

Creating Kin, Remaking Kinship:

**An Exploration of Queer Experiences of Motherhood
in Aotearoa New Zealand**

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Abstract

Kinship norms in Aotearoa New Zealand are inherently heteronormative, constructed out of the settler colonial ideal that a heterosexual couple with children in a nuclear family are the ultimate social unit. This thesis outlines queer experiences of motherhood given this context, highlighting the ways queer people engage with family narratives that implicitly exclude them. By drawing on the stories of six queer individuals, I trace these engagements through the adoption and foster system, usage of assisted reproductive technologies, and finding a sense of belonging and community. In each of these contexts, my participants subvert, reject, and reproduce, heteronormative understandings of family. These accounts primarily draw from in-depth interviews, as well as one instance of participant observation. I analyse the actions of my participants in relationship to LGBTQ+ political stances, examining whether they represent positive progress, or assimilation into heteronormativity. I argue that regardless of political intent, the engagements my participants make with family norms prove the malleability of kinship ideology. Through relating this to the construction of family narratives in Aotearoa New Zealand by settler colonial action, I emphasise that kinship norms are not static nor universal. This thesis posits that if kinship ideology is not naturally arising, or permanent, it has the potential to be remade more inclusively in the future.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	3
Table of Contents	4
Prelude How to Become a Parent	6
Chapter 1 Introduction	7
Formulating My Research Aims	7
Critical Kinship Studies as a Foundational Framework.....	9
My Participants.....	15
Methodological Approach	19
Transcribing, Coding, and Analysis	21
Thesis Structure	24
Chapter 2 “Mothers’ Make the World Go Round”	26
Approaching Kinship Ideology in Aotearoa New Zealand	27
Kinship, Gender, and Sexuality in Aotearoa Prior to Colonisation.....	29
Family as a Hand in Colonisation	32
The Heyday of the Nuclear Family	34
The Impact of Ideology for Queer Families	37
Chapter 3 Negotiating Kinship Norms in the Foster System	40
The Ties Between Adoption, Fostering, and Queerness.....	41
Anthropological Perspectives on Adoption.....	42
Clashes between Adoption and Māori Understandings of Whakapapa	44
Contemporary Shifts in Adoption and Fostering Policy	45
Kate’s Journey to Dash.....	48
The Dismissal of Non-Biological Bonds	50
The Contradictions of State Bureaucracy.....	52
Responding to Contradictions of Kinship.....	55
Navigating Kinship Ideals in Practice	57
Chapter 4 Repurposing Biology through Technology	63
The Potential of ARTs for Queer Kinship	64
Creating the Family Unit.....	65
Ontologically Choreographing the Family	68
Choreographing Multifaceted Ideology	70

Navigating Implied Heterosexuality as a Customer	76
Covert Normative Kinship in Practice	79
Chapter 5 Exploring the Politics of Belonging	85
Coming Out (Again and Again)	86
Failing to Belong	91
The Rise of “Normal” in the LGBTQ+ Community	98
Normalisation in the Context of Kinship	99
Reflections on the Risks of Reproducing Normal	101
The Transformative Potential of Remaking Kinship	104
Chapter 6 Conclusion: Unsettling Kinship	107
Queering Normative Kinship Practices	108
Joining the Disruptive Chorus	115
Malleable Potentials	117
Bibliography:	120

Prelude

How to Become a Parent

I begin with Lauren and Sam's story. Sitting in the corner of a quiet café, we sip tea together, as I listen to them bounce back and forth while they discuss parenting in the future. Lauren identifies as a queer woman, Sam as a queer trans man, and this is an intimate and difficult conversation. They both want kids, but they are unsure as to the likelihood of being able to make that happen.

Balancing physical disability, and mental illness, Lauren feels that she might not be able to cope with the responsibility of being a mother. Sam thinks Lauren would be a brilliant at it but points out that she has a history of early birth on her family, which could harm her already vulnerable body. Lauren's own childhood was marked by the looming potential of state intervention, so she is unsure about adoption or fostering. Perhaps resultingly, they have both considered what it would look like for Sam to carry a future child.

At first, they laugh at the thought, loudly exclaiming at the ridiculousness of the idea. However, as they recount all the barriers between Sam and pregnancy, they slowly shift into a contemplative tone, laced with sadness. While the gender dysphoria would be intense, many of the complicating factors are societal, rather than solely biological. The maternity system that seems to be designed exclusively for cisgender women. The fact that no doctor can give Sam a straight answer on the impact testosterone has on fertility, and whether getting pregnant would even be possible. The way the national media negatively targets gender non-conforming parents, the potential articles splayed out over the internet, sensationalising his identity.

For Lauren and Sam, parenting is a future unlike what they can easily imagine for themselves. There are so many factors that at once put them outside mainstream narratives of becoming a family. Lauren sums it up in one sentence, a phrase that circles in my brain for weeks afterwards, and reflects so many of the conversations I have had within my own queer friendships and relationships:

How are you meant to become something you can't see?

Chapter 1

Introduction

Formulating My Research Aims

Lauren's question was pivotal to my engagement with this area of scholarship and set me on the path to this thesis. At the time of pursuing my undergraduate degree, I entered a long-term relationship with another cisgender woman, our shared gender transforming my understanding of my own sexuality. As our relationship developed, I started to realise I had no idea of what future family with her would look like. In consuming ethnographic explorations of queer kinship, I saw proof that a potential family could exist outside of heterosexuality. At the same time, I also sought out queer representation more generally in my personal life as I slowly stepped into my identity. Initially it did not matter to me whether queerness was depicted with care and nuance or slapped onto corporate advertising to make sales. I celebrated it all as proof of a more inclusive future.

However, over time I started to question who was represented and how, leading to the realisation that it was almost always people who fitted into societally approved ideals outside of sexuality. As I read more scholarship, and consumed more queer perspectives in my personal life, I began to reflect on my orientation around gaining recognition within the norm. Finding my feet as a cisgender middle class Pākehā within the LGBTQ+ community, I was particularly influenced by the divide I had observed between gay assimilation, and radical queerness. While mainstream LGBTQ+ politics argue that representation within conventional kinship through events like marriage equality are universal gains, queer radicals see these as a triumph of heterosexual domesticity

(Warner 2000; Duggan 2002). To them, these changes symbolise an erosion of the potential the community once had for destabilising these norms all together (Duggan 2002).

Unable to determine on which “side” I sat, I started to suspect that my focus on representation alone was like masking symptoms of an unknown disease with ibuprofen: pain numbing, but eventually superfluous. I decided to build a knowledge of where sexuality-based inequities in Aotearoa New Zealand originated from to better work out what kind of interventions upon them would be successful. This, I anticipated, could help me determine my own position in the conversations around LGBTQ+ politics.

I was still primarily invested in queer kinship, but I became increasingly drawn to motherhood as a specific point of analysis. Motherhood as an identity has been contested throughout history (Russo 1976; Glenn, Chang, and Forcey 1994, 1–33; Collins 1994; DiQuinzio 1999; Arendell 2004; Shu and Meagher 2018), and yet continues to be entrenched in gendered understandings of the role of women in society (Choi et al. 2005; Chatillon, Charles, and Bradley 2018; Shu and Meagher 2018). I was curious about how queer women who automatically exist outside of conventional motherhood due to their sexuality, navigate the implied heterosexuality within it. Most of all, I wanted to investigate what their actions meant for the future of kinship in Aotearoa New Zealand. Did they represent a societal move towards more inclusive kinship ideology? Or, as queer radicals would purport, did they in fact denote an assimilation into heteronormativity, therefore proving the insurmountable endurance of family norms?

Out of these reflections, the following research questions emerged:

- Where does heteronormative kinship originate from in Aotearoa New Zealand?
- How do mothers, who sit outside of heteronormative expectations, subvert, reject, and reinforce kinship norms?
- Ultimately, what do their actions represent for shaping normative kinship?

After researching the origins of kinship norms in Aotearoa New Zealand, it was immediately obvious that kinship emerges from culture, rather than nature, and thus there is no universal experience of it (P. Johnston and Pihama 1994; Mikaere 1994; Pihama 1998). This complicates the idea that there are static kinship norms to gain

inclusion into to begin with. In reality, kinship ideology is constantly shifting, and even those superficially included in it reinterpret it to suit their own realities.

In this thesis, I show how six queer individuals engage with the kinship narratives that surround them, often reproducing normative kinship scripts in the process. This partly supports the perspective that queer engagements with the family validate heteronormative ideals. On the other hand, the existence and the activities of my participants sit outside of normative kinship, which means they widen conceptions of what families in Aotearoa New Zealand can look like.

In the end, I found the binary between queer radicalism and gay assimilation unhelpful and instead located my core argument within the contentions between the two. Regardless of the extent to which queer families seek belonging within normative kinship, their existence, and the interventions they make on family norms, demonstrate the malleability of kinship ideology. Therefore, their actions simultaneously represent both the endurance of heteronormativity, and the potential for abolishing it. In this thesis, I tie the origins of kinship ideology and the ethnographic experiences of my participants together, exploring the implications of this parallel meaning. In doing so, I demonstrate that the ways my participants remake kinship ideology prove it can be imagined anew, showing the possibility of a more inclusive future for Aotearoa New Zealand's understandings of 'family'.

Critical Kinship Studies as a Foundational Framework

In seeking frameworks for this exploration, I felt it was important to avoid moralising access to motherhood through arguing for queer people's right to have children. It has now been proven that children experience no significant difference in outcomes between same-sex and opposite-sex parented households (Anderssen, Amlie, and Ytterøy 2002; Gartrell, Bos, and Koh 2018), and this has been explored extensively within social science, psychology, and family studies (Anderssen, Amlie, and Ytterøy 2002). Within anthropology specifically, Ellen Lewin's ethnography *Lesbian Mothers: Accounts of Gender and American Culture* (1993), drove home the similarities between heterosexual and lesbian mothers, emphasising that lesbians were just as effective at parenting as their straight counterparts. Uncomfortable with producing work that reasoned queer families

deserve to exist because they conform to standards of normal, I instead looked to destabilise the idea of a “normal” family altogether. The drive to deconstruct notions of normative kinship led me to use critical kinship studies as my foundational intellectual framework.

Critical kinship studies refers to the body of work within anthropology, and other social sciences, that aims to offer a revisioning of traditional approaches to understanding kinship (Schneider 1984, 138. 174; Collier and Yanagisako 1987; Franklin and Ragone 1998; Strathern 1992a, 1992b; Yanagisako and Delaney 1995; Carsten 2000; Franklin and McKinnon 2000, 2001; Kroløkke et al. 2015). A key element of its development was in critique of the inherent eurocentrism in anthropologists’ understandings of kinship, showing how their bias towards viewing their own “normal” as naturally occurring, created incorrect assumptions of the social lives being discussed (Schneider 1984; Carsten 7-14; Franklin and McKinnon 2001, 2-4). Rather than trying to make kinship structures legible by fitting them into a normative template, critical kinship studies rejects this template in favour of a more fluid understanding of how kinship works (Franklin and McKinnon 2000; Carsten 2000, 15-37; Franklin and McKinnon 2001, 2-26).

Originally, kinship studies in anthropology assumed a link between kinship to biology and marriage, viewing kinship as a natural and universal fact that existed in response to the incest taboo (Evans-Pritchard 1929; Malinowski 1930; Evans-Pritchard 1951; Lévi-Strauss 1969; Schneider 1984; Carsten 2000, 7-14; Franklin and McKinnon 2001, 2-4). From this perspective, marriage existed to build kinship ties, and reproduction served to continue them through genetic connection (Malinowski 1930; Lévi-Strauss 1969; Schneider 1984; Franklin and McKinnon 2001, 2-4). The reflexive turn in anthropology (Marcus and Fischer 1986; Clifford and Marcus 1986), David Schneider’s *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (1984), and the rise of critical feminist scholarship (Rubin 1975; MacCormack and Strathern 1980), lead to the reassessment of this perspective (Sahlins 1976; Goody and Goody 1977; Wagner 1981; Carsten 2000, 6-14; Franklin and McKinnon 2001, 2-4). Out of these discussions, new academic approaches to kinship blossomed.

Led by feminist scholars, the new kinship studies eschewed defining relationships solely through biology and marriage, criticising the potential this approach has for naturalising western patriarchal hierarchies (MacCormack and Strathern 1980; Collier and

Yanagisako 1987; Ginsburg and Rapp 1991; Strathern 1992a, 1992b; Yanagisako and Delaney 1995; Ginsburg and Rapp 1995). Instead, it offered a new framework of kinship, viewing kinship as relatedness, not related-through-blood-and-marriage (Carsten 2000, 15–37; Franklin and McKinnon 2001, 2–26). Through exploring forms of kinship that complicate “natural” biogenetic definitions, such as adoption (Modell 1994; Howell 2003), surrogacy (Ragoné 1994), and assisted reproductive technologies (Strathern 1990, 1992a; Franklin and Ragoné 1998), these scholars purport that kinship is not a static concept attached to marriage or biology. Rather, it is a description of a practice, a performance of forming and maintaining relationships (Carsten 2000, 7–15). Viewing kinship through this lens allows for a nuanced analysis of the multiplexities of relationships that exist between my participants, their children, and their partners, outside of biology, marriage, and normative kinship.

Grounding my analysis within the critical kinship studies body of literature enabled me to draw on a legacy of relevant ethnographic work, starting with Kath Weston’s *Families We Choose: Gays, Lesbians, Kinship* (1991). In its exploration of fluid kinship bonds between members of the LGBTQ+ community, Weston’s ethnography is foundational for both queer anthropology and kinship studies and helps to cement the fact that kinship can exist outside of conventional terms (1991). I was also able to draw on ethnographic writing such as Corinne Hayden’s engagement with lesbian families (1995), Signe Howell’s work on adoption (2003, 2009), and Charis Thompson (2005), Laura Mamo (2007), and Petra Nordqvist’s (2010, 2011, 2014) analyses of reproductive technologies. More locally, I also engage with Dunedin based anthropologist Ruth Fitzgerald’s ethnographies of fertility clinics (2013; 2017).

The tendency critical kinship studies has for drawing from multiple disciplines also gave me the freedom to develop an academically interdisciplinary and nuanced perspective. As queer medical anthropologist Michelle Walks points out in her review of an anthropology of motherhood, scholastic engagement with motherhood experiences was scant until the 1990s, prior to which less than five anthropologists had explicitly engaged with motherhood as a research focus (2011, 4). One of these scholars, Sheila Kitzinger, attributed this to the mostly male make-up of the discipline, asserting in 1978 that anthropologists had neglected analysis of women within the family to focus on the role that men played in the public arena (14). Over time, anthropological explorations of

motherhood have flourished through the development of critical kinship studies (Walks 2011, 5-9). Scholarship outside of this subfield, such as the works of medical anthropologist Pranee Liamputtong (2007a, 2007b, 2010), and the contributors to Walks and Naomi McPherson's edited volume *An Anthropology of Mothering* (2011), strengthen critiques against naturalised kinship by using cross-cultural comparison to emphasise the diversity in mothering practices.

However, while anthropological literature was integral for analysing my participants' experiences, other disciplines, most notably sociology and gender studies, have an equally robust tradition of critical motherhood scholarship, which have considerably shaped this work (O'Reilly 2004, 1-27). I draw on scholars such as Shelley Park and her explorations of the adoptive maternal body (2006), and the multitudes of scholarship on motherhood ideology (Rich 1976; Glenn, Chang, and Forcey 1994; Collins 1994; McMahan 1995; Arendell 2004; Collins 2005; Walks 2010), even though they sit outside of explicitly anthropological engagements with kinship. Drawing from multiple disciplines also meant I was able to gain inspiration from local scholarship, such as Wellington based sociologist Rhonda Shaw's work on the naturalisation of maternal biological processes as organic to motherhood identities (2003; 2004). The critiques laid out by these scholars centre on critiquing gender essentialist understandings of motherhood and are explicitly feminist in their approach. Therefore, this scholarship was intrinsic to developing the assertion that institutional motherhood naturalises patriarchal norms and helped me to challenge the societal narratives that imagine motherhood as a singular, biologically defined role.

This multidisciplinary approach, and the focus critical kinship studies puts on avoiding simplified linear perspectives also allowed me to navigate my positionality while conducting this research. When I began investigating this area of scholarship during my undergraduate degree, I was dating a woman, and coming into my own queer identity. For this project, I initially favoured a radical queer perspective, integrating a political economic slant to trace the development of family in Aotearoa New Zealand, and its ties to heteronormativity (Lehr 1999, 16-27; Warner 2000; Richardson 2005). Inspired by activists around me, and the scholarship I was reading (Warner 1993, 2000; Fraser 2000; Duggan 2002), I was anxious that queer engagements with the domestic family sustained heteronormativity, undermining the potential of transformative change.

However, as my research developed, this approach appeared to flatten the complexities of my participants' realities into heteronormative assimilation, which was not the case. I also started dating a cisgender man within the first month of my Masters. While I am unable to explore the bisexual identity in this thesis, there is no denying that my pathway to creating a family is now significantly simpler, and less likely to attract opposition. Taking a stance against vying for inclusion within heteronormativity, which is often inherent in queer theoretical approaches (Warner 2000; Boellstorff 2007a, 2007b), felt hypocritical as someone no longer facing automatic exclusion. Critical kinship studies allowed me to embrace the complexities of seeking belonging into mainstream conceptions of family, without forcing what felt like an increasingly unfair and one-dimensional analysis, both personally and academically, onto my participants' experiences.

My developing relationship was also a reminder that normative ideology exists on more than just the axis of sexuality, as my current partner is of Indian descent. Likely due to my naivety as a Pākehā, I was surprised to find that even though I was no longer dating a woman, my relationship continued to be an object of curiosity of those around me, due to our differing ethnicities. I remembered Iris Marion Young's writings on citizenship, where she emphasises that the imagined citizen is not value neutral, but in fact imbued with hegemonic ideals defined by the powerful within a society (1989, 1990). I wanted to avoid naturalising the other characteristics of normative kinship outside of sexuality in Aotearoa New Zealand, like assumed whiteness, by deeming them unworthy of analysis.

In attempting to address this potential naturalisation, I was particularly influenced by the work of Māori anthropologists on decolonisation, especially Lily George's call for anthropology to "stir up the silence" within the discipline regarding the impacts of settler colonialism (2017). A collective emerged out of this called Mahi Tahī, and a group at my local university formed, with the intent of creating a space for Pākehā and Māori to have these conversations together (George and Gibson 2018). Even in my limited attendance due to poor health, I observed the frustration of Māori students at Pākehā anthropologists' failure to address the impacts of colonisation. Their perspectives were formative in my approach to this research, as I felt confirmed that my thesis needed to

address the racially oppressive origins of kinship ideology and avoid naturalising Pākehā culture.

Through treating kinship norms as a social construct, critical kinship studies provided me the tools to examine settler colonial action as the ground for heteronormative kinship ideology in Aotearoa New Zealand. Because critical kinship studies is multidisciplinary, I was able to draw on Māori scholarship about the family directly, which was vital for building a comprehensive understanding of the kinship structures that pre-existed Pākehā colonisation. Māori scholarship on sexuality and gender is interwoven into Māori ontology, and is therefore impossible to understand through western academic frameworks (Mikaere 1994; Kerekere 2017). By taking a critical kinship studies approach, I was able to present the works of central scholars like Ani Mikaere (1994), Leonie Pihama (1994; 1998), and Elizabeth Kerekere (2017), without pushing a predetermined motive onto their work. Critical kinship studies therefore offered me the flexibility I needed to embrace the complexities and contradictions present in my ethnographic data and Aotearoa New Zealand's history.

This in turn, led to a project deeply committed to understanding the meanings of my participants' experiences of kinship in Aotearoa New Zealand. However, despite my holistic approach grounded in critical kinship studies, this thesis is still primarily an exploration of how queer women experience this context. Because of this, I draw on queer and LGBTQ+ histories and perspectives throughout this thesis. I intentionally use the acronym LGBTQ+ rather than more inclusive contemporary labels such as LGBTQAI+, or acronyms that include identities grounded in ethnicity as well as sexuality. This is not because I in any way oppose the inclusion of these identities, but because their inclusion is relatively recent (Chase 2006; Reis 2007; Scherrer 2008; Canning 2015), and the majority of the time I use this label is to refer to the imagined LGBTQ+ community that emerged in the 1970s. I am unable to do justice to the specific legacies of the added identities, such as intersex activism against the medicalisation of intersex bodies (Chase 2006; Reis 2007).

