies, is yet another way or privileging human ways of being over all others:

> Transhumanists take things literally. Their supersession of humanism is material in a specific way. When they talk of posthumans they are imagining a human materially modified, a body 'enhanced'. This is hyper-humanism in the sense of bodily and emotional control; and in the stress upon individual autonomous choice over current and forecasted reproductive technologies... The emphasis on the individual here is counter to anti- humanist critiques of liberal humanist thought and the extension of the value of control is counter to critical posthumanism (p. 181).

Twine's account of the differences between transhumanism, the category 'posthuman', and the theoretical orientation referred to as posthumanism is thus central to our understanding of critical kinship studies. Whilst in the chapters to come we most certainly seek to examine how technologies play a central role in shaping understandings of western human kinship, we are not interested in transhumanist accounts of the posthuman, in which the centrality accorded to the human species is further privileged by its technological enhancement. Instead, our interest is to examine, as we do in the following chapter, how kinship itself is a technology, one that shapes how we understand what counts as human, and through which human relationships with other species are formed. Thus as Cary Wolfe (2010) suggests in his elaboration of posthumanism, the point of posthumanism is not to deny the importance of studying humans as a species. Rather, a posthumanist approach:

> [E]nables us to describe the human and its characteristic modes of communication, interaction, meaning, social significations, and affective investments with *greater* specificity once we have removed meaning from the ontologically closed domain of consciousness, reason, reflection, and so on... But it also insists that we attend to the specificity of the human – its ways of being in the world, its ways of knowing, observing, and describing – by (paradoxically for humanism) acknowledging that it is fundamentally a prosthetic creative that has coevolved with various forms of technicity and materiality, forms that are radically 'not-human' and yet have nevertheless made the human what it is (p. xxv).

From our vantage point, then, posthumanism as a theoretical orientation underpinning critical kinship studies allows us to examine the construction of human kinship practices, to examine who such practices exclude (both some humans and all non-human species), and to identify the ways in which such practices are naturalized. Given as human authors we are unable to problematize human kinship practices from a place outside our species, a posthumanist

framework enables us to think about how claims about human kinship are made, and through which relationships (including inter-species relationships) they are made. Thus as Haraway (2008) has suggested in some of her more recent work on animal companions:

> I am interested in these matters when the kin-making beings are not all human, and literal children or parents are not the issue. Companion species are the issue... But none of it can be approached if the fleshly historical reality of face-to-face, body-to-body subject making across species is denied or forgotten in the humanist doctrine that holds only humans to be true subjects with real histories (p. 67).

Nik Taylor (2012) takes up the work of Haraway in discussing how her own relationships with the non-human kin she lives with shape her understanding of self and being in the world:

> I remain permanently curious about the 'we' that the three of us create – this messy grouping of human and canine; the relatings that occur between us.  Yet I remain aware that traditional sociology can do nothing more than account for our relationship from my perspective, if at all.  The 'knot' that we three constitute is thus seen as a one of us two 'others' with the 'one' being the only object (subject?) of importance and interest here.  To account equally for the 'plus two' is a challenge (p. 43).

In framing critical kinship studies through the lens of posthumanism, then, we take up this challenge to think about what it means to understand practices of western human kinship through a complex web of relationships in which human animals, non-human animals, technologies, and practices all overlap and intersect. Our point, then, is not *per se* to yet again reify practices of western human kinship (by denying non-human animal kinship practices or indeed kinship practices across species). Rather, our point is to critically examine how humanness is constructed in contrast with all that is positioned as not human. 'Practices of western human kinship', then, as we use the term, focuses on how humans are treated as the centre of the world precisely through our claims to kinship that are themselves claims to human exceptionalism.