When referring to contemporary identities outside of heteronormativity, I use the descriptor of queer. I only use the terms bisexual and lesbian when specifically referring to these identities, to avoid converging them into one another. While Queer is used as a verb in queer theory e.g. "to Queer" something, it is also a label that has been appropriated

by the LGBTQ+ community, operating as an umbrella term for those outside of heteronormative identities (Levy and Johnson 2012). It is considered a label that only people within the community can use, because of its history as a slur (Levy and Johnson 2012). This history makes it a contested term within the LGBTQ+ community, but I chose it as a descriptor because it is inherently oppositional to the mainstream, as are mothers who exist outside of heterosexuality.

My Participants

This thesis is a small-scale qualitative research study, focusing on the accounts of six different research participants. This scale was determined by multiple different factors, primarily because of recruitment difficulties, but also because of my research aims. Initially, I posted a call for participants on a national facebook group for LGBTQAI+ parents called “rainbow families”. This received significant engagement considering the groups’ small size (around 500 members at the time), demographic (most members are based in a different geographic region) and daily activity (1-3 new posts per week, with minimal responses), with 20 interactions in the form of likes and comments. However, translating this into tangible fieldwork opportunities proved to be difficult, and the lack of explicit communal public spaces for queer parents in Aotearoa New Zealand meant I was unsure of where else to search.

My focus on mothering consequentially meant most potential participants that had caregiving responsibilities, which complicated their availability and ability to commit to ongoing communication. After filtering out those outside my geographic scope, and giving more detail about the requirements of participation, I confirmed three of my participants, Kate, Harriet, and Aneta¹. I began interviews with them right away, hoping that they would connect me to others, using a recruitment strategy often referred to as “snowball sampling” (Browne 2002). Snowball sampling is commonly used when recruiting in demographic groups that are “hidden”, because of small population size, or topic sensitivity, both of which were true for this thesis (Browne 2002, 28). As planned, Kate, Harriet, and Aneta all offered to connect me to their peers after my first round of interviews. However, by this time, I had found three other participants through my own

¹ The participants in this study have been given pseudonyms to provide anonymity, discussed on page 10.

social networks, Viv, Lauren, and Sam, who approached me themselves after hearing about my research from mutual friends.

After considering connecting with Kate, Harriet, and Aneta's suggestions, I actively decided to limit the number of participants in my study, choosing instead to prioritise the anthropological tradition of highlighting individual stories and experiences through ethnographic writing and providing "thick descriptions" (Malinowski 1922, 3; Clifford 1986; Narayan 2009; Bönisch-Brednich 2018, 153). Understandings of ethnography within the social sciences continually shift and evolve (O'Reilly 2005, 1-3, 12-20; Behar 2007, 146, 154). Ultimately however, being "ethnographic" generally indicates a dedication to a methodological approach that uses prolonged and intensive contact with one's subjects. It also prioritises writing the findings of this in a way that emphasises participant experiences and personal narratives, embracing the contradictions, intricacies, and the uncontainable messiness of human life (O'Reilly 2005, 3; Narayan 2009; Bönisch-Brednich 2018, 153-156). Through limiting my participant pool, I was able to conduct multiple interviews with each of them, choosing to seek depth over breadth.

Below, I provide a basic demographic overview of each participant, as a point of reference for my later ethnographic explorations of their stories. They have been anonymised, a practice in social science that aims to protect the confidentiality of participants, and ensure they are unable to be identified (Saunders, Kitzinger and Kitzenger, 2015, 617). This is especially important when conducting sensitive research, where identifiable factors could lead to discrimination or backlash (Wiles, Crow, Heath and Charles 2008, 423-425). All my participants are based in the lower North Island region of Aotearoa New Zealand, and each person mentioned below is Pākehā. Apart from Sam, they are all also cisgender.

Kate is in her late 30s and the predominant relationship featured in this thesis is with her permanent foster child Dash, who she now has special guardianship over. Dash is now in his early teenage years, and Kate shares guardianship of him with her wife Jude, and Dash's biological mother, Lilah. She also has three other biological children, that she had with three different male partners before she was 20 years old. She identifies as a lesbian but uses the word queer to describe the wider community. I interviewed her on the 8th

of June, and on the 22nd of August, in 2018, once in a café close to her workplace, and then at university.

Harriet is in her late 30s, and is the biological mother to both Oliver, who is in his late toddlerhood, and Pippa, who is still a baby. She conceived both through anonymous sperm donation and In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF) at Fertility Associates, an Aotearoa New Zealand based fertility clinic. She chose the sperm sample with her earlier partner Jane, who she now shares equal custody of Oliver with. Her second child Pippa is from the same sperm donor, but conceived in a later relationship, with Chris. Chris and Harriet currently live separately and are in the process of potentially breaking up. Because of this, they are also navigating what Chris's relationship with Pippa should look like. Harriet identifies as a lesbian but uses the word queer interchangeably at times. I interviewed Harriet on the 14th of June in 2018 in a local café, and conducted a follow up interview in her home on the 18th of March, 2019, where we reflected on key themes of the thesis together.

Aneta, also in her 30s, is the biological mother of Jonti who has just started school, and the non-biological mother of Scarlett who is in her later years of preschool. She shares equal custody of Scarlett and Jonti with her ex-wife Jules, who is Scarlett's biological mother. They also used Fertility Associates to conceive with an anonymous sperm donor. Aneta and Jules have a fluid co-parenting relationship and live three doors away from each other. Aneta identifies as bisexual. I interviewed Aneta in her own home on 10th of July and conducted participant observation with her and her family on the 9th of August, both in 2018.

Vic is in her early 30s, and is the non-biological mother of Flynn, who is less than two years old. Her partner Keely is Flynn's biological mother, and they used a known donor, and the services of Fertility Associates to conceive. Their donor is an old friend, and currently lives overseas. Vic identifies as queer. I interviewed Vic in a local bar on 22nd of August, and shared minor updates with her as the project progressed.

Lauren and Sam are in their mid-twenties, and are yet to become parents, though they are considering what that would look like for them as a couple. Lauren is a cisgender woman, and Sam is a transgender man. They are married, but primarily for legal reasons as at one point they anticipated moving to a country where they were unsure as to whether their relationship would be recognised. Sam identifies as trans, and both him

and Lauren identify as queer. Lauren and Sam became participants later in the thesis, after Lauren heard through our wider social network that I was struggling to find transgender participants. Due to health delays on my part, I interviewed them on the 1st of February 2019.

As described, all of my participants are Pākehā, which at the time of seeking participants, caused me to reflect on how to achieve creating research that destabilised hegemonic whiteness, rather than reproducing it. Initially, I explicitly aimed for half of my participants to be Māori, to create equal representation, and therefore avoid repainting queerness in Aotearoa New Zealand as Pākehā centric.

However, early on in my research, I experienced “Pākehā Paralysis”, a term that refers to anxiety and resistance in Pākehā when considering integrating Māori participants and approaches (Tolich 2002; Fabish 2014, 28–34). As I investigated different methods for researching with Māori (Awekotuku 1991; Smith 1992; Smith 1999, 177–81; Fabish 2014, 23–56), I soon realised that a close and anti-hierarchical relationship with Māori communities was vital for doing decolonial research. The more I read, the more I realised despite my intentions, I had not created the relationships or done the work necessary to be able to conduct meaningful and safe research with Māori.

This was consolidated after interviewing a potential participant that is not included in this thesis, a Chinese woman studying in New Zealand at the time. After the interview, I realised that I had not known enough about her own culture to ask the right questions and became even more anxious about my inability to conduct culturally sensitive research. I only broke through this with the guidance of Tarapuhi Vaeau, an anthropologist that identifies as both Māori and Pākehā. She gently but firmly reminded me that this work was not about my feelings, and I would just have to find a new way of doing the research I was invested in. During our conversation, she urged me to stop thinking of my Pākehā identity as a value neutral existence that I had to add cultural competency onto, but as equipment that could analyse Pākehā kinship ideologies directly. Instead of using Māori participants as a foil to Pākehā hegemony, she encouraged me investigate the construction of the Pākehā identity, pointing me towards Jen Margaret’s critique of settler colonialism through her exploration of the Pākehā nation (2018). What now seems obvious, was revolutionary to me at the time, and shaped the direction of this thesis.

From here, I decided to explicitly focus on Pākehā experiences, choosing not to include my Chinese participant². In the context of my research and knowledge, it felt disingenuous to mine our interview for quotes to support my points, without any theoretical explorations of the cultural underpinnings of her motherhood experience. While I was aware that I was not equipped to do decolonial work, I decided on approaching my thesis with an anti-colonial stance, opening with an exploration of the settler colonial roots of heteronormativity. To account for the lack of diversity in my dataset, which was not just Pākehā, but also only had one transgender participant, I continually tie my participants' experiences back to these roots in my writing. In doing this, I remind the reader that their experiences are not universal to queer parents, but representations of how these norms can manifest.

Methodological Approach

My methodological approach emerged from my specific curiosity regarding the impact of kinship ideology on my participants' experiences and perspectives. While participant observation is normally encouraged for anthropological fieldwork, I intentionally chose to primarily conduct interviews. I knew that most of my participants would have childcare requirements and inviting myself into their homes felt like an imposition. The ethics approval process required by the university also caused me to reflect on the sensitive nature of the project.

As I filled out the necessary forms that emphasised the importance of participant safety and data collection, I felt more uncomfortable about creating an expectation of access into future participants' private spaces. Same sex families routinely note a feeling of societal surveillance, and pressure to perform "acceptable" parenting scripts (Bartholomaeus, Due, and Riggs 2015). Compounding this experience by requesting permission to observe their parenting in action, and then document it for academic research, did not sit comfortably with my crystallising ethical aims of emotional safety. While my approved ethics application (granted on 29th May 2016, reference number 0000026042) included

² When informing her of this over facebook messenger (where we had been communicating), I also apologised for being underprepared for the interview. Despite my intuition that it had gone badly, she insisted she had enjoyed the opportunity to talk about her experiences and looked forward to reading my final work. This experience reflects the subjectivities present in interviews, especially when conducted cross-culturally (Goldstein 2017; Robles 2017, 56-60).

plans for significant participant observation, as my project began, I increasingly favoured interviews as my key methodological approach.

I was also more invested in my participants' own reflections of navigating kinship ideology, than observing their behaviour, and the potentials of interviewing for this interested me. One of the main critiques regarding interviews is their performative nature (Agar 1980; Angrosino 1989), and the risk that participants simplify their responses into narratives that they feel the interviewer is seeking (Briggs 2007; Hampshire et al. 2014). However, on the context of this thesis, I did not feel that this risk was a distinct limitation, and in fact, chose to see it as a potential strength of interview as a method. I was interested in the ways my participants would present themselves and their experiences to me, as this would give insight to their engagement with mainstream scripts of motherhood.

I conducted one instance of participant observation, attending a school pick up with one of my participants and making arts and crafts with her children after school. Three of my interviews occurred at participants' houses, which gave me an insight to their routine and inner worlds. However, while these events got me closer to understanding the actualities of their relationships with their children, I found the interview setting just as relevant for unpacking their reflections on navigating kinship ideology.

To reach the depth needed in my data collection, I interviewed three of my participants twice, and maintained sporadic contact with the others. I also intentionally employed queer and sensitive research methodological approaches to the interviews, using an in-depth interviewing method (Liamputtong 2007c, 96–97). An in-depth interviewing method aims to build intimacy between the interviewee and the interviewer, using self-disclosure as a method for building trust and connection (Liamputtong 2007c; Dickson-Swift et al. 2007; Gorman-Murray, Johnston, and Waitt 2016; Detamore 2016). I aimed to destabilise the boundaries between interviewer and interviewee by shaping the interview more like a conversation and collaborating on key themes by offering my own experiences and perspectives.

This form of interview aims to embrace emotion and vulnerability, which was vital in my navigation of my participants' reflections (Dickson-Swift et al. 2007; Liamputtong 2007c, 1–23). All my interviews contained a range of sentiments, filled with laughter, frustration,

and at times, tears and sadness, as my participants recounted their experiences. In these sometimes-unpredictable moments, I put aside any burning questions, and instead acted on intuition, sometimes moving into the role of comforter, rather than interviewer. This reflects the realities of conducting social research, which often needs spontaneous response, just as much as directed questioning (Collins and Cooper 2014). In these moments, empathy and connection felt more relevant than research outcomes.

However, despite sharing an emotional space, and disclosing my own experiences with my participants, I was careful not to fall into the trap of an insider/outsider binary, and incorrectly perceive myself as an insider. Doing so would have essentialised our commonalities as objectively shared experiences, which was not the case (Gorman-Murray, Johnston, and Waitt 2016, 99–102). Subjectivities are relationally co-constituted (Gorman-Murray, Johnston, and Waitt 2016, 101), and while I am queer, I am not a mother or in a serious same gender relationship.

Therefore, while I was transparent about my own perspectives, I let my participants shape the direction of the interview, starting with prompting them to tell me their parenting story, and using the semi-structured technique of offering guiding questions when conversation began to fade (Leech 2002; Spradley 2002). Each interview lasted for over an hour, which reflects the depth and breadth of the interview content. Ultimately, my methodological approach emerged out of a combination of logistical needs, my research priorities, and my intuition, rather than a particular methodology or technique.

Transcribing, Coding, and Analysis

I continued this approach as I moved from fieldwork into the transcribing, coding, and analysis stage of my research. I was reminded of and inspired by Brigitte Bönisch-Brednich's reflections on intuitive ethnography (2017), which I had first hear her speak about in 2017, at the Cultural Anthropology programme at Victoria University of Wellington's 50th Anniversary. As ethnography has popularised as a social scientific method, coding processes have gained prominence in multi-disciplinary discussions on how ethnographic data should be transformed into research findings (Davies 2010, 9-13).

However, Bönisch-Brednich, as well as other anthropologists invested in ethnographic writing such as Ruth Behar (2007), Kirin Narayan (2009) and James Davies (2010), are

critical of the attempt to claim a “tidy subjectivity” through a rigorous and methodological coding process (Bönisch-Brednich 2017,155). They assert that the very process of adopting a predetermined coding methodology, as laid out in fieldwork guides for new scholars or implied by computer software (Davies 2010, 11-14, Bönisch-Brednich 2017, 154-156), can interfere with the intricacy that ethnographic writing aims to achieve.

Instead, Bönisch-Brednich emphasises the importance of hunches when writing ethnography, rejecting efforts to “scientificate qualitative data” (2017, 155), and choosing to embrace the uncategorizable messiness of ethnographic work. She promotes “working with an intuition that comes from hovering instead of coding, from hanging out with our narratives instead of filing or ordering and... de-privileging of interview methods, and a privileging of listening” (2017, 156).

Therefore, rather than fully transcribing my interview data, I instead timestamped key moments from my interviews, whilst also recording sentences that denoted the related subject matter. Using the free online software “OTranscribe”³, I was able to click on the time stamp, and listen to my participants’ words over and over again. This allowed me to “hang out” with my data (Bönisch-Brednich 2017, 156). Each time I listened, I recorded new notable dialogue, relistening each time I began transcribing a new interview to reflect on potential connections between them. I favoured a naturalised transcription style, which aims to transcribe in the closest way possible to the actual recorded content, rather than a denaturalised transcription, where you trim pauses, asides, and non-verbal responses from dialogue so it reads as its own piece (Gibson and Brown 2009). Emotion, which is so often expressed non-verbally, was ever-present in my interviews. To edit it out felt like an erasure of the depth behind my participants’ words.

As I neared the end of my first round of fieldwork, which lasted around two months, I had transcribed the interviews almost in entirety, albeit couched in my own asides, annotations, and reflections. While my transcription process was ongoing, rather than demarcated, I intentionally paused twice throughout my research, to loosely code, and reflect on key emerging themes.

At first, I leant towards a mixed categorical coding process, printing out my transcriptions, cutting them into distinct potential quotations, and then attempting to

³ oTranscribe is a free web transcription application that allows you to upload interview recordings, transcribe their contents, and keep records of multiple interviews at once. Found at otranscribe.com.

arrange them into connecting patterns and overarching themes (Saldaña 2015, 1-31). As Bönisch-Brednich warned (2017), this shifted me towards prominent commonalities, but away from individually significant ethnographic moments. In front of me lay a connected but lifeless arrangement of words, flatly reduced into categories such as “heteronormativity”, “legalisation” “family expectations”, “stereotypes”, and “community”. In other words, I had coded myself away from my participants’ stories (Bönisch-Brednich 2017, 154).

While cutting up my transcripts had allowed me to see the similarities between my participants’ experiences, it also stole the individuality and depth my participants’ reflections had originally contained. Their voices, which I had spent the two months prior immersed in, were absent, replaced by detached and isolated quotations. They had shifted from narrators, to informants (Taussig 2006, 62). This moment, spent fruitlessly arranging and rearranging on my office floor, led me to eschew organising my thesis thematically, and move towards attempting to represent my participants’ journeys. Following a hunch, I shifted to structuring my transcriptions around separate ethnographic contexts, aiming to weave theoretical analysis throughout. Upon doing so, I could see kinship ideology’s continuing but distinctly differing manifestations, leading me to my eventual explorations of the enduring but shifting nature of kinship norms.

My following round of fieldwork, where I interviewed Aneta, Kate, Vic, and Viv for the second time (Sam and Lauren joined the project too late to conduct two interviews), aimed to flesh out the details behind the specific circumstances I had decided to explore. I asked for elaborations on their original reflections, while also sharing the emerging thematic threads I had found between them and other participants, giving them space to explicitly engage with these findings. This helped me add an ethnographic richness to the retellings in my thesis and ensure that my ethnographic explorations avoided generalisations and were multi-dimensional.

Because of my focus on different ethnographic contexts and experiences of kinship ideology within them, I begin each chapter with a brief theoretical and contextual introduction. This aims to orientate the reader with the historical, social, and theoretical considerations I have made, which differ from context to context. I have also included an opening chapter that gives a historical analysis of kinship ideology in Aotearoa New Zealand, providing the background knowledge needed for understanding the socio-

political foundation my participants' experiences emerge from. Choosing this means of organisation, rather than a traditional format with an exhaustive literature review at the beginning of the thesis, allows me to pay particular attention to both the specificities of each context, and the continuing connections that endure between them.

Thesis Structure

The thesis is organised into four main chapters (following) and a conclusion. In the next chapter, chapter two, I offer a historical context for which my participants exist within in Aotearoa New Zealand. This chapter is shorter than the rest, as rather than drawing on my ethnographic data, it lays the groundwork for further explorations. Primarily based on Māori scholarship, this chapter aims to emphasise the constructed nature of kinship ideals and the ties their developments have with settler colonialism. Here I propose that one of the only consistent qualities of kinship norms, is that they are constantly changing, and being contested.

In chapter three, I share Kate's story, using her experiences in the foster system with Dash to explore the historical developments of kinship ideals within the Aotearoa New Zealand and its state institutions. As I depict Kate's navigation of dominant motherhood scripts, I show that despite their inherent heteronormativity, individuals can repurpose kinship norms in new ways that include their own families.

Chapter four, helps me outline the experiences of my other participants, Vic, Aneta, and Harriet, all of which used the services of Fertility Associates to have a child. Using critical kinship studies frameworks to explore their usages of assisted reproductive technologies, I continue to show how kinship ideals are flexible. However, by illuminating the limitations of these technologies, I highlight that kinship ideology's multifaceted nature can make it hard to navigate, and often the ability to remake kinship is influenced by one's ability to conform to other normative ideals.

In chapter five, I discuss the implications of my participants' engagement with kinship ideology, exploring whether they are in fact contributing to the endurance of heteronormative family narratives. I investigate their experiences of belonging, in conjunction with LGBTQ+ and queer perspectives on inclusion into societal definitions of normal. In tracing my own developing thoughts on the issue, I eventually suggest that

focusing on political meaning centres the wrong phenomena and erases the radical potential of queer families.

In chapter six, for my conclusion, I further this point, and share a brief ethnographic exploration of the ways my participants reject heteronormative expectations, and instead forge their own forms of family. I suggest that the fact that my participants are able to reinterpret kinship ideals, means there is the potential that a future exists where Pākehā kinship norms have moved far enough away from their heteronormative roots, that they become more inclusive. In this thesis I contribute to anthropology and critical kinship's body of work on LGBTQ+ families and offer an Aotearoa New Zealand based ethnographic exploration.

Chapter 2

“Mothers’ Make the World Go Round”

Before I begin writing the bulk of this thesis, I fly home to attend a family reunion on my father’s side. He has one brother, but six sisters, and they rule their family with a kind-hearted yet iron fist. When we arrive, they are the ones who tell us where to sit, what to eat, and how much to drink, delivering family news with an air of authority and permanence.