Importantly, however, while having used the word 'intersect' above, our approach to thinking through kinship practices is one of assemblage, rather than intersectionality. Across a now substantial body of work, Jasbir Puar (2013) has drawn attention to the humanism inherent to theories of intersectionality. Notably, her intent in making this critique is not to dismiss the significant contribution that theories of intersectionality continue to make to understanding how all of our lives are shaped through a criss-cross of identity categories. Rather, Puar's point is that an understanding of assemblage extends the agenda of theories of intersectionality by encouraging us to think about relationships rather than individuals. Although not the intent of Kimberlé Crenshaw (1998; 1991) - who originally elaborated the theory of intersectionality -  many recent applications of intersectionality have treated

identity categories as mere matters of addition or subtraction. Such an approach reduces intersectionality to a set of individualized coordinates that can be mapped out and then responded to, which is problematic because of the reductive individualism and the change-resistant nature of such 'plotting'.

We can see this in the storybook *King & King & Family,* and perhaps most pertinently in its title. The ampersands denote a story where King plus King plus Family constitute kinship. Our point is not that two men and a child do not constitute a kinship form (many can and do), but rather that they are constituted as such additively. In other words, rather than seeing kinship as formed through an assemblage of technologies through which particular bodies are rendered intelligible, kinship is simply seen as the summation of a series of individuals. While this is indeed the hallmark of western humanist accounts of kinship, and whilst in some sectors this may be a necessary way of thinking about kinship (given the operations of neoliberalism, for example), when it comes to theorizing beyond the categories we already have – categories shaped by humanist understandings of the world – we need other ways of thinking about kinship.

We thus follow Puar (2013) in her suggestion that assemblage is centrally about connections. More specifically, she suggests that:

> [A]ssemblages are interesting because a) they de-privilege the human body as a discrete organic thing. As Haraway notes, the body does not end at the skin. We leave traces of our DNA everywhere we go, we live with other bodies within us, microbes and bacteria, we are enmeshed in forces, affects, energies, we are composites of information. And b) assemblages do not privilege bodies as human, nor as residing within a human/animal binary (p. 4).

Thinking about human kinship through a posthumanist focus on assemblage, then, requires us to bring together people, bodies, and experiences that may typically be considered to be incongruent. More specifically, it requires us to consider how binaries (such as culture/nature, woman/man, animal/human, familiar/strange) function to construct as much as they function to exclude. In other words, when the strange is rendered familiar, when difference can be incorporated into a logic of sameness, as was the case in *King & King & Family*, we must ask what disappears? The answer to this question, from the perspective of critical kinship studies, is the humanist logic that frames processes of incorporation and naturalization, processes that we must attend to in order to develop other accounts of kinship.

## Chapter Topics

In the rest of this book, we bring together a complex array of kinship stories that are intended to jar. In so doing, we draw upon research that we have conducted previously with other people, as well as new research that we have conducted together for this book (specifically, analyses of film and documentary data). With regard to the former, some of the research discussed in Chapter 4 was

undertaken by Damien in collaboration with Clare Bartholomaeus. Similarly, some of the research reported in Chapter 6 was undertaken by Damien in collaboration with Catherine Collins and Clemence Due and Nicole Caruso, and by Liz with Ruth Cain and Christa Craven. Finally with regard to previous collaborative work reported in this book, some of the research detailed in both Chapters 7 and 8 was undertaken by Liz in collaboration with Rosie Harding, and some of the research drawn on in Chapter 8 was undertaken by Damien in collaboration with Kathleen Connellan, Clare Bartholomaeus, and Clemence Due. For the sake of readability, however, in these chapters we use the pronoun 'we' to refer to this collective work, although of course acknowledging here the contributions that others have made to our thinking and data collection. The analyses reported here, however, are original to this book and to our collaboration as authors. All of the underpinning empirical research we engage with in this book was approved by our University ethics committees and/or the Social Care Research Ethics Committee (SCREC), and all names used for participants are pseudonyms (though names from media data are retained as per the originals).