The latest update is that one of my cousins has just had a baby, and as I hear this for the fourth time from a different aunty, I spy her and her new daughter in the corner. There’s a whirlpool of relatives around them, commenting on the infant’s beauty and perfection, all straining to get a closer look. My aunties revere their grandchildren, and so, the rest of the family does too.

Months later, when I begin to research the origins of motherhood, I can’t help but reflect on this idyllic presentation of maternity. I find unpacking the history of mothering as we know it in Aotearoa New Zealand today relatively disturbing, like intentionally peeling back the face of a favourite toy only to discover the unnatural metal underneath. As I uncover the relationship that motherhood ideals have with constructing heteronormativity, to Pākehā domination, to classism, I think back to this family event, and to the power of the matriarch I felt there.

Conscious that the attendees were mostly older, conservative, people, I generally described my research as an “exploration of motherhood in New Zealand”. When I told one aunty this, she held up her hands to the sky, adorned with sparkly rings and crimson nail polish, and loudly proclaimed: “mothers make the world go round!”.

Now, months after the reunion, I start to reflect on how big this topic is, how deeply gender, motherhood, sexuality, and social institutions are all woven together, and how intensely they shape the society I'm in. I begin to suspect, albeit in a different way to her intention, that my aunty was right.

Approaching Kinship Ideology in Aotearoa New Zealand

Motherhood, as a social institution, was integral to the formation of the world, or rather, Aotearoa New Zealand, as we know it. Aotearoa New Zealand built its national social infrastructure on the assumption of heterosexual kinship, and used norms of motherhood, gender, and family, to create a successfully dominant settler colonial state (Mikaere 1994; Jenkins and Matthews 1998; Morgensen 2012). This history has shaped contemporary Pākehā motherhood ideology, resulting in a manifestation of class, bodily and ethnic ideals, that reinforce the gender essentialism present in beliefs about women in the western world for centuries now (Mikaere 1994; Jenkins and Matthews 1998; Arendell 2004; Walks 2010). Opponents of the families like the ones featured in this thesis, draw on this history when they present the (heterosexual) nuclear family ideal as the traditional and natural family organisation (Clarke 2001; McCroskie n.d.). In reality, the nuclear family was never endemic to Aotearoa New Zealand, and only reigned as the tangible norm for a couple of decades (Mikaere 1994; Cribb 2009). Additionally, Pākehā kinship practices have never been homogenously nuclear and continue to significantly differ by class and age, alongside increasing representation of step and blended families (Tennant 1985; Else 1991; 1-13; Harrington 2002; McCreanor, Watson and Denny 2006; Cartwright 2010; Sligo et al. 2017).

Despite this, a heteronormative vision of motherhood in contemporary Pākehā kinship ideology persists. To understand its endurance and paint a picture of the foundation from which my participants mother from, I use this chapter to unpack the origins of these norms. In this, I highlight how kinship is not as static as Pākehā narratives paint it to be, drawing on the approaches critical kinship studies scholars have set out before me. I build on Schneider, and his critique of universalising biological kinship (1984, 174–76), and continue in the style of the feminist scholars that followed him. As Yanagisako and Delaney purported in *Naturalising Power* (1995, 1–15), positioning kinship as “naturally occurring”, legitimises hierarchies of power, rooting their origins in nature, rather than

culture (Franklin and McKinnon 2001, 1–29). In actuality, there is no such thing as a “pre-social” fact of kinship, and Pākehā understandings of kinship are not natural results of sexual reproduction, but socially created norms (Collier and Yanagisako 1987, 24–35; Mikaere 1994; Johnston and Pihama 1994; Franklin and McKinnon 2001, 12).

This is evident in contemporary anthropological engagements with kinship, which reflect endless diversity of family norms. For example, in one influential critical kinship studies volume alone, *Cultures of Relatedness* (Carsten 2010), scholars explore contexts ranging from the Iñupiat in Alaska, who favour kinship ties formed through contributing productively to local work over biology (Bodenhorn 2010, 128-149), to the cycle of *laiwang* in China, which creates non-genealogical relatedness through reciprocal ceremonial transactions (Stafford 2010, 37-55). In the edited volume *An Anthropology of Mothering*, equal diversity is evident, and the included ethnographic analysis of a range of geographic contexts help to debunk the idea of kinship as a universal natural fact (Walks and McPherson 2011, 1-9, 19-24).

In this chapter, I make this contextually clear through a succinct retelling of the construction of Pākehā kinship norms in Aotearoa New Zealand. I want to avoid falling into the trap of using Eurocentrism as a starting point of comparison, which as Schneider laid out in the critique that birthed critical kinship studies, has the potential to legitimise this form of kinship as organic (Schneider 1984, 174–76). Instead, I begin by exploring pre-colonial understandings of kinship, and then move to discussing the intentional and tangible interventions colonialists made against Māori conceptions of family.

Throughout this thesis, I use the name “Aotearoa New Zealand” to remind the reader of that the struggles and interactions between “Aotearoa” and pre-existing Māori life, and “New Zealand’s” colonial forces, set the backdrop of this ethnographic work. However, in the first section of this chapter, I intentionally only use “Aotearoa”, to highlight that contemporary kinship ideology emerged from the establishment of the Pākehā dominated settler colonial state. In this, I aim to emphasise that kinship norms as we know them today in mainstream Pākehā culture, came from a particular history, and are not universal, naturally occurring, or ever-present.

Kinship, Gender, and Sexuality in Aotearoa Prior to Colonisation

Aotearoa, prior to colonisation, had norms of kinship, gender, and sexuality, that were collective and fluid (Johnston and Pihama 1994; Mikaere 1994). Māori scholars argue that it is difficult to accurately reify Māori kinship relations and conceptions of gender through a Pākehā lens (Mikaere 1994), so this section is drawn entirely from Māori scholarship, with little further analysis from me. Much of this writing works against dominant historical narratives, as according to Māori scholars, many Pākehā historians misinterpreted Māori ways of being due to their own bias (Mikaere 1994; P. Johnston and Pihama 1994; Pihama 1998). By making increased use of direct quoting, and explicitly naming the authors I cite in my writing, I aim to amplify their voices and perspectives over my own.

At the time of colonisation in Aotearoa, gender essentialist beliefs present in British bourgeoisie and middle class circles meant that colonial powers believed women were inferior to men, and should be primarily restricted to management of the private sphere of domesticity (Shorter 1976, 58–65; Mikaere 1994; P. Johnston and Pihama 1994). This was not the case for Māori. As Ani Mikaere lays out in her work *Māori Women: Caught in the Contradictions of a Colonised Reality* (1994):

The roles of men and women in traditional Māori society can be understood only in the context of the Māori world view, which acknowledged the natural order of the universe, the interrelationship or whanaungatanga⁴ of all living things to one another, and to the environment, and the overarching principle of balance. Both men and women were essential parts in the collective whole, both formed part of the whakapapa⁵ that linked Māori people back to the beginning of the world, and women in particular played a key role in linking the past with the present and future. The very survival of the whole was absolutely dependent upon everyone who made it up, and therefore each and every person within the

⁴ Whanaungatanga as a concept embraces whakapapa, focusing on understanding, and connection between individuals and the collective (Carlson et al. 2018). Often related to whānau, whanaungatanga also includes relationships outside of genealogy, including people who have become like family through shared experiences, purpose and love (Carlson et al. 2018).

⁵ Whakapapa is often loosely translated to mean genealogy in English, but “as a philosophical construct, it implies that all things have an origin (in the form of a primal ancestor from which they are descended) and that ontologically things come into being through the process of descent from an ancestor” (Roberts 2013).

group had his or her own intrinsic value. They were all a part of the collective; it was therefore a collective responsibility to see that their respective roles were valued and protected (Mikaere 1994, 125).

This inherent focus on collectiveness also means that people within Māori iwi and hapu⁶ had a significantly more fluid organisation of kinship than the nuclear and gendered structure of the British, referred to as whānau. In Tiama Moeke-Pickering's literature review on *Māori Identity Within Whanau*, she emphasises that the whānau is "more than just an extended family social unit" (1996). Māori were, and are, connected within their iwi and hapu through their tīpuna (ancestors), but also through their turangawaewae⁷, the geographical landscape and environment that they and their tīpuna were born in (Moeke-Pickering 1996). Connections between members of whānau were therefore not primarily defined biogenetically, and there were few individualised kinship roles based on biology (Mikaere 1994; Kerekere 2017, 42). Instead, whānau lived communally in groups, which meant biological parents could not be sole caregivers, as they had responsibility to the wider whānau, rather than just their children (Mikaere 1994; Pihama 1998). Children were looked after communally, not separated into biological nuclear families (Mikaere 1994). Therefore, the idea of "mother" (as a singular role with complete responsibility over biological children) that dominates in hegemonic Pākehā culture is a product of settler colonialism, not nature.

Equally as relevant to my participants, so is a strict binary of sexuality and gender. Nga Huia Te Awekotuku, a Māori academic, wrote against the historical erasure of Māori outside heteronormativity, calling on other researchers and activists to "reconstruct the tradition, and reinterpret the history of this land so skilfully manipulated by the crusading heterosexism of the missionary ethic (1991, 37). Her seminal work on mōteatea⁸ and whakairo⁹ was instrumental to uncovering the historical existence of Takatāpui, a term she uncovered through retranslating the story of Tūtanekai and Tiki

⁶ Iwi was the largest political grouping in pre-European Māori society, and consisted of several related hapu, which usually contained several hundred people, and consisted of a number of Whānau (Taonui 2005).

⁷ Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal describes this as "the places we feel especially empowered and connected. They are our foundation, our place in the world, our home" (2007).

⁸ Traditional incantations, songs, and chants (Kerekere 2017, 46)

⁹ Carving (Kerekere 2017, 46)

(Te Awekotuku 1991, 1-40, 2005; Kerekere 2017, 17).¹⁰ This story is better known in Aotearoa New Zealand as a well-known heterosexual love fable between Tūtanekai and Hinemoa.¹¹ In Te Awekotuku's reading, she reveals Tiki, a character usually presented as a slave or servant (The Department of Maori Affairs 1962), as Tūtanekai's intimate partner (Te Awekotuku 1991, 1-40, 2005). Regardless of whether Tūtanekai loved Hinemoa, he clearly loved Tiki, making statements like "Ka mate ahau i eroha ki tōku hoa, ki a Tiki" (Te Awekotuku 1991).¹² He refers to him as his "taku hoa Takatāpui", which translates to "intimate same sex friend" (Kerekere 2017, 64). Te Awetokuku gifted this term, "Takatāpui", to LGBTQ+ Māori in the 1980s, along with Lee Smith, another Māori scholar who discovered the term around the same time (Te Awekotuku 2005; Kerekere 2017, 46).

Since then, "Takatāpui" has been reclaimed by Māori who do not conform to heteronormative expectations, operating as both an umbrella descriptor, and an identity firmly rooted in Māoridom (Kerekere 2017, 38, 60–63). Elizabeth Kerekere, in her thesis, *Part of The Whānau: The Emergence of Takatāpui Identity-He Whāriki Takatāpui*, documents this identity, and answers Te Awekotuku's call, exploring evidence in support of fluid conceptions of gender and sexuality existing prior to colonisation (2017, 18, 21, 41, 57–81). She notes that the documentation of history by Pākehā meant that Māori were interpreted through a heteronormative lens (Kerekere 2017, 81). Therefore, just as anthropologists' attempts to force diverse kinship structures into a Eurocentric nature/culture framework, resulted in an inaccurate portrayal of these cultures (Schneider 1984), the rich fluidity present in kinship, gender, and sexuality, prior to colonisation, was reified as non-existent in Pākehā dominated historical accounts.

However, it is important to note that the idea of kinship being consistently heteronormative throughout Aotearoa New Zealand's history, is not solely the result of flawed documentation. Colonialists also felt threatened by the existing arrangements they arrived to, and intentionally acted to destroy, replace, and erase them. This is the

¹⁰ Te Awekotuku based her retranslation on the original account of their relationship in the manuscripts of Wiremu Maihi Te Rangikāheke from the 1840s (Te Awekotuku 2005; Kerekere 2017, 17,63).

¹¹ See Kerekere's thesis for a fleshed out retelling of this story (2017, 63–64), as well as Te Awekotuku's chapter in *Outlines: Lesbian and Gay Histories of Aotearoa* (2005).

¹² "I am dying for the love for my friend, for my beloved, for Tiki" (Te Awekotuku 1991, 1–40)

point in history where settler colonialists constructed and reinforced the kinship ideals that underpin the context that my participants now live within. While I move into in text citations rather than direct quotations in this section, much of this analysis is inspired by Māori scholar Leonie Pihama, and her article *Reconstructing Meanings of Family: Lesbian/Whanau And Families in Aotearoa* (1998). This piece, along with Mikaere's work on colonisation's impact on Māori women, deftly compile research and analysis from many to highlight that heteronormativity is a colonial construct.

Family as a Hand in Colonisation

In the late 17th century, as Britain began to colonise Aotearoa, and shape the foundations of Aotearoa New Zealand's national identity, the British elite saw gendered organisation and nuclear kinship as the key to a functioning society (Mikaere 1994; Pihama 1998). During industrialisation and the age of enlightenment, the bourgeoisie in Britain had developed the idea that the ultimate social unit was the nuclear family, with men as active participators in the nation's public sphere, and women in control of the home and the family (McMahon 1995, 20–29; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995a, 44–55). Thought leaders at the time justified this through biology, using women's ability to give birth and breastfeed as biological “proof” that their primary role in society should be to mother (McMahon 1995, 20–25).

As family sizes decreased through improvements in science and healthcare, children in bourgeois circles began to hold more social value, becoming symbols of collective future citizenship, and individual legacy (Benzaquén 2004). From here, bourgeoisie motherhood became associated with values of empathy, patience, and selflessness, all traits viewed as necessary to raise successful children (McMahon 1995, 27–29). Motherhood, and the heteronormative family, now had an ideological purpose. In the upper class¹³, “good” mothering became synonymous with creating and upholding the values of a successful society (Benzaquén 2004).

When the British colonised Aotearoa, they held these beliefs, underpinned by the logic of enlightenment (Johnston and Pihama 1994). The so-called science emphasised during this period, also claimed that white people were meant to rule, as they had supposedly evolved more successfully (Johnston and Pihama 1994). When Anglican missionaries

¹³ For the majority of the population outside of the developing upper class, women could not afford to dedicate themselves to their children regardless and had to partake in external labour in some form (Shorter 1976, 171).

arrived in Aotearoa in 1814, they therefore came with the purpose of transforming the “barbarism” of early Māori to the “civilisation” of Christianity (Jenkins and Matthews 1998; Pihama 1998). Colonial leaders, like the governor of Aotearoa New Zealand, George Grey, supported this civilising project, and in 1857, he decreed that forcing Māori to assimilate would be the best way of ensuring a thriving colony (Grey 1971; Mikaere 1994; Pihama 1998).

Settler colonialists gave same sex activity little thought, importing relevant laws from Britain, and applying them similarly in Aotearoa New Zealand after the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi.¹⁴ In contrast, they were immediately concerned by the freedom that Māori women seemed to have, especially in terms of sexual expression, perceiving this as immoral promiscuity (Jenkins and Matthews 1998; Pihama 1998). This represented an ideological threat to the nuclear family structure they had shaped the public around, as well as a material risk, as Māori women apparently tempted married missionary and colonial men (Jenkins and Matthews 1998). The collective way of understanding family through whānau, and the lack of individualised land ownership, also clashed with the motives of colonialists, who sought to gain individual land titles (Mikaere 1994; Pihama 1998). In response, colonialist actively tried to implement cultural shifts to Māori life, institutionalising gender roles and nuclear kinship, to replace Māori values with their own (Mikaere 1994; Pihama 1998).

They began with an apparatus commonly used during colonisation: education (Shahjahan 2011). Missionaries and colonialists opened boarding schools that replicated the Victorian schools of Britain, segmenting them by gender (Pihama 1998; Jenkins and Matthews 1998). For the boys, the schools focused on building skills that would make them breadwinners in the future and able to participate in the industrial market (Jenkins and Matthews 1998). For girls, the education focused on domesticity, teaching them to take responsibility for the housekeeping, gardening, laundry, and meal preparation (Jenkins and Matthews 1998). Through schooling, early colonialists aimed to assimilate

¹⁴ Colonisers viewed same sex activity as immoral between men, non-existent between women, and denied existence of it within the pre-existing Māori population (Kerekere 2017, 59). When the Treaty of Waitangi was signed in 1840, they adopted the “buggery” law from Britain, making sex between men illegal (Ministry of Culture and Heritage 2014). For 20 years, the punishment for this was the death penalty, which then was lessened to life imprisonment (Ministry of Culture and Heritage 2014).

Māori youth into British culture and raise them to reproduce gendered and industrial capitalist values (Kerekere 2017, 42; Jenkins and Matthews 1998). There was also a particular focus on girls, as colonialists viewed them as future mothers, who would hopefully raise their children within this cultural framework (Mikaere 1994; Jenkins and Matthews 1998).

They also addressed Māori kinship structures, through setting up the Native Land Court in 1965, and implementing a variety of laws which undermined the principle of collectivism in Māori culture (Mikaere 1994).¹⁵ This made it more difficult for Māori to maintain ownership of land, as their systems of organising whanau and collective right to whenua were not recognised within the developing legal infrastructure of Aotearoa New Zealand (Mikaere 1994). By intentionally disrupting whanau and hapu structures, colonialists shaped Aotearoa New Zealand with the nuclear family, industrial capitalism, and property ownership in mind, making it easier for them to settle and dominate materially and culturally (P. Johnston and Pihama 1994; Mikaere 1994; Kamerman et al. 1997, 209; McRae and Nikora 2006). Therefore, heteronormative gender roles, and nuclear family structures in Aotearoa New Zealand are the product of colonial pursuit of Māori assimilation, and land ownership, rather than being organic or endemic. They are the result of culture, not nature.

The Heyday of the Nuclear Family

Evidently, any framing of the nuclear family as traditional and naturally occurring, is not based on a truthful interpretation of Aotearoa New Zealand's history. For a long time, it was also almost exclusively the Pākehā middle to upper class who participated in this family organisation (Shorter 1976, 171, 206, 256; Pihama 1998). However, as Aotearoa New Zealand's society continued to industrialise in the 1900s, nuclear family ideals began to strengthen, and spread. The rise of individualism, loosening ties to faith, and increasing disconnection from the wider community, meant that marriage, and the domestic family, gave people a sense of stability in a quickly modernising world (Bellah et al. 1985, 81–112).

¹⁵ Ani Mikaere gives a succinct overview of these legal changes in her article *Māori Women: Caught in the Contradictions of a Colonised Reality*, all of which made it easier for settler colonialists to purchase and seize land (1994).

With urbanisation, living standards increased and children were no longer necessary for physical labour (Shorter 1976, 258). Instead, they gained increasing social relevance as parenthood moved to provide a societal sense of meaning that the diminishing role of religion and community left space for (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995b, 105; Hays 1996, 19-51; Illouz 1997, 21-31). In the 1950s, the idea of children representing the future and deserving prioritisation, exploded from bourgeoisie circles into the middle and lower classes, gaining more traction than ever previously (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995a, 105-35; Cunningham 1995, 171-201; Hays 1996, 71-97).

Advances in sciences, primarily psychology, medicine, and education changed the way people thought about parenting, highlighting the impact a parent could have on a child's outcomes and future (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995a, 105; Cunningham 1995, 171-201). In the 1960s, medical discoveries revealed that many physical and mental disabilities could be prevented, and psychologists popularised the belief that the first five years of a child's life determined their future (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995a, 128, Hayes 1996, 71-97). Suddenly, children were not just a metaphor for future civilisation, but the care of them literally represented how they would turn out as adults in society (Cunningham 1995, 171-201; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995a, 130-135; Hays 1996, 71-97). The nuclear family became a moral symbol of functioning families and societies throughout all the classes, and mothers became societally responsible for raising successful children, and future citizens (Glenn, Chang, and Forcey 1994, 1-33).

Despite the rise of these ideals, the actual practice of nuclear families in Aotearoa New Zealand only lasted for a couple of decades. According to census data, "the nuclear family was the norm during the 1950s and 1960s" (Cribb 2009). At the time, the social institutions under government control, such as laws, public policy, taxation, and social assistance, were all built around this family structure (Cribb 2009). However, as the children of this era, the baby boomers, began to enter adulthood, family structures began to shift. Rates of divorce almost doubled¹⁶ and the rate of marriage dropped from the "all-time high" of 44.5 (per 1000 not-married population aged 16 and over a year) in 1971, to 16.5 in 1996 (Cribb 2009). Step families and single parent families

¹⁶ From 5.1 per 1000 existing marriages in 1971, to 12.7 in 1996 (Cribb 2009).

increased, women began to have children later in life, and more people chose to not marry at all (increasing from five percent of women in 1971, to thirty six percent in 2001) (Cribb 2009).

Historians attribute this to the social changes throughout the 1960s and 1970s, many of which occurred because of the feminist movement in Aotearoa New Zealand (Cook 2011; Dann 2015, 1–30). The arrival of the contraceptive pill also allowed women to have more agency in their decisions around creating a family, and many began to re-enter the workforce (Dann 2015, 54–85). This shifted the beliefs around what a mother should be, creating conflict between mothers who stay at home, and those who work, and putting more pressure on women to be able to balance the requirements of managing a successful career, and family (Choi et al. 2005; Walks 2010). The “traditional” gendered and nuclear family structure promoted during the 1960s, was ultimately short-lived.

In fact, family structures continue to diversify in Aotearoa New Zealand, reflecting the above shift in social expectations, and the nation’s increasing multiculturalism. A collection of longitudinal studies suggest that less than half of young New Zealander’s live with both of their parents for their entire childhood and that many are raised in blended and step-families (Flynn 2016), with over 24 percent receiving significant care from their grandparents (Statistics New Zealand 2017). Those who identify as Pasifika, Indian, and Chinese (all demographics that have grown significantly in Aotearoa New Zealand over the past 20 years), are also more likely than Pākehā to conceptualise their primary family unit as being over multiple households, and as multigenerational and extended, rather than nuclear (Cribb 2009; Cohen and Gershon 2015). Additionally, despite the increasing urbanisation of Māori, and the resulting shift away from communal living (Mikaere 1994, 130-134), whānau remains the primary way of understanding relatedness, which transcends biogenetic connectedness and household organisation (Mckenzie and Carter 2010). While there was never a natural or universal “family” in Aotearoa New Zealand, contemporary kinship practices mean that diverse family organisations are more visible than ever in the nation’s settler colonial history.

Rather than seeing contemporary kinship practices as a continued reflection of ongoing variance in family organisation, the opposition that queer families continue to

face almost always emerge from a belief in the natural, traditional, and universal qualities of the nuclear family. While the above kinship practices also attract persistent prejudice and stigma, same-sex families continue to receive heightened and specific opposition, the organisation and rhetoric of which suggests direct issue with same-gender parenting. Despite the nuclear family reigning as a norm for less than four decades in Aotearoa New Zealand, heteronormativity and kinship beliefs are intertwined. For my participants, this complicates the context from within they mother.

The Impact of Ideology for Queer Families

Primarily, Aotearoa New Zealand's colonial foundation of nuclear kinship automatically excluded the LGBTQ+ community from its legal infrastructure, meaning they had to actively campaign to gain legal recognition.¹⁷ The LGBTQ+ community faces constant opposition, most commonly from conservative political parties, Christian organisations, and the population over sixty five (Davinson 2013; Wynn 2013). Perhaps the most significant battle between the LGBTQ+ community and allies, and these groups, was during Aotearoa New Zealand's passing of same sex marriage in 2013, which attracted national attention (Davinson 2013). While same sex couples already had access to domestic partnership rights through civil unions¹⁸, marriage is an obvious symbol of heterosexual kinship, and opponents defended its implied heteronormativity with voracity.

Making up around 30 percent of public opinion, opponents were extremely visible, releasing statements to the press, holding marches, and creating lobbyist groups (Davison 2013; 3 News 2013; Newstalk ZB 2015). Their main platform centred on gender essentialism, stating that men and women are natural opposites, which makes married heterosexual couples with children, the ultimate and organic family unit (McCroskie n.d.; Newshub 2013). The Catholic Church of New Zealand weaponised this logic, claiming that alternatives to this, such as same sex marriage, were morally

¹⁷ An overview of these legal gains can be found on the Ministry for Culture and Heritage's website (Ministry of Culture and Heritage 2014)

¹⁸ In 2004, New Zealand passed the Civil Union Act, giving same sex couples the same rights as married heterosexual couples, apart from the ability to adopt children jointly as a couple (Ministry for Culture and Heritage 2017).

flawed because of the implied challenge to God's will (Kilgallon 2013). Family First, a political lobbyist group that lead the opponents' charge, continued this argument, stating that the breakdown of the nuclear family was the cause of "poverty, starvation, and environmental decay" in Aotearoa New Zealand. To them, divorced couples, and single mothers, are the cause of inequality, and they believed that changing the definition of marriage to include same sex couples would worsen Aotearoa New Zealand's wellbeing (McCroskie n.d.).

The historical ties between the rise of western civil society, settler colonial ideals, and heteronormativity, help to explain the arguments these groups made to protect what they saw as the sanctity of marriage. Same sex marriage held a symbolic threat to Pākehā society, as it destabilises the heteronormative foundation colonialists built Aotearoa New Zealand upon. This is obvious in the opposers' perception of the nuclear family as the "ultimate social unit", and the depiction of same sex marriage as a "slippery slope" to moral depravity and unrest (Kurtz 2012; Lyons 2012; Newman 2013; Family First NZ 2013). To these groups, the nuclear family is the standard social organisation, and alternative arrangements break the historically created and established belief in universal heterosexual monogamy as a naturally occurring, and ubiquitous fact.

As this chapter has exemplified, these groups are incorrect. The application of nuclear family ideals has been patchy throughout history, and are anything but organic, if we define organic by how the masses naturally organise themselves. As shown, kinship norms have never been universal. They were not universal when they originated in Europe, within elite circles that had little in common with the middle and lower class. They were also not universal when colonialists used them to dominate Aotearoa, erasing and subjugating already existing modes of kinship, gender, and sexuality. Despite this, Pākehā culture's historical and contemporary understandings of kinship propagate a universal heterosexuality. While opponents of the LGBTQ+ community may be the only ones to explicitly elicit this, it is inherent within Aotearoa New Zealand's societal institutions, and public understandings of parenthood. Despite the realities of Aotearoa New Zealand's actual history, this is the context my participants exist within.

For Lauren and Sam, the participants featuring in the prelude, the Pākehā kinship norms discussed above underpin the anxiety they have about potentially becoming parents. Lauren's worries about being physically and mentally inadequate as a mother, stem from the belief that women are biologically designed to give birth and be particular kinds of caregivers. The barriers that Sam faces are because of heteronormative kinship, and the association between pregnancy and womanhood. The strength of gender essentialism and heteronormativity present in kinship narratives in Aotearoa New Zealand, means that Lauren and Sam differ from the vision of parenthood that is presented as universal. Nobody perfectly reflects these expectations, regardless of sexuality. However, for people in the LGBTQ+ community, whose attempts to validate their families have been met with legal barriers, stigma, and persecution, these norms are reminders of the ways they might not fit. They are also reminders, that in some settings, your sexuality might result in your purposeful exclusion.

From here, I move into the ethnographic body of my thesis, where I partly respond to Sam and Lauren's call for representation. Throughout the rest of this work, my participants draw on the beliefs this chapter has covered, reaffirming, reimagining, and rejecting dominant Pākehā understandings of kinship. While these norms shape, constrict, and empower my participants, they are not set in stone. Kinship has always been fluid, in the sense that it is constantly evolving to suit the needs of any given population, and it certainly has never been universal. In my participant's engagement with dominant kinship norms, they are widening and recreating definitions of family in Aotearoa New Zealand. On one hand, this is radical, and their sheer existence conflicts directly with the historical narrative of families in Aotearoa New Zealand's imagination. On the other hand, this engagement is completely ordinary. Modes of kinship have consistently been reshaped over history and continue to reform in numerous ways.

Perhaps that is the only true universal of kinship- it is always changing.

Chapter 3

Negotiating Kinship Norms in the Foster System

For members of the LGBTQIA+ community, the road to parenthood can be complex. While some have children from relationships and sexual encounters with opposite sex partners, sexual reproduction without intervention is often not possible. In this chapter, I focus on adoption and fostering, examining the context of this pathway to parenthood. I place emphasis on the competing ways of understanding kinship at play, highlighting how the ideals of family that social institutions produce constantly evolve to suit their needs. However, even in the face of institutional power, there are gaps within the social logic of kinship. This allows individuals to make interventions that remake kinship norms in their own image, gaining legitimacy in the eyes of the state. To exemplify this, I draw on Kate's story, specifically her experience of the foster system, and gaining custody of her son, Dash.

I present Kate's experience of the foster system in chronological order, moving back and forth between her own words and perspectives, and noting where her recounting fits into the wider context and literature. As one of the main pathways to parenthood outside heterosexual reproduction, the fostering and adoption spheres are worthy of analysis, especially as they represent national norms of kinship, manifested in state action. Fostering and adoption both allow governing powers to move children from families deemed unacceptable by their measures, into families that reflect normative visions of kinship (Leinaweaver 2009).

Aotearoa New Zealand's position as a settler colonial state complicates this, as its government institutions are shaped by a historically (and continuing) harmful relationship to Māori, and their resulting attempts to redress this damage (Gibbs and Scherman 2013; Haenga-Collins and Gibbs 2015; Keddell 2017). Kate's child Dash is Māori, and him and his biological mother Lilah, are part of te Ati Awa iwi. However, Kate only found this out years later from Lilah herself, making ethnicity largely absent in Kate's retelling of her pathway to Dash. Regardless, the foster system in Aotearoa New Zealand is significantly shaped by state attempts to counteract Pākehā cultural hegemony. The lack of disclosure regarding Dash's ethnicity speaks volumes about the limitations of these efforts and the endurance of Pākehā ideological dominance in kinship norms, which I explore concurrently in this chapter.

For Kate, this history means she must navigate and repurpose multiple, and sometimes contradictory conceptions of what makes a good mother to gain custody of Dash. The ways she subverts these ideals of motherhood to better include her, exemplifies how queer families find themselves within mainstream kinship narratives. Because this ethnographic context is complex, I start by a short engagement with anthropological literature, as well as an overview of the socio-political history of adoption and fostering in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The Ties Between Adoption, Fostering, and Queerness

The emergence of motherhood ideology in relationship with the societal prioritisation of childhood, means that good motherhood is socially defined by one's ability to care for children.¹⁹ However, the perceived competency of a mother is also measured by the extent to which they do this in a way that reflects wider kinship norms (Park 2006). As discussed in chapter one, visions of motherhood in Aotearoa New Zealand emerge from colonial constructions that naturalise mothers as Pākehā, middle to upper class, able-bodied, cisgender, and heterosexual (Pihama 1998; Park 2006). Therefore, the characteristics of perceived good motherhood are interwoven with these norms,

¹⁹ This is fundamental to beliefs about how mothers should behave, and continues to shape key public debates, such as how much time a mother should spend at home, the risks and benefits of co-sleeping, the breast is best dialogue, attachment parenting, and so forth (McKenna and McDade 2005; D. D. Johnston and Swanson 2006; Marshall, Godfrey, and Renfrew 2007; Crowley 2015; Moore and Abetz 2016; Abetz and Moore 2018).

which means that those outside of these identities are under further pressure to prove their effectiveness (Park 2006). We see this in the emphasis that many queer scholars, like Ellen Lewin, and academics within psychology and family studies, place on proving that child outcomes between heterosexual and same sex families are the same (Lewin 1993; Meezan and Rauch 2005; Marks 2012). Deviance from heterosexuality becomes something that needs to be compensated for (Park 2006).

Adoptive and foster mothers share this experience to an extent, as their lack of genetic of gestational connection to their children means they differ phenomenologically and narratively from normative motherhood (Park 2006). Shelley Park, who has written extensively on adoptive motherhood, views adoptive maternal bodies as queering motherhood for this reason, as they clash with conventional beliefs about biological reproductivity (2006). She notes that like mothers outside of heterosexuality, adoptive and foster mothers must also perform scripts of normative motherhood, to validate their mothering identity and worth to institutional bureaucratic gatekeepers (Park 2006). Kate's usage of these scripts, as both a queer woman, and adoptive mother, shows how kinship norms are malleable for those who know how to remake them.

Anthropological Perspectives on Adoption

As touched on in chapter one, kinship studies in anthropology once assumed a universal link between kinship and biological relationship (Schneider 1984). This perspective was primarily propagated by structuralist Levi Strauss (1969), but was also implicit in the work of other functionalists, like Bronislaw Malinowski (1930), A.R. Radcliffe-Brown (1950), and E.E. Evans-Prichard (1929). Schneider, whose scholarship shifted the way anthropologists addressed kinship, disputed this model (1984). He actively critiqued the assumption that families are universally formed through genealogical ties alone, pointing to his study with the Yapese, where kinship was not formed solely biologically (Schneider 1984). Further work in kinship studies has filled the gap Schneider tore from anthropology's unchallenged canon, using other frameworks to address kinship, defining it as "relatedness", not "relatedness through blood or marriage" (Franklin and McKinnon 2001, 1-53; Carsten 2000, 1-36). This lens allows a keener insight into the kinship experiences of those who adopt and foster (Howell 2003; Hicks 2006). Additionally, viewing kinship norms as non-static, and

ever changing, helps to explain the multitude of ideologies that play out within Kate and Dash's story.

Adoption, specifically transnational adoption, has been a key focus of critical kinship studies, with significant scholars such as Signe Howell, who created the framework of "kinning" for explaining how adoptive parents and adoptee children form connections (2003). Howell defines this process as how "the foetus or new-born child (or a previously unconnected person) is brought into a significant and permanent relationship with a group of people that is expressed in a kin idiom" (2003). Now dominant in anthropological discourses on adoption, kinning helps to conceptualise acts such as finding similarities in appearance between adoptive parents and adoptee, using storytelling as a way of creating a shared origin, and prioritising the importance of nurture (Howell 2003, 2009).

However, Dash is Kate's permanent foster child, which means that her pathway to parenthood was not as processual as it would be if she had adopted him. Fostering, is supposedly short term²⁰, and acts as a way of caring for children when their primary caregivers are not "fit" to, therefore returning the child once the situation is deemed suitable by state organisations (Gibbs and Scherman 2013). Rather than gaining legal parenthood, and then building a mothering relationship through intentional kinning, Kate sought out legal parenthood after forming a parental attachment to Dash through fostering him.

Kate now has special guardianship²¹ over Dash, which required engagement with Child Youth and Family (CYF), the primary governing body of adoption and fostering in Aotearoa New Zealand. Now known as Oranga Tamariki/The Ministry for Children, there are inherent tensions within this state organisation, as it navigates the complexities of its own history. This, in conjunction with the often-competing priorities of foster parents, adoptive families, and the families of origin, means that multiple notions of kinship are constantly clashing against one another. Within this space, there are rich representations of the kinship ideologies present throughout Aotearoa New Zealand, and the ways both

²⁰ In 2010, a report by the Office of the Children's Commissioner found that the average length of time in foster care was 194 days for ages 0-4, 388 for 5-9 years, 402 for 10-13, 339 for 14-16 and 466 for 17+ years (Atwool 2010, 108). This means that the average placement overall is well over a year.

²¹ Special guardianship provides the special guardians with permanent day to day custody, as well as further rights over key decisions child's trajectory, the extent of which is determined on a case by case basis by the Family Court (The Law Shop 2004).

individuals and institutions reinterpret and reproduce them to suit their needs. Kate's experiences reveal the often-illogical application of kinship ideology by the state, and how individuals are empowered and disempowered to respond to it. However, before delving into her specific ethnographic story, I give a brief overview of the history of adoption and fostering in Aotearoa New Zealand, to give context to the ideologies and practices she encounters.

Clashes between Adoption and Māori Understandings of Whakapapa

While adoption and fostering are distinct processes, they are informed by one another in Aotearoa New Zealand, primary because of the damage caused by closed adoption policy, and the resulting political action (Newman 2013; Gibbs and Scherman 2013; Blake and Coombes 2016). Closed adoption policies were especially harmful to Māori, because of their inherent diminishment of whakapapa, belonging and whānau. Prior to colonisation, Māori already had a practice called “whāngai”, which over time has been interpreted through the Pākehā lens as a proximate for adoption (McRae and Nikora 2006; Newman 2013). However, adoption in Aotearoa New Zealand aims to legally shift a child into a new family, where they are integrated into the adoptive family's lives, history, and norms, with little consideration to their biological roots prior to the 1970s (Newman 2013).

Māori scholar Erica Newman critiques the convergence of adoption and whāngai, pointing to how the removal of adoptive children from their pre-existing community is at odds with Māori ontology (Newman 2013, 239). Instead, whāngai fits into the wider framework of whakapapa, and respects the need for children to maintain the genealogical narrative that they come from.²² Within Māori ontology, learning about one's whakapapa and practicing a connection to it through knowledge of one's tīpuna and access to one's turangawaewae, is vital for children to develop a sense of identity (Newman 2013).

As covered in chapter one, the concept of whakapapa was actively eroded by settler colonialists, because its inherent collectiveness acted as a barrier to seizing and purchasing land (Johnston and Pihama 1994; Newman 2013). While adoption legislation

²² For more in depth reading about the how the process of whāngai accounts for this, I recommend Erica Newman's work in *History of Transracial Adoption: A New Zealand Perspective* (2013), and the article *Whāngai: Remembering, Understanding and Experiencing*, by Karyn Okeroa McRe and Linda Waimarie Nikora (2006).

initially focused on Pākehā²³, colonialists soon used the law as a way of regulating whāngai relationships, and diminishing related legal rights for their own gain (Mikaere 1994; Newman 2013). Because whāngai usually occurred without engaging the state, the Native Land Courts were unable to manage the applications tamaiti²⁴ whāngai were making for inheritance of estates (McRae and Nikora 2006; Newman 2013). To keep track of land ownership, they created a register of whāngai in 1901 (Newman 2013). Colonialists then amended legalisation so all whāngai had to go through the Pākehā process of adoption to gain legal recognition (McRae and Nikora 2006; Newman 2013). This made it harder for tamaiti whāngai to inherit land, thus making it easier for Pākehā to purchase it (McRae and Nikora 2006; Newman 2013). This marks the start of this thread of state intervention in Māori families, which birthed a destructive legacy that the Aotearoa New Zealand government is still grappling with today.

Contemporary Shifts in Adoption and Fostering Policy

While the law changes in the 18th and early 19th century²⁵ focused on questions of inheritance, the rise of the nuclear family ideal in 1940s shifted legislative priorities, as adoption became a mainstream concept (Else 1991, 24-28; Newman 2013; Blake and Coombes 2016). Until the 1940s, single women with illegitimate children were expected to raise them alone, as punishment for pre-marital sex (Else 1991, 8; Newman 2013). The idealisation of marriage and nuclear familyhood shone a spotlight on single mothers, increasing the associated social stigma and public interest (Else 1991, 1-13; Newman 2013). Women were encouraged to give up their child for adoption, and hide the fact that they were ever pregnant, in order to avoid shame, and damage to future marriage prospects (Else 1991, 37-47; Newman 2013). By 1949, Aotearoa New Zealand Pākehā saw this as the expected pathway for women out of wedlock, leading to the 1955 Adoption Act.²⁶ Legislators based the act on clean break theory, which drew from

²³ The Adoption of Children Act 1881 in Aotearoa New Zealand, was the first adoption legalisation in the British Empire, beginning the state's management of adoption processes. It aimed to make adoption between Pākehā more straightforward, by providing a legal framework for understanding how inheritance worked in adoptive settings (Newman 2013, 242).

²⁴ The person who takes on a child as a whāngai is called a matua whāngai, and the child is referred to as a tamaiti whāngai (Newman 2013).

²⁵ See Erica Newman's *History of Transracial Adoption: A New Zealand* (2013, 244-245), and Ani Mikaere's section on Adoption in *Māori Women: Caught in the Contradictions of a Colonised Reality* (1994) for an overview of the other legislative changes relating to Māori regarding adoption.

²⁶ This law is still current, with minor amendments (Ministry of Justice 1955).

psychological perspectives on nurture at the time, and encouraged adoptive parents to raise children as their own, with no knowledge of their origins (Haenga Collins 2011, 11–15; Newman 2013)²⁷.