With regard to the chapter contents, the following two chapters explore in greater detail some of the concerns we have already raised in this chapter. Specifically, Chapter 2, *Objects of Critique* outlines in detail three points of critique that we believe are central to critical kinship studies, namely kinship as a nodal point of power, kinship and the 'natural order of things', and the valorization of genetic relatedness. Chapter 3, *Tools of Critique* then offers three tools of critique that we see as central to critical kinship studies. These are an understanding of kinship as a technology, a discursive account of subjectivity, and a focus on affective ambivalence.

Having outlined our points of critique and tools for examining them, the subsequent analytic chapters then explore in detail how the latter can help us understand a truly diverse range of practices of western human kinship. Chapter 4, *Reflecting (on) Nature* explores the intersections and overlaps between accounts of humans raising non-human animals as kin, and accounts of heterosexual human couples planning for a first child. Our central claim in this chapter is that human relationships with other animals often serve primarily to tell us more about humans than they tell us anything about non-human animal ways of being. Importantly, our claim here is not to dismiss cross species kinship outright, nor is it to deny the fact of non-human animal personhood. Rather, it is to emphasise the operations of human exceptionalism.

Chapter 5, *Donor Connections* explores narratives of kinship about both organ donation and donor sperm conception. We frame the chapter through a focus on the instrumentalisation of non-human animals with regard to breeding, and from there explore how such instrumentalisation is both implied in, and resisted by, narratives of organ and sperm donation. By exploring how both organs and sperm are treated as synecdoches for whole people, we discuss the complex accounts of kinship provided by a sample of recipients of cadaveric organs and a sample of donor conceived people taken from television programmes and documentaries.

Having explored how personhood is evoked or claimed through donated materials in Chapter 5, in Chapter 6, *Kinship and Loss* we then explore how personhood is routinely denied in the context of certain losses (i.e., the loss of a companion animal, and in the case of pregnancy loss), while in others certain forms of personhood are devalued (i.e., when children are diagnosed with autism or are transgender). By bringing together multiple accounts of loss across these contexts, we highlight not only the ways in which human exceptionalism operates to accord personhood only to certain groups, but that human exceptionalism is always premised on a particular account of personhood, and that the failure to 'achieve' such personhood may be experienced as a loss.

In Chapter 7, *Motherhood and Recognition*, we consider how motherhood is normatively constructed as being alive for one's children as long as possible, and how being a mother involves both conceiving and birthing children. We then trouble this understanding of motherhood by juxtaposing two under-recognised groups of mothers, namely transgender mothers and cisgender mothers with dementia. Through exploring these two categories of motherhood we interrogate where the taken-for-granted assumptions about mothering lie, in terms of bodies, roles, identities, and, indeed filial connection itself.

Chapter 8 focuses on *Kinship in Institutional Contexts*, acknowledging that how kinship is enacted is highly dependent on context. Kinship is shaped by, and through, institutional contexts both at a broad discursive level and also through moments of institutional interaction. In this sense kinship is dynamic *and* contingent on content. In this final substantive chapter we again consider incongruous contexts – a mother and baby unit, and institutional dementia care – in order to examine how context *per se* is vital for a critical exploration of kinship.

In bringing together these complex and seemingly competing assemblages of people, personhood, and kinship, the analytic chapters in this book demonstrate how a posthumanist approach to critical kinship studies may be achieved. Moreover, these chapters allow us to consider how the narrative contained in *King & King & Family* becomes intelligible. Thinking about these types of stories as *human* stories of kinship, shaped by a very specific western humanist logic of personhood, enables us to think about the connections that they both engender and prohibit: the ways of being they render intelligible and the exclusions they are reliant upon. By the conclusion of this book, we will have provided an understanding of what is 'critical' about 'critical kinship studies', and specifically, following Puar, to have asked not what kinship is *per se*, but rather what it does: what hierarchies, inequalities, and ways of being does it prop up, and through what multiple and nebulous assemblages does this occur.

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