Between the years 1955-1985, it is estimated that an average of 2800 children were adopted out annually (Gibbs and Scherman 2013; Haenga-Collins and Gibbs 2015), and that many of these children were Māori (Newman 2013; Haenga Collins 2011; Blake and Coombes 2016).²⁸ Many Māori that had both Pākehā and Māori heritage were adopted by Pākehā families, and were raised with no knowledge of their Māori ancestry, severed from their tīpuna and whakapapa (Haenga Collins 2011; Newman 2013; Blake and Coombes 2016). The harm that these policies caused to Māori, and to adoptees of all ethnicities, in Aotearoa New Zealand and internationally, is now well documented, both by adoptees themselves, and child welfare experts (Else 1991, 172-196; New Zealand Adoption Education and Healing Trust 1997; Blake and Coombes 2016). This led the government to introduce the Adoption Information Act in 1985, which allowed adoptees over 20 to access their adoption records and gave biological parents the option to seek out information about their biological children (Gibbs and Scherman 2013). From 1985 - due to shifting understandings in psychology and child welfare globally - Aotearoa New Zealand began to encourage open adoptions, and by 1997, over 90% of domestic adoptions were open (Gibbs and Scherman 2013).

The development of contraception, increased welfare for families, and decreasing stigma towards single mothers, means that domestic adoptions are now fairly uncommon in Aotearoa New Zealand (Newman 2013; Gibbs and Scherman 2013), with only 122 occurring in in 2017(Harris 2017a). However, the decrease in numbers does not correlate to a more comprehensive and culturally sensitive approach to intervention by the state. The Adoption Information Act has been heavily critiqued due to the lack of direct action the government has taken to ensure open adoption processes (Blake, Coombes, and Morgan, n.d.; Blake and Coombes 2016), and since 1985, there have been

²⁷ This automatically excluded the fluidity and openness present in whāngai from the law, making it impossible for Māori to practice whāngai and maintain legal recognition (Newman 2013)

²⁸ Closed stanger adoption was at odds with Māori kinship understandings, so these numbers are likely due to extreme social pressure on urban Māori women, and the fact that many of the birth mothers were Pākehā who had concieved with Māori men (Newman 2013; Haenga-Collins and Gibbs 2015).

no changes to domestic adoption policy (Blake and Coombes 2016). The government officially put domestic adoption reform on hold in 2015, but stated that “in the meantime, there have been significant improvements in alternatives to adoption that can provide a permanent, loving home for a child, without completely severing the legal and familial ties to their birth parents” (Paterson 2015, 4). The report later clarifies that it is referring to the foster system, which explains the decrease in rates of domestic adoption. As the Ministry of Social Development states, it is now directing children through the foster system instead (Paterson 2015, 35).

The focus on fostering, and the inception of CYF emerged partly because of the response from Māori to the government’s handling of adoption and children in its care (Keddell 2007). In 1988, the Ministerial Advisory Committee released a report called “Puaote-Atatu”, which consulted with various Māori community groups, to form a critique of the Department of Social Welfare, which managed state care and adoption at the time (The Maori Perspective Advisory Committee 1988, Else 1991, 175-194). The report was deeply critical of the lack of Māori perspective in institutions and policy, and along with Māori activism preceding it, motivated the government to create the “Children’s and Young People’s Well-Being Act” in 1989 (Keddell 2007). Aiming to create a legislative framework for treatment in state care, it officialised procedures of child removal and consequential fostering, explicitly prioritising the cultural identity of children by integrating Māori understandings of whakapapa and kinship (Keddell 2007). The Act included tangible principles that dictated children should be placed within their Iwi, or with biological relations, wherever possible, preferably with people already known to them (Keddell 2007). At the time, it was heralded by the government as a social welfare success (Love 2002b).

Despite the attempts to integrate Māori perspectives, the government and its systems are is a product of the settler colonial project. Herein lies an implicit clash between kinship ideals within the foster system, as a Pākehā institution tries to transplant Māori culture into its bureaucratic functioning. Rather than accounting for the legacy of colonisation, and the relationship between historical trauma and rates of abuse and neglect, the state continues to superficially treat the symptoms, ignoring the cause (Keddell 2007, 2017; Pihama 2019). Māori scholars, activists, and politicians, have extensively critiqued CYF

for inadequately carrying out Māori values in a meaningful way (Love 2002b, 2002a; Keddell 2007, 2017; Pihama 2019). The bureaucratic needs of the department clash with the attempt to prioritise placement within Iwi, leading to thousands of children in limbo within state care (Love 2002b, 2002a; Keddell 2007, 2017; Pihama 2019). This has not improved since Kate's engagement, and Oranga Tamariki (then CYF) continues to face criticism due to their failure adequately look after children in their care, or address the structural issues that lead to child abuse and neglect (The Modernising Child, Youth and Family Panel 2015; Bywaters et al. 2016; Hou 2016; Keddell 2017; Pihama 2019).

Kate's engagement with CYF helps to reveal the superficiality of its attempts to account for Māori conceptions of kinship, and the inadequacy of a bureaucratic state arm for effective management of families. Despite Dash's own connection to te Ati Awa iwi, in Kate's story the official prioritisation of whakapapa, combined with the foundational Pākehā kinship beliefs within the government, manifests itself in biologically driven heteronormative ways. Kate's resulting navigations of these norms as a queer and non-biological mother, reveals the contradictions in the government's logic, creating space for her to reinterpret motherhood scripts for her own gain. In this process, she demonstrates both the inherent flexibility of kinship norms, while at the same time displaying that entry into publicly validated familial relationships require the reproduction of enduring heteronormative kinship beliefs.

Kate's Journey to Dash

Kate and her wife, Jude, initially became foster carers when they took care of a work colleague's children for a weekend, after she seemed overwhelmed. This resulted in CYF chastising them as they were not official caregivers.

We weren't caregivers, we were just people, and they said we weren't allowed to do it unless we were foster carers. And the kids knew us very well, we're both early childhood teachers, we both have first aid certificates, but nope. So I said, fine, we'll be foster parents then. So we signed up to look after those two children.

While frustrated by what they saw as unnecessary bureaucracy, Kate and Jude decided to stay on CYF's system, and signed up to take care of children under the age of five, for short-term stays. This led them to Dash, a toddler who CYF initially told them would need six weeks of caretaking. While developing and sustaining a relationship with Dash's birth mother Lilah, they acted as his custodians for over a year before CYF were able to set up a family group conference (FGC). The government initially designed FGCs in response to the Puao-te-Ata-tu report, aiming to emulate a Hui structure.²⁹ CYF invites everyone who has a vested interest in the child to attend, with the goal of deciding on future action.

Those rooms had Jude and I, as we had Dash at the time, Dash's Mum Lilah, Lilah's Mum, and Lilah's younger brother, Lilah's Aunt and her husband, Lilah's Uncle and his wife, the social worker, the person who had Dash for a short period before us, and the centre manager of the place Dash had been at. So we all had a turn talking, about how Dash was, how he was now, and then everyone puts input in. And then, the family go into another room, with no agencies, and no external people, and they make a plan.

At the end of the FGC, those who are biologically related to the child can connect away from the other parties and give their input to CYF. The compatibilities between the genealogical element of whakapapa, and the Pākehā tendency to define kinship by biology, mean it is easy for CYF to superficially integrate Māori perspectives, while reproducing familiar Pākehā norms (Moyle and Tauri 2016). However, while most agree that the FGC is an improvement on the previous court proceedings, the implementation has been critiqued for its shallow application of tikanga Māori (Moyle and Tauri 2016; Love 2017). For example, the final decision making power still resides with the (often Pākehā) state professionals, regardless of the emphasis put on family input (Love 2002b).

³⁰ This was true in Dash's case, where CYF's agents quickly deemed Lilah's mother to be

²⁹ Catherine Love, in her article *Family Group Conferencing: Cultural Origins, Sharing and Appropriation- A Māori Reflection* defines a Hui as "a gathering of people", that aims to maintain "whanau, hapu, and iwi health, wholeness, and unity" (2017). For a more in depth analysis of the origins, the successes, and the failings of CYFs implementation of this approach, I recommend reading Love's article.

³⁰ Again, I recommend Catherine Love's work for further reading on this topic. The conference presentation *E Tipu E Rea: The Care and Protection of Indigenous (Māori) Children* by Amohia Boulton, Gill Potaka-Osborne, Lynley Cvitanovic, and Tania Williams Blyth (2018) is also useful for understanding the racial dynamics of these meetings, and *Māori, Family Group Conferencing and the Mystifications of Restorative Justice* by Paora Moyle and Juan Marcellus Tauri, gives a useful critical analysis of the superficial nature of the application of Māori concepts within the family conferences (2016).

unsuitable as a permanent carer for Dash, perceiving her as unfit with no mention of their shared genealogical connection to te Ati Awa iwi. This reflects the unevenness of CYF's prioritisation of existing ties, community of origin and whakapapa, as instead of providing Lilah's mother the structural support needed for her to be "suitable", they automatically excluded her from consideration.

Additionally, despite the official commitment from CYF to attempt to prioritise foster placements within biological kin, the extended families of origin are often stricken by the same structural poverty and intergenerational trauma affecting biological parents (Love 2002a, 2002b). This leads to behaviours that the state considers similarly inappropriate, meaning that many foster children are placed with people unknown to them, outside of genetic relations (Love 2002b). For carers like Kate and Jude, the structure of the FGC means they get little say in their foster children's future, regardless of the length of time they have been caring for them. While CYF ruled out Lilah's mother, they still aimed to place Dash with members of his biological family. This was not discussed in relation to whakapapa, but rather in terms of keeping him within his "family of origin". After the FGC, they decided that Lilah's uncle and his wife would take Dash permanently, both of whom are Pākehā and have no connection to Dash's iwi. CYF resolved to implement a plan for increasing visits with them, with the end goal of them gaining custody of Dash if things went smoothly.

The Dismissal of Non-Biological Bonds

While CYFs assigned Dash to Kate and Jude on an official short-term basis, the actualities of caring for him indefinitely meant their attitudes towards him began to shift. For an entire year before the conference, they cared for Dash, teaching him new skills as a toddler, taking care of his needs, and watching his childhood journey. After visits began as per CYF's instructions, Dash also began to show anxiety about spending time with his uncle, which made them feel protective over him, and concerned about the upcoming custody change.

What was really challenging around that was that we'd gotten really attached. We were seeing things like on Friday, when Dash was supposed to go to his uncle's house, he'd say things like "I just want a weekend at home"- meaning our

house, "I don't like (their child)", or "I'm tired". He'd cry in the drive home from his childcare centre to our house on Fridays, knowing that he was going to be picked up (by his uncle).

This is one of the key strengths of critical kinship studies, as instead of solely subscribing to biological definitions of kinship, it allows for action and practice in its analysis, validating the relationships between Kate, Jude, and Dash (Franklin and McKinnon 2001, 1–25; Howell 2003). After all, bonding through caregiving is perhaps just as pertinent to Pākehā motherhood ideology, as biogenetic connection is to Pākehā kinship norms. To ignore this is to erase a social narrative that underpins Pākehā understandings of relatedness.

Societally, this is still partly defined biologically, with psychological research historically pointing to how the production of hormones such as oxytocin, create bonds between mother and child (Kendrick 2000). Studies from the 1970s propagated the belief that these bonds were most important to form directly after childbirth, which centred a normative biological maternal body (Eyer 1994). An activity such as breastfeeding is naturalised as a function of this body, outside of the realm of reason, but rather a passive activity that is an unquestioned part of connecting with one's child (Shaw 2004). The motherhood identity is partly constructed by enacting these biological forms of bonding, and posits participators as good maternal bodies, because of the perceived superior care that doing so provides (Shaw 2003, 2004). All of this helps to essentialise the mother child relationship as a biological fact (Shaw 2003, 2004).

As Park outlines in her analysis of adoptive motherhood, this marks the adoptive maternal body as queer, sitting outside of these biologically driven narratives (Park 2006). However, the studies from the 70s that helped to validate the idea that bonding is primarily biological, have now been disproven, critiqued for their reliance on gender essentialism in their scholarship (Eyer 1994). As Park points out, there are many bodily processes that exist outside of biology when raising a child, like changing diapers, physical proximity through cuddling, helping children to get dressed, feeding them, and so forth (Park 2006). These activities create bonds, and also contribute to the construction of a maternal body, both in societal interpretation, but also in the creation

of an individual's identity as a mother (Park 2006). While the lack of biological connection to a child positions adoptive and foster mothers as deviant, these acts - under the umbrella of primary caregiving - allow them to perform motherhood (Park 2006).

The societal interpretation of primary caregiving as mothering in Pākehā society creates gateways for Kate and Jude to depict themselves as "good" mothers later in their story. Most importantly however, taking the perspective of Park, and other critical kinship studies scholars, gives validation to the bond Kate and Jude feel to Dash, and he to them. The posture by CYF here that family is primarily biological erases how kinship bonds can form and become legitimated through performance and practice, diminishing the relationship between Kate, Jude, and Dash. For Kate and Jude, who had now acted as Dash's primary caregivers for over a year -denoting a maternal relationship in Pākehā culture- suddenly having no input into his future felt jarring. There has been significant harm in prioritising adoptive and foster parents over their families of origin, but there is complexity and nuance in the application of redressing this harm. Kate and Jude's experience of the FGC highlights how even within one child's relationships, multiple visions of what kinship should mean can exist, and that state processes often flatten these complicating dimensions.

The Contradictions of State Bureaucracy

While Dash's reservations about his great uncle made Kate feel concerned, the lack of contact from CYF and the seemingly glacial pace of their progress made the situation feel non-urgent. As a consequence of leaving such a long time period between the FGC and the official confirmation of custody change, it is likely that CYF agents were hoping that any conflicts would resolve themselves and moving Dash would be a simpler process. Jude and Kate did grow much closer with Lilah during this time, maintaining regular dinners, play dates, and visits with Lilah and her mother (Dash's grandmother). Lilah was cautious of Jude and Kate at first, primarily because of their sexuality.

Initially Lilah was pretty unsure about us as people, and then we met her so she could spend time with Dash, she rang the social worker afterwards and said something along the lines of "I've just met Kate and Jude and they're really nice and normal and not awful at all". *Laughs ironically*- as though we kept our

horns in on purpose! You can almost imagine: “Kate has long hair, it's gonna be fine!”. It's that classic thing where you go, oh we met lesbians and they're just people. But yeah, we've had a great relationship from the start, regardless of sexuality.

In this retelling, Kate is clearly aware of the societal scripts Park talks about in her scholarship, where she shows how “good” families are heterosexual and heterosexuality is tied to normative middle to upper class gender performance (Park 2006). Cognisant of the preconceptions that Lilah may have had, Kate pokes fun at how her feminine presentation and adherence to elements of these scripts clashes with the dominant stereotypes of lesbianism.

Despite any initial prejudice, Kate and Lilah became relatively close. While Lilah's ultimate preference for Dash's caregiver was her own mother, she knew that CYF would not allow it. She disliked her uncle and was suspicious of his intentions. After a sustained relationship with Kate and Jude, she felt confident that she would maintain a stronger relationship with Dash if they were his caretakers, and her and her mother officially indicated a preference for them to take Dash on permanently.

After the FGC, it took 18 months for CYF to organise a meeting with Kate and Jude, where they confirmed they were going to permanently move Dash to his uncle. In this time, Kate and Jude's growing bond with Dash, their continued relationship with Lilah and her distaste for her uncle, and Dash's resistance to the regular visits, made them uncomfortable with the change. Their awareness of Dash's turbulent history exacerbated their resistance. Now that CYF had officially confirmed, Kate felt the need to act.

So they told us, "that is absolutely the plan, and that's what we're going to do." And I said, "actually, this is not okay, we've expressed our interest to have him, and we think it's better for him to stay in a secure spot". You know, he's moved from his Mum, to his grandma to his aunt, to Vicki, to us, in not many years, and there's been living in cars and drugs and stuff so that's a really tricky start. So I said "I think I'm going to see a lawyer about this" and she said *in a dismissive tone* "well that's your right if that's what you want". I said, "of course it is, get

up Jude, we're leaving". And just outside Child Youth and Family in Porirua is a law shop, so I went in there, and burst into tears.

There was no further justification of this decision, and nobody gave Kate any explicit reasoning as to why it had been made. After this interaction, Kate decided to apply for permanent custody, and special guardianship of Dash. Because Kate's beliefs around kinship focus on nurture and care, it made sense to her that she and Jude should be the ones who continue to take responsibility for Dash. Despite the strength of biogenetic kinship ideals, the act of being a child's primary caregiver, decision maker, and advocate, is parental in Pākehā culture (McMahon 1995; Park 2006). Having her experiences of building kinship with Dash for almost three years dismissed frustrated Kate, and felt to her like an erasure of Dash's own preferences and needs. This feeling solidified as she realised there was little support for her as a foster parent, or for Dash as the child. While Dash had a dedicated lawyer for his own benefit, she felt he was a "massive fence sitter", and despite Dash himself communicating his anxieties to the lawyer, the lawyer remained impartial throughout the process, never indicating a preference for custody. Because Dash's great uncle was the person CYF had chosen to care for him, Kate and Jude were officially taking CYF to court.

Everything for them was supported by Child Youth and Family funding wise, as officially we were taking Child Youth and Family to court. So we had to get a mortgage holiday, and a loan from my parents to be able to afford it. We had to get a psychological assessment, and a home visit from a psychiatrist, to see the house dynamics, and then we had to go to court!

As shown in the contextual section of this chapter, CYF's financial and legal support for the uncle reflects a reflexive attempt to integrate notions of whakapapa into its operations, redressing the harm its policies have caused in the past. However, instead of addressing the systematic issues of historical trauma and poverty that leads to the ratio of Māori in state care (Love 2002b; Wirihana and Smith 2014, 200–201; Keddell 2017), they apply Māori concepts on top of a pre-existing Pākehā institution.

The fact that CYF never factored in Lilah and her mother's Māori genealogy as a consideration, nor reviewed the fact that they, along with Dash, were pushing for Kate and Jude to be his guardians, shows the contradictions that can emerge out of this approach. Even though Kate was not aware of Dash's whakapapa at the time, she felt it was obvious that Lilah's uncle had been chosen because he was the only biological relative available, rather than because would keep Dash connected to his community of origin. This is not to say that Kate and Jude should have automatically gained custody but the lack of further consultation with Dash after the initial FGC speaks volumes about the superficiality behind CYF's decision. Additionally, leaving Dash in Jude and Kate's care indefinitely for over two years by this point, suggests a lack of depth and intentionality behind CYF's support of Dash's uncle. For Kate and Jude, it felt as though there were multiple changing contradictions in CYF's policy and action, which lacked a sense of nuance or empathy for their situation.

Responding to Contradictions of Kinship

Despite this, Kate and Jude's subsequent navigation of CYF's legal proceedings reveal how individuals are often equipped to respond to the contradictions in mainstream kinship beliefs, by repurposing to support their own imaginings. After gaining a lawyer, and presenting their case to be heard, Kate and Jude went to court to gain custody of Dash. Lilah chose to represent herself at the hearing, but called Kate to the stand, and asked her multiple questions about her character, and care for Dash.

So Lilah called me to the stand, and asked me a bunch of questions. So like, I'd been to a four day brainwaves trust, which is an organisation that talks about trauma in the brain, and Jude and I both went, because of our work as educators, but also to learn more about Dash. So we were both interested in the fact that Dash's moving around has the potential to wire the brain to prepare for a move, which can influence his ability to attach. So she asked us something like "what course have you just been to, and what have you learnt?".

In this, we see Lilah, Kate, and Jude, reproduce the scripts of normative motherhood Park describes, drawing on societal narratives that emerged with nuclear family ideals, where stability is depicted as vital for children to flourish (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995a,

128; Park 2006). Kate and Jude avoid the biogenetic implications of this rhetoric, by repurposing notions of attachment. As shown earlier, attachment and bonding is often societally perceived as a biological process in relation to mothers and children, centring experiences such as pregnancy, birth, and breastfeeding (Park 2006).

By focusing on how instability can damage a child's ability to form successful bonds, Kate and Jude patch together an alternative script of motherhood that prioritises their relationship with Dash over biology. They give this a sense of objectivity by tying it to scientific knowledge, creating a worthy opponent of the enlightenment origins of nuclear family ideals and the 1950's psychological research that supported their widespread adoption (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995a, 128). Kate and Jude's perspectives, along with the context of their role as teachers, also help to emphasise their class position as professionals. While not heterosexual, nor biologically connected to Dash, this highlights the other ways that they conform to societal notions of good motherhood. As Park purports, reproducing these dominant scripts allows adoptive mothers and queer women - like Kate and Jude - to represent themselves as good mothers in the face of gatekeepers, by fulfilling other markers of normativity.

Lilah's own testimony emphasised this, by contrasting Kate and Jude's competencies as caregivers with her uncle's behaviour.

So Lilah asked her uncle to come to the stand, and she said "I have one question" and he's like one of these bulshy white guys, and was like, "yeah sure, whatever", and she just said "when's my birthday?". Her birthday is really easy to remember because (redacted). I can remember it myself. He went bright red, and he was so furious he could not answer the question, because he'd tried to paint this picture of the really caring uncle, and it was her that had estranged from the family, and he had tried to do all these wonderful things to help his brother's children out. But the reality is he hadn't.

Lilah's story helped to undermine her uncle's potential competency as a parent, using her authority as Dash's biological mother to position Jude and Kate as comparatively authentic caregivers. Playing on cultural narratives of parenting, fatherhood, and

motherhood, Kate, Jude, and Lilah implicitly contrast the paternal potential of Dash's uncle with the maternal capabilities of Kate and Jude. Rather than explicitly rejecting biological motherhood ideology, this approach repaints gender essentialism in Kate and Jude's favour, touching on the cultural belief that women are naturally more caring. Through this narrative, Kate and Jude's shared gender becomes a strength, rather than a limitation, using gendered ideology to mitigate heteronormative kinship beliefs. Kate and Jude continued this subversion, repurposing their potential deviance as positive factors.

In the past, Kate had faced discrimination for having children with multiple fathers. However, in court, she openly talked about how she managed to maintain active relationships with her children's fathers, repackaging her transgressions against the nuclear family ideal as proof of her ability to mother alongside Lilah. At the same time, Kate and Jude were explicit about the sustainability of their long-term relationship, and their established success at raising children together. This shows deft navigation of mainstream kinship ideology, transforming areas where Kate and Jude clash with motherhood scripts (their sexuality and resulting dual womanhood, and Kate's multiple parenting partners) into strengths that are in line with CYF's priorities. Evidently, even individuals with seemingly little agency against mainstream norms and state authority, can reimagine kinship to their advantage when they fulfil other expectations (Park 2006).

Navigating Kinship Ideals in Practice

The courts eventually decided in Kate and Jude's favour, and they became "special guardians" of Dash, which means they have full custody of him but share dual guardianship powers with Lilah. Globally, there are many instances where shared parenting exists, for a myriad of reasons. Patricia Hill Collin's transformational work on "othermothers" emphasises the role that grandmothers, sisters, aunts, and cousins have as caregivers in African-American communities, where there are "women-centred networks of community-based care" (Collins 2005; 2016, 318). In Juansar-Bewar in India, fraternal polyandry is common, and children within these families view all their biological mother's husbands as equal fathers (Zeitzen 2008, 109-125). As touched on already, here in Aotearoa New Zealand, contemporary Māori kinship beliefs continue to conceptualise caregiving as non-exclusive to biological parents and a responsibility of the

wider whānau, a practice that is also common in Pasifika families (Abel, Park, Tipine-Leach, Finau and Lennan 2001; Worrall 2009).

However, since the early 19th century, family in Pākehā culture has been built upon the assumption of an independent heterosexual social unit, positing motherhood as a singular role (Mikaere 1994). While shared parenting exists around the world and in Aotearoa New Zealand, this is the cultural context that Kate and Jude primarily exist within. Despite their collaboration in court, and Lilah's preference towards Kate and Jude, collective mothering therefore has its complications. For example, Kate and Jude must consult Lilah on any major decisions, and when deciding where to send Dash to primary school, they encountered differing priorities.

So we said, "we're looking at schools, this is where we live, these are the ones in the area, could we have your opinion?" So she named the Catholic school in our area, and it's like...ummmmm. I said to Jude "she's chosen the bloody Catholic school and we're gay! There's so much of this that's not going to work". And she's like "Ask her why". So I messaged her back and said "Look, Catholic school, he's going to get messages every single day that his family structure's not okay, and I'm concerned about that. Could you talk to me about why this school is important to you?". And she said, "aw, he'd just look so cute in the uniform!".

Even though Kate and Jude consider themselves to be on Lilah's team, and to form Dash's wider collective family alongside her, they are the ones with custody, and therefore the ones who are most affected by the outputs of Dash's major life decisions. In Kate, Jude, and Lilah's lives, reigning ideology of singular motherhood falls short to describe the complexities of this family structure. Despite the potential for tension that this holds, the state offers little guidance for this, expecting those who share guardianship to negotiate and manage this process without much intervention (Love 2002a). Luckily, Kate and Jude felt confident in navigating this situation, and Kate recounted the story with good humour.

So I messaged her back and I said "Lilah! Jude dresses him, and his kicks³¹ and his tee shirt always match, and he always looks amazing, he always looks really good. The school is not going to support him in the manner that another school might." I just thought, not talking about gay families is one thing, but talking explicitly about them being wrong is completely different. So I messaged her more about that, and she was fine.

While Kate and Jude's approach to Lilah's input is relatively fluid and open, in other settings they are stricter in their ownership of their role as Dash's parents, explicitly shaping their family by excluding potential members. When Lilah and her partner got married, they went out of their way to define parenthood in a way that reinforced their own family unit, firmly excluding Lilah's new husband from the equation.

Lilah has married the person she's with, and they have two children. And we were invited to their wedding. This must have been around three or four years ago, Dash was ten or eleven, and when we were driving home, he said "oh, it's quite nice having a step dad", and I was like "whaaat?". And I was going to tease it out a little but Jude went straight in for the jugular and was like "your mother, your birth mother has married somebody, he's literally nothing to you. He's not your stepfather, a stepfather is someone like Bill (Jude's step father) who does parenting stuff- who does fathering stuff.". So working out those dynamics is hard. I mean, he's just applying the same theory as other people. He's got a friend with a stepdad you know?

As Kate says, Dash is applying mainstream kinship logic to Lilah's partner, operating with the assumption that the man's official title as his birth mother's husband, makes him his step-father. The intensity with which Kate reacted, and Jude spoke to Dash, reveals their own definitions of kinship and its perceived limitations. They refer to Dash's other relatives of origin with familial terms regardless of their social connection to him, talking of uncles and aunts with comparative ease. They also view Lilah as Dash's mother, despite her lack of primary care towards Dash. However, Kate and Jude constructed their own

³¹ Colloquialism for shoes.

specific position as Dash's mothers on the basis that kinship is practiced, rather than defined by blood and marriage.

As foster parents, they have raised Dash, feeding, teaching, and bathing him into now adolescence, navigating the important decisions around his trajectory, and providing emotional care. They have faced gatekeepers in seeking validation of this relationship, in the form of CYF officials and the Family Court, where the centrality of love and caregiving present in kinship ideology outside of biology was key to justifying their identity as mothers. To casually assign a newcomer the hard-earned role of parent (regardless of the "step"), undermines the version of parental kinship they have worked to both create, and validate. They stretch Pākehā kinship narratives to include primary caregiving as a pathway to a parental label, but then firmly protect this definition of parenting, both externally to the state, and to Dash.

This is one of the key points that critical kinship scholars make: Kinship is just as much about exclusion as it is about inclusion (Franklin and McKinnon 2000). By defining who is outside of Dash's family, Kate and Jude create boundaries around him, solidifying their own place as his parents inside of their own definitions. Kinship is not infinitely expandable, and even collective kinship - like the structures pre-existing colonisation, and examples given above - has its limits (Franklin and McKinnon 2000, 2001, 13, 147-75). Despite the diversity in parenting practices worldwide, Kate and Jude exist within a cultural context that conceptualises families as isolated social units. While fostering seems like it radically extends this unit, Kate and Jude still turn to strands of conventional kinship to define familial relationships, by focusing on mainstream narratives of nurture. Their practice of collective kinship is collective only to the point where it allows them to include themselves into Dash's existing parental picture, but they see this inclusion as earned, rather than something that should be readily extended.

Kate and Jude oscillate between multiple mainstream kinship scripts, reinterpreting them in a myriad of ways that often serve different purposes to what first meets the eye. The diversity of kinship understandings at play in their story and the contradictions in their own applications of these norms, emphasises that experiences of kinship are not universal, and even within families, beliefs about kinship are constantly shifting. This

makes kinship impossible to objectively measure, despite the efforts of the state to regulate and standardise the foster system.

While the intentions behind the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989 may have been positive, the reality is that the Pākehā colonial foundations of the state are not set up to provide care that truly integrates Māori conceptions of family. Ultimately, the state is ill-equipped to manage the myriads of ways multiple kinship ideologies manifest in Aotearoa New Zealand, and continues to face deserved critique (The Modernising Child, Youth and Family Panel 2015; Keddell 2017; Pihama 2019).³²³³ State interventions centre on definitions of “good” families, but these definitions are often contradictory and uneven, making them malleable for those who know how to perform the correct scripts of normativity.

For queer families, historically excluded from visions of mainstream kinship this represents a gateway towards inclusion more generally. While their families might not identically reflect dominant narratives of kinship, by pulling together ideologies and reproducing them in their own vision, they can find themselves within mainstream kinship stories, and gain societal validation. However, to do this, it is clear that one must also draw on other forms of normativity, which creates a hierarchy of potential inclusion for those who sit outside familial norms.³⁴

Both the potentials and limitations of kinship ideology become even more vivid in my next chapter. Through exploring my participant’s experiences of reproductive

³² It is estimated that over 10,000 children were removed from their homes between the years 2012-2015, despite no convincing evidence that child wellbeing increases within the foster system (Hou 2016; Keddell 2017; Duff 2018a, 2018b; Pihama 2019). Due to its failings, CYF has restructured over 12 times since 1998, and the current Oranga Tamariki iteration has already been heavily critiqued for a lack of structural approaches to child abuse and neglect, rising rates of child removal, and the number of children hurt while in state care (Hou 2016; McLachlan 2018; Hyslop 2019; Forbes 2019; I. Davison 2019; Manch 2019; Pihama 2019).

³³ Since the submission of this thesis in May 2019, Oranga Tamariki has been further challenged by Māori groups, collectives, and Iwis, as well as garnering significant negative mainstream attention through a nationally-aired documentary featuring a specific child removal procedure (Sachdeva and Reid 2019). An internal investigation spurred by the documentary and accompanying activism revealed a myriad of failures, resulting in an apology from Oranga Tamariki’s current CEO, Grainne Moss and a planned overhaul of operations (Sachdeva and Reid 2019). Citing reasons such as the history outlined in this thesis, Māori leaders are critical of the potential this holds, and continue to call for a new tikanga Māori set of operations (Sachdeva and Reid 2019).

³⁴ While I am unable to fully explore the foster system within the confines of this thesis, it cannot be overstated how significantly ideals of class and ethnicity play into state definitions of good families (Beddoe 2015). I highly recommend reading Catherine Love’s work on the Māori experiences of the foster system for better insight to how this manifests, as despite over 15 years passing since her publications, they continue to be relevant (2002, 2002).

technologies, I show how different parties cut up kinship norms and patch them back together again. While Kate's main adversary is CYF, it is often my other participant's own internalised meanings of kinship that they must reify and negotiate to feel confident in their family organisation. This is a reminder of how the perceived relationships between family, biology, and heteronormativity, continue to exist, and shape families in Aotearoa New Zealand. Like Kate's repurposing of family ideology, the other participants' usage of technology helps to exemplify the malleability of kinship ideals. However, just as Kate consequently reaffirmed dominant scripts of motherhood, their engagement with fertility treatment often resulted in the reproduction of heteronormative kinship narratives.

This suggests something about the nature of kinship. The same flexibility that allows for people to remake it, also gives the ideology surrounding it a certain endurance, exemplified by it showing up in my participants' stories, again and again. In this light it is important to examine both the potentials, and the limitations, of queer inclusion into mainstream notions of family.

Chapter 4

Repurposing Biology through Technology

Three of my participants, Vic, Aneta, and Harriet, became parents through using Fertility Associates (FA), the only fertility clinic available in their region. While Kate had to put considerable time, money, and energy, into legitimising her relationship to the state with Dash, the rest of my participants spent these resources on creating a family as customers of FA. This made them participants in the private sector³⁵, rather than the public sphere. Because of this, they had more visible agency over the ways they designed their family with FA providing them with the tools and guidance to shape their parenting journey in the way that they desired. For Kate, it was necessary to destabilise beliefs about biological kinship and genetics during her custody battle, to justify her parental role of Dash. In contrast, some of my participants used the services provided by FA to reinterpret and reproduce biological kinship norms in ways that secure their connections as a family, regardless of genetic relatedness.

By exploring the ways my participants do use assisted reproductive technologies, I further the argument that kinship ideology is fluid and reinterpretable. I argue that fertility clinics enable individuals to pick and choose which conventions of kinship they want to fulfil. However, I also begin to explicitly address the limitations of this malleability, showing how kinship ideology's multifaceted nature makes it difficult to completely subvert. While FA provides services to queer customers, FA exists within wider societal constructs of heteronormative kinship, which means that they design their

³⁵ Individuals can gain state funding for their use of Fertility Associates, but only after proving physical infertility ("Public Funding and Eligibility" n.d.). None of my participant's initial engagements were funded.

services with a heterosexual customer in mind. The implications of this for my participants makes visible the complexities of belonging and show that renegotiating kinship norms to fit one's family into the mainstream is often an intricate, uneven, and impermanent process.

The Potential of ARTs for Queer Kinship

Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs) have acted as a focal point for prominent critical kinship scholars (Strathern 1992a; Franklin 1993; Franklin and Ragone 1998; Reiter and Rapp 1999; Franklin and McKinnon 2000, 175). This is essentially because of the symbolic challenge ARTs represent to naturalised biogenetic kinship (Franklin and McKinnon 2001, 176). With technological intervention, family structures outside of linear cognatic descent are made visible in a setting validated by science, destabilising cognatic descent as the universal definition of relatedness (Thompson 2005, 66–68). In this sense, ARTs provide a winning narrative for feminist kinship scholars, as they show the limitations of essentialist understandings of kinship for describing the forms of family ARTs enable (Thompson 2005, 66–68). For the LGBTQ+ community, ARTs have given them a gateway into biological kinship that did not exist previously (Hayden 1995)-thereby queering reproduction.

While queer families have long existed through previous heterosexual relationships, co-parenting, adoption, and fostering, the services of ARTs, and the clinics that provide them, allow queer women specifically, to have more agency in designing their families than ever before (Hayden 1995). As sociologist Laura Mamo suggested in her work on lesbian reproduction, this has transformed expectations regarding pregnancy via insemination, as more queer women move to use these services (2007, 23–57, 2013). What was once a “low tech, do-it-yourself” endeavour, now involves multitudes of actors, materials, and social relations (Mamo 2007, 45–57, 2013, 228). Interestingly, many women use these processes to emulate heteronormative notions of kinship, taking dominant narratives of what it means to be related and repurposing them through the tools that fertility clinics provide (Hayden 1995; Thompson 2005, 86, 215; Nordqvist 2014, 2012, 2010).

There are many queer theorists, groups, and individuals who are critical of what they see as a replication of the heterosexual family (Weston 1991, 198; Warner 1993, 69–82, 2000, 100–130; Duggan 2002). My participants themselves spoke against heteronormativity, and claimed to view kinship as a practice, rather than a static role.

Despite this, I noticed Aneta and Harriet specifically, still used ARTs in direct engagement with conventional kinship ideology, both in terms of nuclear family ideals, and biogenetic understandings of relatedness. Just as Kate rewrote dominant motherhood scripts to better encapsulate her parenthood of Dash, the stories in this chapter show how engagement with kinship ideals can be both innovative and assimilationist at the same time.

Creating the Family Unit

In my interviews, I quickly became aware of how ARTs operated as both a revolutionary tool, and a gateway to assimilation into conventional nuclear family organisations. Corinne Hayden, in her work on lesbian kinship and biology, notes that lesbian parenting disrupts normative kinship, because of the challenge it offers to heteronormativity (1995). Parental families headed by women are “deeply bound to the existence of a second female parent, who is neither downplayed, nor de-gendered. She is clearly another mother” (1995, 46-47). However, in the drive to create and validate the role of “another mother” in a way that is not secondary to the biological parent, there can be an inadvertent focus on reproducing the nuclear two parent ideal (Hayden 1995; Nordqvist 2014). Only one of my participants, Vic, showed an openness towards the potential connectivity that using a known donor could result in.

We’re totally open to our donor wanting to be involved. At the moment, he isn’t, because he lives overseas, and I don’t see him moving back to New Zealand any time soon. But, if in five years he was like “Hey, I really want to get to know Flynn more” then sure! Because he’s someone we know, and a friend, we had to have conversations when he was in New Zealand, having all the appointments. We did up a draft contract type thing- so as we were talking, we wrote this document like “if in five years, this changes, all parties are okay to have this conversation again”. But I mean, I can’t even remember what’s in that document.

While her and her partner Keely chose their donor primarily to avoid FA’s two-year long waitlist for clinic supplied sperm, Vic’s nonchalant reflections suggest a relaxed attitude towards the extent of his future involvement. In contrast, my other participants, Harriet and Aneta felt strongly that any future engagement with their sperm donor would be

negative. When I asked Harriet about her decision to use an unknown donor, she emphasised her anxiety about the donor's potential influence.

We really wanted to be our baby's parents, and we didn't want to have to negotiate, to have some sort of legal document, to be in the position of uncertainty about what the donor's role would be if it was someone that we knew. It seemed like the neatest, most straightforward option. And of course, there are still risks with that, I will always have a sense of anxiety about when and if Oliver or Pippa decide to meet that donor: what the potential is, what that biological relationship of this unknown person in our lives could potentially have on the two most precious people in my life. That's a terrifying thought.

Harriet goes on to specify that she would undoubtedly support Pippa and Oliver if they decided to seek out their donor, but that she worries about his potential to "wield a tremendous amount of power and hurt". Operating out of Pākehā culture, shaped by historical biogenetic definitions of parental descent, Harriet puts considerable energy into ensuring their donor will not transform into a competing parent.

The majority of donors, they say things like "I always wanted to be a Dad, and it never happened" - there was this very strong sense of missing out on fatherhood. That made Jane and I anxious, because we had to be considering what this would mean for this child if the time came, and they wanted to meet this person, and what sort of role would this person want with this child? We didn't want that person to be a parent. So the reason why we chose the donor that we did was because he said that he wasn't interested in being a Dad- he just knew people that had fertility issues, and this felt like something he could do. So that made us feel really confident that he wasn't going to be seeking a father figure role.

Aneta, felt similarly to Harriet, and chose an anonymous donor in an effort to create a family protected from external influence. Initially, her and her wife Jules, had asked Jules's brother to be a sperm donor. However, upon realising that he was interested in having a parental relationship with their future child, they swiftly changed their mind.

When we did the mutual counselling thing with Fertility Associates, he started saying things like "I want them to call me Dad, or special uncle" and started changing that relationship right away. He was asking about how often he'd be

able to see them, and what kind of discipline we were gonna use, and we thought “whoah, put the breaks on this, this isn’t what we want”. We were after a donor, not a Dad, we don’t want a Dad. We don’t want a third person involved.

As mentioned in chapter three, there are many occurrences of multiple people taking on parental roles of children outside of Pākehā culture, without signifying a threat to the relationship children have with their parents. In some cases, uncles specifically hold an important role, such as in inner city African American populations in the United States, where uncles provide social support to boys with single mothers (Richardson 2009). In Māori culture, the lack of differentiation between uncle and father in *te reo* (both are “matua”, and “whaea” refers to both mother and aunt), reflects fluidity in kinship understandings that also exist outside of exclusively biological definitions of parenthood (Kerekere 2017, 42).

In contrast, Pākehā conceptions of kinship are interwoven with the idea of the family as an isolated nuclear social unit (Mikaere 1994). This is not universally reflected in Pākehā parenting practices; statistics show that around 17 percent of Pākehā children live in single parent households, 8 percent of Pākehā households contain two or more families, and blended and step families are increasingly common (Statistics New Zealand 2007, Gath 2016). However, queer families already exist along one axis of difference, and in the absence of biological connection, for some it can feel important to reproduce other mainstream kinship narratives (Hayden 1995). As discussed in relation to Kate’s story, defining boundaries of exclusion is a key process of creating relatedness (Franklin and McKinnon 2000, 2001, 13, 147–75). By severing any connection between the sperm donor and a future child, Harriet and Anita construct themselves and their partners as dual mothers, reconfiguring conventional ideals of the nuclear family unit to exclude biological heterosexual reproduction.

There are similarities here between Harriet and Aneta’s usage of ARTs, and the ideologies that Kate enacted to win Dash’s custody battle. Despite the different contexts, they all draw on dominant Pākehā kinship narratives, and repackage them to better represent their own families. In Kate’s case, this manifested in her use of ideals of care, nurture, and motherhood, working to undermine heteronormative biological kinship norms. In contrast, Aneta and Harriet reinforce nuclear family ideology in their efforts to create a

connected family. Regardless, their experiences show the fluidity of kinship, and the ways individuals can reinterpret ideals to suit them, in forms that still reflect mainstream beliefs.

However, the tools that they each use to do so, speak volumes about who can reject and iterate kinship norms. In Kate's case, her position as an educated teacher, allowed her and Jude to represent themselves as natural caregivers, deserving of being Dash's guardians. The ability to pay for the cost of a lawyer was also significant, and while it caused Kate financial stress, the fact that she has mortgage payments to pause, and parents to borrow from, speaks to her class position. In Aneta and Harriet's case, engaging with market provided reproductive technologies, the power of money, through their positions as customers of FA pronounced.

Ontologically Choreographing the Family

The ability Aneta and Harriet have to shape their families using ARTs directly correlates to their financial power as well as the consumer choice that FA's position in the private sector gives them. As Strathern argues, the invention and subsequent selling of ART services, allows reproduction in this realm to be defined by want and desire, where the "child is literally an embodiment of the act of choice" (Strathern 1990, 3). Her main point is that under the framework of a market, kinship is transformed from something that occurs "naturally", to a service for purchase, changing future parents into potential customers (Strathern 1990).

For LGBTQ+ kinship, this offers a new side to understandings of choice. In Weston's foundational ethnography, she talks extensively about how queer people "choose" family, connecting with one another, rather than viewing kinship as exclusively biogenetic (1991). However, Weston also suggests that this behaviour stems from responding to homophobic exclusion from families of origin, and barriers between queer people and forming their own conventional families through reproduction (1991). ARTs therefore offer queer people the option to choose an orientation around biological kinship, by making reproductive kinship possible between same sex couples. Thus, ARTs provide a whole new meaning of chosen families, if you can afford to use them.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, government support for these services is available, but this requires proving infertility, which is impossible for same sex couples, unless they have a pre-existing medical reason. Otherwise, they are held to the same expectation as heterosexual couples, and must unsuccessfully “try” for at least one year with a private donor, or have multiple failed FA treatments (“Public Funding and Eligibility” n.d.). As Vic points out, this impacts the access that people have to these services.

It’s this middle class, white “richy” thing you can do. It cost us \$25,000. You can get government funding, but you have to prove twelve months of infertility, which just seems so silly as a same sex couple. Like, would we have to get our sperm donor to come over from Germany for a year to try?

However, if you can pay this price, you access a form of family creation that would otherwise be impossible. Charis Thompson refers to this as ontological choreography, describing it as “the dynamic coordination of the technical, scientific, kinship, gender, emotional, legal, political, and financial, aspects of ART clinics”(2005, 9). Through the management of parts (e.g. bodies, instruments, biological material), and time (e.g. menstrual cycles, biological clocks, medical appointments), ARTs, and fertility centres like FA, aim to make the complexities of, and barriers to, reproduction, simple and superfluous (Thompson 2005, 10, 145–79).

This is what allows Aneta and Harriet to create their families in conjunction with the nuclear family ideal, as their pathway to parenthood would have been much more complex if they had used a personal donor to self-inseminate. Outside of the significant physical intricacies of getting pregnant without medical assistance, private sperm donation is unregulated in Aotearoa New Zealand (Nelmes Bissett 2018). There is no limit for how many times a donor can give their sperm sample, no organised database, and no legislative framework for how relationships between donors and receiving parents should work (Nelmes Bissett 2018). Therefore, those outside of fertility clinics are unable to use an anonymous donor or gain validated proof³⁶ of how many biological siblings their child may have, and must manage the donor-parent relationship themselves.

All of this would crack the nuclear family image that Aneta and Harriet aimed to construct.

³⁶ FA has limits on how many people a person can donate sperm to (Nelmes Bissett 2018).

FA on the other hand, manages the physical progress and sperm samples, creates legal documentation, and provides the option of anonymity.³⁷ In doing so, they reify the complicated process of donor insemination into a consequential bureaucratic journey, that is presented to users as a logical step by step plan (Thompson 2005, 79–82). Through routinising finding a sperm donor, fertility clinics make ARTs feel safe, predictable, and natural (Thompson 2005, 81, 146–49). This allows Aneta and Harriet to construct their families, without having to perceive the donor as anything but a sample of biological material.

While the moving parts of ARTs may seem messy, they are coordinated in explicit and intentional ways to produce not just children, but parents, by fulfilling and renegotiating notions of what it means to create a family (Thompson 2005, 5–28). However, while the idea of a Pākehā family working as an isolated unit is relatively straightforward, the ideology behind what it means to be related within that family is much more complex. Fertility clinics try to choreograph mainstream meanings of kinship, but because of the multifaceted nature of these narratives, their ability to create a genuine feeling of relatedness between parents and children, can be limited.

Choreographing Multifaceted Ideology

One of the key ways of defining relatedness in Pākehā culture is through genetic connection (Carsten 2002, 2000, 1–37). Western culture recognises genetic connection through physical similarity, rather than just shared genetic material. Therefore, reproduction is interpreted as producing beings that resemble oneself (Strathern 1995, 354; Rabinow 1996, 99; Nordqvist 2010). Clinics capitalise on this narrative, by offering the process of donor matching, to emulate heterosexual reproduction (Nordqvist 2010). Aneta and Jules were initially anxious about using an anonymous donor rather than Jules's brother, because Jules "was a huge believer in genetics" and "really wanted that bloodline". When they chose a donor, FA offered them extensive information about the donor's physical characteristics, interests, skills, and personality. This allowed them to match their donor to Jules.

We looked through the profiles, and it was just shivers, because the donor was just amazing. He was very similar to Jules, so again, we were really happy

³⁷ For those who use a known donor, FA also provides group counselling to negotiate any future complexities.

because at that point we thought I was going to have both, so having similar physical characteristics and personality to Jules- well, everything was just beautiful!

Because of this, they can draw similarities between Jules and their children, rather than the donor, emulating ideals of genetic connection. However, fertility clinics are not always successful in creating a feeling of relatedness. Because kinship ideology is multifaceted, narratives can be difficult to wrangle, as they often manifest differently in individuals' intuitive feelings about parenthood.

For example, Vic saw no need to manage biology, or emulate a nuclear family structure. Despite the similarities between Aneta and Harriet, Harriet cared more about choosing a donor who had no interest in fatherhood, and neither her or Jane were particularly concerned with donor matching. Even within couples, different beliefs about parenthood often exist, as Harriet realised when she had her second child with her partner Chris. When she and Jane split up, Harriet kept the sperm donor on file, and chose to use it again when pursuing parenthood with Chris. Her only motivation when choosing the sperm initially was to ensure an isolated family unit, and as Jane and Owen had bonded easily, she gave little thought to the importance of biology.

I kept the sperm, it was available, I knew that the donor and I had compatible genes, and Oliver's been a really healthy, happy and beautiful child, so I didn't have any hesitation in wanting to use the same sperm again.

To her, the sperm no longer symbolised any threat, but was simply a means to having another healthy child. However, in hindsight, Harriet can see that Chris may have had different priorities when choosing a donor.

For my new partner Chris, it was a little difficult for her, because the sperm was the sperm that Jane and I had chosen, so she wasn't included in that donor choosing process. And I think if things had been different, she would have liked us to use a known donor.

Chris's orientation around a known donor contrasts directly with Harriet's prioritisation of using anonymisation to diminish the donor's input into her family. Additionally, while Harriet and Jane did not attempt to create commonalities between Jane and Owen, the donor choice was still a decision they made together, which to an extent, ties Pippa to

Jane. This influenced Chris's own feeling of agency within the process, as her Harriet and Jane's understandings of relatedness diminished her own.

The ability for ARTs to choreograph feelings of relatedness is also further complicated by the additional facet of motherhood norms within mainstream kinship ideology. Queer women not only have to engage with creating non-biological family units, and navigating genetics, but also look to create a sense of equality between each mother, and their children. One of the ways this manifests is a drive towards replicating the nuclear family unit, as shown in the earlier parts of this chapter. However, diminishing the role of the sperm donor and the resulting genetic material, does not automatically create a sense of dual motherhood.

This is because Pākehā culture depicts "becoming" a mother as something that occurs through pregnancy and birth, with expected participation in activities like regular scans, blood tests, and examinations (Côté-Arsenault, Brody, and Dombeck 2009). These act as rituals which mark a processual movement towards birth, and solidify the creation of a motherhood identity (Côté-Arsenault, Brody, and Dombeck 2009). Through this, motherhood is defined as a singular role, between the biological carrier, and the child (Hayden 1995). The fact that the "other" mother is recognisable by the lack of birth relationship in comparison, has the potential to make the family feel asymmetrical. While ARTs help to choreograph families, and parents, they do not necessarily help to choreograph equal mothers.

For Chris, it was not just her lack of agency in deciding on a donor that influenced her relationship to Pippa, but also her own experience with biological motherhood.

It's a very different experience for her. She obviously gave birth to her twin boys, but she isn't biologically connected to Pippa, and she hasn't been the sole caregiver, so it's a very different experience. Her whole perspective is quite different, and I know because we've talked about it, that she doesn't feel as connected, or put Pippa in the same category as her boys.

There is the chance that if Harriet and Chris had made use of the ontological choreographies available to them through ARTs, and chosen the sperm together as a couple, Chris would feel more ownership over Pippa's existence. Realistically though, only one parent can be the birth mother, which limits the potential of ARTs. Even Aneta

and Jules, who seemed to be on the same page in their interpretation and navigation of kinship ideology, struggled with keeping a sense of dual motherhood after their children were born. When they broke up, Jules instantly reverted to biological understandings of singular motherhood, taking ownership of Scarlett.

Jules said “I’m taking Scarlett and I’m moving”. And I went “you’re taking my baby away? Are you kidding me?! Absolutely not, I will fight tooth and nail, you are not taking my child away.”. She didn’t know how to handle it, she’s very traditional in that respect. Even though she’s a lesbian, she sees things in black and white like that.

There is genuine difference between experiences of biological, and non-biological motherhood, which has an impact on Jules, and Chris. Within one pathway, there is a socially legitimated ritualization process that reinforces a maternal relationship, while in the other, Jules and Chris have to forge their own understanding of relatedness, in direct contrast to dominant motherhood narratives (Hayden 1995). However, just as the differences between the ways Jules and Harriet used ARTs to create their families showed that beliefs about relatedness are not universal or monolithic, individuals can interpret motherhood ideology in multiple ways.

After all, Jules and Chris are not the only mothers in this thesis who share these potentially contrasting experiences. Kate has three biological children and considers Dash to be just as much her child as the other children. Rather than claiming a biological parenthood over him, she embraces the queerness that Park attributes the adoptive maternal body with, building her motherhood identity to Dash through practiced kinship (2006). Park’s article emphasises the flexibility in social meanings of motherhood, sharing a quote from another scholar, that exemplifies the commonalities between adoptive and biological mothers (2006, 206):

There are the same pleasures of plump baby-flesh, almost the same number of diapers to change and sleepless nights. Adoptive mothers carry infants in our arms and potty train our toddlers; we experience the same joys of and responsibilities for bathing, feeding, singing lullabies, and reciting stories to one's child. As the mothers of infants, toddlers, or teens, we too are familiar with

the tears, screams, laughter, and smiles that enter one's bones (Homans 2002, 266, quoted in Parks 2006).

Park emphasises that the legacy of womanhood, caregiving, and motherhood, marks these activities as distinctly maternal. By participating, adoptive mothers are acting out historically gendered practices of motherhood (Park 2006). This is just as relevant to queer mothers seeking connections with non-biological children. Harriet herself feels that if Chris had spent more time providing primary care, she may have formed a closer bond with Pippa. She compared them to Jane and Oliver, where Jane had spent a year staying at home to care for him which “cemented their bond”. In saying that, Jules also spent time acting as Scarlett and Jonti’s primary caregiver, and initially felt more connected to Scarlett regardless. It is impossible to reduce the complexities at play to the extent where generalisations can be made. While both the processes of pregnancy and primary caregiving are key elements of building kinship, motherhood ideology is multifaceted, and there are many potentials and limitations for building a mothering identity.

In Kate’s case, she would never claim that her relationship to Dash is identical to that with her other children, both in the development of their connection, and in her experience of its manifestations. However, she also does not view the relationships between her other children as indistinguishable. Rather, her mothering experience between all of them diversifies over multitudes of factors. Different, does not need to mean inferior. This shows that while ARTs offer services that ontologically choreograph parenthood and families, this is not a top down process, where users are passive recipients of parenthood. Rather, the ways individuals themselves rewrite and reinterpret societal scripts of parenthood, is just as relevant to their resulting feeling of inclusion within mainstream family.

The diversity between Kate’s experience, and that of Jules’s initial feelings towards Jonti, and Chris’s lack of relationship to Pippa, shows how even within mainstream kinship narratives, there is a wide variance in the way individuals internalise them, and choose to reproduce them. For Kate, mainstream motherhood means primary caring, while Chris, defines it by biological reproduction. Harriet, while attributing much of Chris’s disconnection to Pippa to their own decisions, has begun to suspect

that Chris's perspectives may have more to do with her own understandings of biology, than the genuine potential of connection between her and Pippa.

I think a lot of it has to do with how emotionally invested the other parent is. Like Jane is absolutely Oliver's "other" mother. And she is proud of that, and absolutely secure in her own identification of being his mother. And I wonder if there's a sense that she kind of owns that space, in a way that Chris doesn't when it comes to Pippa. And perhaps, like anything, if you don't own anything, if you don't claim it, then how can other people tap into something you're not projecting? How can you feel it?

Perhaps in support of Harriet's position, after Aneta encouraged Jules to re-evaluate her understandings of biological kinship, she began to perceive Jonti as her own son. Now, over a year after they split up, they share the children between them, living less than a block away from each other. However, to get to that point, Aneta had to spend considerable time and effort convincing Jules that Jonti was just as much her child as Scarlett was.

It took me a long time to convince her: Jonti is your son. He may not have your blood, but he needs time with you, he needs a connection with you. Otherwise he will blame himself for losing this connection, because he won't understand. You know, for him, this is his Mum. He's always had her around.

It was not the choreography of ARTs that created this connection, despite them intentionally donor matching, but her own shift in kinship beliefs. In the face of multifaceted kinship ideology, the ontological possibilities of ARTs are not limitless, and differ from individual to individual. However, while these stories speak to the limitations of ARTs, they may also speak to their limitations specifically for queer women.

Laura Mamo would likely refer to Aneta and Harriet's experiences as a failure to create "ontological innovation", reflecting how fertility clinics sometimes get the choreography wrong. Realistically though, ARTs, and the ontological choreography they provide, were designed for heterosexual couples (Thompson 2005, 237–43), not queer women. The development of reciprocal IVF³⁸, and creation of embryos without male genetic input

³⁸ Reciprocal IVF refers to when one woman provides the egg, and the other carries it (IVF Australia 2018).

(Dolgin 2018), show that there are possibilities for tools that cater intentionally to queer mothers. These technological advances suggest that ARTs may be moving to directly engage with narratives of motherhood that impact same sex female couples (IVF Australia 2018). However, as it stands, fertility clinics base themselves around an imagined heterosexual customer. Outside of the limitations this might place on technological offerings, it was also noticeably clear that FA's inherent orientation was around heterosexuality, which impacted my participants' experiences.

Navigating Implied Heterosexuality as a Customer

The extent to which conception and heterosexuality are intertwined in social perception is perhaps best exemplified by the lack of critical attention queer usage of ARTs has had within mainstream feminist scholarship up until recently (Nordqvist 2008). In 2008, Petra Nordqvist noted that most academic engagements with ARTs, even within critical kinship studies, "normalize heterosexuality, and render it at the same time fundamental, and yet theoretically insignificant" (2008, 287). Since then, there has been an abundance of research in this area, notably by Nordqvist herself (2010, 2012, 2014) and Laura Mamo (2007, 2010, 2013, 2015). However, considering significant scholarly engagements with reproductive technologies bloomed as early as the 1990s (Strathern 1990, 1992; Franklin and Ragone 1998), the delayed rise of queer considerations reflects that initially, researchers and clinics alike imagined the key users of ARTs as heterosexual women (Nordqvist 2008).

Assumed heterosexuality is evident in FA's promotional materials. The resources that they provide are clearly written to a cisgender heterosexual audience, with only one section on their website for same sex female couples, and sparse mention in any of their downloadable resources (Fertility Associates 2018, n.d.). The only information consistently available solely describes where the logistics and legalities differ between heterosexual and same sex female couples, rather than offering any tailored support (Fertility Associates 2018, n.d.). There is certainly no mention of trans parenthood, and most of the language is gendered by "his" and "her" pronouns (Fertility Associates 2018). The lack of queer specific resources provided by FA was noticeable to my participants.

Vic, while relaxed about the donor process in general, ended up submitting feedback multiple times because of this, frustrated by the gendered nature of the process.

Their website is super gendered. At Fertility Associates, I suppose we thought because so many gay and lesbian men use fertility centres, they might have specific resources for us (but they didn't). We provided extensive feedback, twice, and each time it was "staff are great, website's gendered, we need more resources." I don't think anything has changed though.

While Vic never felt discriminated against, events like this highlight that she, and other queer women, are not the target market. This was evident in Harriet's experience with them, when they confused her and Jane's name.

They got muddled by me and Jane, they mixed us up in a letter. I still feel really grumpy about that. I think lesbians are Fertility Associates' bread and butter—we're such easy clients! Most of the time it's just a simple insemination. So I was really frustrated that their processes were so inadequate that they couldn't deal with two women's names.

As Harriet points out, for most same sex couples, fertility treatment is just a question of a simple treatment. However, as FA operates primarily in the private sector, it is enmeshed within market values, which means their overarching goal is profit. Most of their market are heterosexual couples, and it is more efficient for FA to cater its services to them as its base clientele.

The simplicity of the treatment most queer women need also makes them less profitable as potential clients, as their treatments are less invasive, and therefore, less costly and profit generative. FA also have the monopoly on ARTs within their region, which means they have no reason to specifically target queer families, as they capture this customer base through being the only option. This means that queer inclusiveness is not a foundational priority. Their policies around sperm donation exemplify this, as because they need a steady supply of sperm, they prioritise donor preferences ahead of their customers who are not in monogamous heterosexual relationships. As Vic found out after her personal donor showed her the intake form, sperm donors can restrict who is, and is not able, to use their sample, based on this logic.

Anonymous donors can specify who their sperm goes to, and they cross out some categories of people. When we did it over a year ago it was “Am I happy for my sperm to go to A. Single Women: Yes/No B. Same Sex couples: Yes/No. And I always think about this- even still! Ever since I saw that form I’ve been annoyed. Because I mean, you could also say “I don’t want my sperm going to Jewish people”- like, how do you decide on those categories? They’re not involved in that person’s life, so I don’t see why they should get a choice on who the sperm goes to.

This policy reinforces heterosexual nuclear family structures as the norm³⁹, suggesting that other family organisations are less worthy of donation. It also clearly shows their orientation around profit and efficiency.

Additionally, their for-profit nature muddies the boundaries between their customers, and the consumed service, as the success of their fertility treatments with their customers is the marketable element of their service. Statistics feature heavily in FA’s marketing materials, which aims to provide a sense of reliability to their future customers. For example, there is currently a large billboard at Wellington airport with the slogan “20,000 babies all started with a chat to us”. As Harriet puts it, this means that while treating you, they are simultaneously producing the service that they offer, in the sense that your outcome impacts the statistics that they then go on to market.

They’re all about the numbers. They want to say x numbers of babies have been successfully born, and x number have been conceived. They’re so statistics focused that it’s not about supporting women. It’s definitely not an organisation that has feminist ideals. It’s all about money making and profit and being a baby factory. Their focus is about getting you pregnant. Anything else is completely secondary.

This is not to say that the individual agents within FA solely reproduce profit driven imperatives, or that they intentionally discriminate against queer customers. Anthropologist Ruth Fitzgerald exemplifies this in her explorations of the emotional

³⁹ It also shows an unconscious reproduction of biological kinship beliefs. As Vic points out, there is no genuine reason for sperm donors to choose who their sample goes to, as they are not the future child’s “parent”. However, clearly FA still subscribes to biogenetic kinship beliefs to an extent, as they give the donor agency over this, implying a degree of symbolic ownership and relationship to the genetic material, and the child it becomes.

labour the scientists at FA perform (2013). FA's scientists also double as service providers, so they are encouraged to provide emotional care for their clients, which results in dual responsibilities that they take very seriously (Fitzgerald, Legge, and Frank 2013). However, FA designs its processes in general within the wider context of Pākehā kinship ideology. This means, that regardless of intention, FA, and other fertility clinics, create inequitable access to reproduction.

Covert Normative Kinship in Practice

Because reproductive technologies emerged mostly in the private sector, access to them is explicitly shaped by class. However, putting the economic inequities inherent in ARTs aside, fertility clinics exist within societal kinship norms. This manifests in covert ways, as exemplified by Vic's perspective on her experience with FA.

It's so whitewashed- they are very focused on BMI too, which excludes people that have larger BMI's because of their genetic makeup, so for example, you don't see many Māori and Pasifika women in Fertility Associates. That's a racist practice in the sense that it's covertly disguised in whiteness. We had no negative experiences, but we're white and middle class. We might experience discrimination (in the medical system) if we were something else, if we were Māori, Pasifika, disabled...if we were anything but what we are.

The covert racism Vic refers to is obvious when reading through FA's resources with a critical eye. While they have multiple customer stories in their promotional booklets from a Māori perspective, there is little material written by directly by FA about how they cater to cultural understandings of family outside of Pākehā norms. This suggests that the organisation has added these stories in for marketing purposes, without actively considering what it means to create families in the context of settler colonialism. Considering the emphasis on whakapapa within Māori culture, as talked about in the two chapters previous, the lack of intentional integration of these views mean FA's services are inadequate for providing a service in line with tikanga Māori (Glover and Rousseau 2007; Glover et al. 2008; Lovelock 2010). Likely related to the lack of a foundational integration of Māori kinship ontology, FA has had to advertise multiple times for Māori sperm donors, and in 2017, only had one Māori donor available (MacManus 2017). For Takatāpui, for which ARTs are one of the only pathways towards biological reproduction, the inherent whiteness of fertility clinics creates a major barrier to balancing personal,

cultural and institutional, understandings of whakapapa and its relationship to biological genealogy (Glover and Rousseau 2007).

While Harriet is Pākehā, she is outside of FA's recommended BMI range, and her experiences of their services helps to paint a picture of how normative customer imaginations manifest in action. She noticed that during her time engaging with them, they attributed any challenge to her getting pregnant to her BMI, and rather than re-evaluating her treatment plan, consistently told her that she needed to lose weight for IVF to be successful.

One of the issues is that they are incredibly fatphobic- they always made a big issue of my size. None of this is relevant with Pippa because I got pregnant on the first insemination anyway, but with Oliver, their explanation was for why I didn't get pregnant right away was, well they can't say any one thing, but they can say "certainly your BMI would have been an issue, we really strongly encourage you to lose weight". And it wasn't like it was said once, I guess I could have accepted it if it was said once, but it was said on multiple occasions. Like, I'm not a child you know? You can tell me once that this is what you think, and that's fine, but it's not helpful or constructive. But their justification is always that this is the medical science.

Harriet's frustrations magnified after she got pregnant with her second child Pippa on the first round of IVF, despite no change in her BMI. When reflecting later with me in our interview, it was clear that the way FA reinforced a bodily ideal of motherhood made her uncomfortable and felt disingenuous. To her, it seemed more like a representation of their beliefs about women's bodies, than a genuine scientific commitment.

There is zero feminist analyst. Like absolutely zilch. I mean I think it's interesting that one of the symbols of fertility is the "Venus of Willendorf"- this is like an ancient symbol of fertility. The reason why I bring it up is that there's nothing skinny about this symbol. I mean, I guess I'm not convinced on the science that having a normal BMI makes you more fertile than any other cluster, maybe that's true, maybe it's not. But it doesn't feel like a helpful narrative that they're so obsessed with.

The fact that FA professionals viewed Harriet's weight as a barrier in need of removal, rather than a navigable characteristic, speaks to who FA sees as its target customer base. It also shows the limitations of the emotional labour Fitzgerald references, within the context of scientific priorities.

While Fitzgerald found that the scientists at FA take caring for their patients extremely seriously, her research on fertility clinics more generally shows that workers also feel that technical perfection is mandatory (Fitzgerald, Legge, and Frank 2013; Fitzgerald and Legge 2017). Technical perfection requires reaching scientific goals, and the potential cost of emotional care in fulfilling this priority is clear within Harriet's experience. The attribution of Harriet's fertility issues to her weight, which was unchanged when she quickly became pregnant with Pippa, shows how scientific logic can flatten the messy reality into normative explanations. Fitzgerald's work also reveals how fertility workers are imbued with normative kinship ideologies, as some scientists disclosed doubts regarding the ethics of treating single career women, lesbians, and couples with major age differences (Fitzgerald and Legge 2017). While the scientists maintain professionalism in their tangible care, Harriet's experience suggests that wider social norms do impact the experiences of fertility clinic customers.

When an institution designs its science, care expectations, and systematic processes with normative kinship in mind, its services automatically prioritise a Pākehā, heterosexual, cisgender, ideal. Therefore, regardless of FA's lack of intentionally discriminatory practices, their vision of motherhood, and their customers, are implicitly exclusionary. For people considering parenting, especially same sex couples that are reliant on some form of intervention (whether through the state or sperm donation), this acts as a very real barrier to having children.

For example, Sam and Lauren -the young queer couple who are yet to have children- find parenthood difficult to envision because of the inherent cissexism within motherhood spaces, which is heightened when combined with the financial costs of fertility treatment.

L: I have endometriosis, so I don't know how that would influence my fertility, and obviously I would need to go through the sperm donation process, but I might need more intervention, like Inter-uterine insemination, or IVF. That's expensive and difficult to navigate if you're going through the public system, and

it is very variable depending on where you live, and what DHB you fall under. I think it would be hard enough for me, but if Sam was to become pregnant, the whole maternity system? Oh my gosh! Imagine trying to navigate that!

S: That's a big part of the reason, negotiating stigma around it, that's why I wouldn't want to do it as well. I feel like it would become a thing. And I hate things becoming things. I hate becoming the centre of attention, or being talked about, or it becoming something that's not about- who I am I guess? I don't want to be a spectacle. If there wasn't that social stigma, if I could go away for nine months, I think I would actually be potentially okay with it.

L: You can't control how other people would react to it right? If you were to be visibly pregnant, how would that change social interactions? Like the whole midwifery, obstetrician system, even going through going DHB stuff for endometriosis, it's literally called the Women's Clinic. It's not anyone's malicious intent, I mean, most healthcare officials seem to be pretty well intending, but it's stuff like there's no male or gender-neutral bathrooms in the women's clinic. You know, I can imagine someone asking you when you were pregnant who the father was and stuff, which would be so weird and hurtful.

Nowhere, in any of FA online materials, do they mention the word “transgender”. This indicates that trans parents simply do not feature in their vision of families. As Sam and Lauren describe, biological parenthood holds genuine complications for them, such as Lauren's health, and the fact that neither of them produce sperm. However, blockades like the cost of treatment, and the implicit exclusion present in fertility clinics, are due to the social context underpinned by kinship ideology, rather than biological limitations.⁴⁰ While Aneta and Harriet could make use of the ontological choreography offered to them, FA clearly does not choreograph trans parenthood in an effective way.

Despite its role in reproducing the social narratives that create inequitable access to kinship, FA is not a one-dimensional oppressive being that aims to exclude those who do not conform to normative kinship. The first sections of this chapter exemplify the radical

⁴⁰ Some fertility clinics attempt to address this, such as Repromed, in Auckland, who intentionally use gender neutral language, share stories from LGBTQ+ customers, and explicitly welcome customers who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, takatāpui and intersex (“LGBTI+ Fertility Treatments | Auckland| Repromed” n.d.). However, even in these cases, these services are usually an add on to an existing premise, rather than being the norm that companies build from (Harris 2017b).

possibilities ARTs offer for queer families, as well as their ultimate limitations. The key point here is that FA exists within Pākehā kinship culture, which is inherently exclusionary. Therefore, the limitations of the ontological choreographies that FA offers, are not solely caused by its for-profit nature, or by some underlying immorality. They simply reflect the kinship narratives that surround FA and its operations.

Seeing FA through this lens reduces its power both as an exclusionary institution, and as a radical provider of change. On the macro level, Pākehā dominated Aotearoa New Zealand culture imagines kinship as heterosexual, white, cis-gendered, and middle to upper class, and so, this is the vision that FA prioritises. However, even within Pākehā images of kinship, beliefs can manifest in multitudes of ways, as shown by Aneta and Harriet's usage of ARTs. The complexities of kinship ideology, and its multifaceted nature, prevents straightforward belonging, regardless of the intervention of fertility treatment.

While there may be a future where ARTs are more inclusive and accessible, there is no telling how queer people will engage with them. Biological motherhood ideology prevailed in Harriet and Aneta's stories with the tools of FA, but was conquered in Kate's, despite opposition by the institutions around her. Then again, even if one uses fertility treatment to attempt to create a totally heteronormative family, its existence outside of heterosexual reproduction still destabilises narratives of what normative families look like. In the messiness of all these contradictions, it is difficult to singularly determine what the actions of my participants represent. Their navigation and reinterpretation of kinship norms could be a subversive act, which highlights the malleability of Pākehā family ideology. On the other, almost all of these actions seem to draw from scripts of conventional motherhood, which could prove the concreteness and endurance of heteronormative kinship norms in Aotearoa New Zealand.

There is also the potential that by participating in the reproduction of these norms, even in the context of reinterpreting them, my participants validate the oppressive heteronormative ideology they seek to mitigate. This is one of the key contentions that exist within both the LGBTQ+ community, and queer theoretical perspectives. For some, the domestic family is a symbol of marginalising heteronormativity, rather than being a structure anyone should seek to belong to. For others, inclusion into this domesticity represents positive change, and a rebellion against historic homophobic exclusion.

In the next chapter, I explore these conversations, unpacking the conflicts present in the LGBTQ+ community, and within queer studies. I ground my analysis of these different strands of dialogue in relation to my participants' experiences. By putting the realities of their exclusion (both in terms of erasure, and at times, active homophobia), next to the intellectual perspectives of queer theory, and the historical context of the LGBTQ+ community, I trouble the idea of a binary between queer radicalness and gay assimilation. Ultimately, I investigate whether focusing on the political implications of my participants' behaviour acts to obscure the potentials their existence represents.

Chapter 5

Exploring the Politics of Belonging

While I have established that no actual universal experience of motherhood exists, a perceived collective identity in Pākehā understandings of it persists. The ideology I have unpacked over the last three chapters is woven into the Aotearoa New Zealand's social fabric. Despite constantly iterating, the heteronormativity of this ideology continues, reinforced through media representations, and social institutions (Johnston and Swanson 2003; Woodward 2003; Choi et al. 2005). For my participants, this means that there are few models of kinship that accurately represent their families, leaving them to look to mainstream narratives to find meaning. This helps to explain the ways participants reach for normative kinship norms and give considerable energy to reinterpreting them to better reflect their own family realities. However, it is important to note that the drive towards finding themselves within normal, does not solely stem from a lack of representation, or for wanting to replicate the kinship norms they have grown up within. It also comes out of a response to the reactions that they face daily to their own families, and to the dialogue they see around them about queer sexualities.

Despite the impressive resilience and methods that my participants have for responding to this, the consequential fatigue, and in some cases, feeling of isolation, can sometimes result in an explicit pursuit of belonging to definitions of normal they see around them. This drive has heavy political implications to it in the context of LGBTQ+ politics, with many queer theorists interpreting it as conforming to, and therefore reproducing and emboldening, heterosexual hegemony. By unpacking both a brief history of the LGBTQ+ community, and applying a queer theorist perspective, I investigate the potential risks of

remaking kinship when these restructures still draw from heteronormativity. By starting with a foundation of my participants' experiences of exclusion, I explore the truths in these risks, and clarify whether political intent is the ultimate determinate of the changes they are making to kinship in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Coming Out (Again and Again)

Because kinship beliefs in Aotearoa New Zealand assume heterosexuality, my participants rarely feel that their queerness is visible to those around them in parenting spheres. This means that they often must decide whether to accept a heterosexual interpretation, or disclose their sexuality, and "come out". The process of coming out holds significant symbolic importance within the LGBTQ+ community, and is often framed as a path from secrecy and feelings of shame, towards liberation and openness (Bergstrom-Lynch 2012). The metaphor of the closet operating as a space where queerness is hidden continues, which positions people to interpret coming out as a permanent and singular process (Bergstrom-Lynch 2012).

Perhaps because of this, there is a gap in the literature regarding queer parents, and how they navigate disclosing their sexuality in childcare spaces (Almack 2007). The majority of scholarship regarding queer parents, especially within critical kinship studies, and queer studies, addresses the way that they subvert and remake kinship (Weston 1991; Benkov 1994; Hayden 1995; Nordqvist 2014). This builds on an assumption of "outness", by focusing on perceivably explicitly queer engagement with heteronormative ideals. While foundational work, such as Ellen Lewin's *Lesbian Mothers: Accounts of Gender in American Culture* (1993) aimed to reduce the stigma against lesbian mothers, there has been less emphasis on addressing how that stigma manifests in mundane and social parenting spheres (Almack 2007).

Despite this, a large section of my interview data focused on "coming out" in the day to day, which was a mundane but frustrating reality of my participants' routine lives. All of my participants are publicly out, but the "deadly elasticity of heterosexual presumption", as foundational queer studies scholar Eve Sedgwick framed it, reifies even explicitly queer people as heterosexual to an uncritical eye (1990, 46). In the face of heteronormative motherhood ideals, assumed heterosexuality is a daily factor in my participant's lives, as Harriet describes:

When you come into contact with people in normal everyday life, there isn't necessarily an assumption of being straight. But, when there's a child, you're absolutely straight. So there's that sense of having to decide to come out all over again, and it's....it's just exhausting.

Queer scholars Catherine Donovan, Brian Heaphy, and Jeffery Weeks account for this in their concept of "layers of outness", which works against a binary of in and out, and refers to how queer people are always navigating their visibility to those around them (1999). To give a personal example of how this works, I am publicly out to my friends and family, and on social media pages, but someone I meet at a party would mostly likely assume me to be straight until I say otherwise. Sometimes people choose layers of outness, such as at the family reunion referenced in the thesis's opening vignette, where I chose not to disclose my sexuality to older conservative family members. The extent to which a person is out on the multiple layers of their lives, generally depends on the perceived consequences of revealing their sexuality (Donovan, Heaphy, and Weeks 1999). Unfortunately, it can be difficult to predict the outcome of coming out, which means that each disclosure, regardless of whether it is to a significant relationship, or to a newly formed acquaintance, requires a level of emotional investment (Donovan, Heaphy, and Weeks 1999).

For most of my participants, it is the consistency of having to come out in mundane situations that is most draining, as this emotional investment feels pointless in such routine circumstances. While social narratives around coming out position it as a high stakes endeavour, there are times where the stakes are low, such as one of Harriet's stories about a recent visit to her favourite café.

So much of the time, I am just who I am. I've been out now since I was sixteen, and I'll be 39 this year, so I've been out for longer than in. But sometimes, it just isn't worth the conversations. So at the cafe I go to, there's a couple of people that work there that I'm really friendly with, and every time I go in, we chat, and Pippa obviously delights them, and one of the woman the other day said to me, because we were talking about going back to work, and I was talking about how Pippa is in bed asleep by 6 o'clock at night, and the woman said "oh that must be really sad for Dad, that he doesn't get to spend time with her!". It was said in a loving, genuine, kind way, but it's just that thing where there's absolutely the

invisibility of being queer, and I'm sure not for a millisecond would it have occurred to her that Pippa doesn't have a Dad.

While not intentionally homophobic, interactions like this one are reminders for my participants of the invisibility of their queerness, and that mainstream society associates their motherhood identity with heterosexuality. In this situation, the stakes are low, and Harriet could have come out to the woman in question without there being a significant impact on her and Pippa's wellbeing. However, in this case, she chose not to disclose her sexuality. In the bid for equality, mainstream dialogues about inclusion for queer families tend to orientate themselves around eliminating discrimination, and standing up in the face of homophobia (Rahman 2014; Dreher 2017; Wall 2017). While this is a necessary focus, at times this approach overlooks the cumulative exhaustion of having to explain one's family. Harriet's resistance to coming out in this story does not stem from internalised shame, or even from the fear of homophobia. It just originates from a place of tiredness.

Because my participants differ from the preconceived norm of what a mother looks like, they often find that they become objects of curiosity from their peers and are questioned about their personal lives to an higher extent than their heterosexual peers (Almack 2007). For example, the process of pregnancy, and conception, are generally a private affair for heterosexual couples (Lovelock 2010). Despite this, many of my participants faced personal questions regarding their pathways to parenthood. Vic shared an example with me from her workplace, which exemplifies that while this often comes from a well-intentioned place, it has the potential to add discomfort to queer peoples' lives.

I had a work colleague that was like "oooooh, so how does that work?". I'd just started and I was only two months in so I wasn't really sure what to say or how to handle it. She was very well meaning, but it was that classic thing of "I'm just sooo interested, and omg that's amazing, and I'm not being discriminatory but I still want you to tell me everything about how it works.". And it does come from a genuine place, but it's also really uncomfortable to know what to say.

Aneta also found that people's curiosity meant they expected her to give them more detail than she would normally be comfortable with sharing. Now a single mother after her break up with Jules, people often mentally fill the gap Jules left with a man. When people

make that assumption, Aneta must decide whether to correct them or not, with full knowledge that a simple comment can suddenly turn into an extensive, and sometimes uncomfortably intimate conversation.

People just automatically expect that when two children are with one mother, there is a father somewhere. So people say things like “oh, does your ex see the kids often?”, you have to decide whether to go into this whole litany of the break up, and suddenly they’re asking you about your conception process, and it’s all too much.

Constantly having to justify and explain your own existence is gruelling. In my interview with Lauren and Sam, Lauren reflected on how the resulting fatigue influences the extent to which people feel they can challenge heteronormativity.

Some people label themselves as advocates, but that’s not something I want to label myself as, because there are times when you don’t want to deal with it, and you’d rather just blend in. You might feel upset about something someone has said but let it go, because, it’s just exhausting.

Within this context, Harriet’s refusal to disclose her sexuality, despite the perceived low stakes, makes more sense. However, even though the women in the café have little relationship to her, because Harriet’s sexuality is so intrinsic to her identity, the omissions she occasionally makes can feel morally wrong. Now, when she goes back into that coffee shop, she knows without question that the women working there perceive her as straight.

And of course, I wasn't up for that conversation, so I just said, "oh yes yes yes" regarding there being a Dad, but the next time I saw her, I felt less like I wanted to engage. Because I felt like, not that I'd lied to her, but I knew in my heart that I hadn't been 100% honest, and I guess it kind of felt damaged. This was a very frivolous, not important relationship, but it still felt damaged.

Because of the liberation narrative of coming out, the anticlimactic nature of navigating the visibility of one’s queerness can like a step backwards, resulting in a degree of guilt or discomfort (Almack 2007).

The frequency with which these interactions occur means that all my participants are well practiced at navigating disclosure, and often move between revealing themselves, and omitting their identity based on their own intuition about the situation. However, as their children get older, such as with Kate and Jude now that Dash is a teenager, the agency they have to make these decisions has the potential to decrease.

One of my challenges is, when do I say to friends' parents what our family make up is? When the children were younger, all the parents socialise, so we met school parents, and we were his parents, and if you wanted to be friends with us you were, and if you thought that was awful, you just weren't.

Now that Dash is old enough to seek out his own friendships, Kate and Jude must interact with new parents, who have no idea about their relationship or sexuality. Kate is also conscious that because of the stigma against the LGBTQ+ community, her own sexuality has the potential to negatively impact Dash's life.

Our family rule is that I have to talk to a parent first before he stays overnight anywhere. And I said to Jude- "what do I say about us?". Like, do I just say nothing because it's completely irrelevant? Do I protect him somewhat by telling that story before he goes? Does he get to their house, and say "My Mum's", and they say "we don't like that", and then he's stuck there overnight?

While Kate felt confident in being explicitly out when Dash was younger, this was partly because she could protect him from any resulting homophobia. Now that she is unsure of the stances of the parents of his friends, she is more cautious about navigating these situations. This was similar to something Lauren worried about. As her and Sam's potential future child might not physically resemble them (because of the use of a sperm donor), she was concerned that Sam's gender identity might be more obvious. While Sam is open about being transgender, he sometimes opts not to disclose in situations that could be dangerous to him. While Kate anguished over the impact her sexuality could have on Dash, for Sam and Lauren, making their queerness visible could have a negative impact on Sam directly. Despite the gains made by the LGBTQ+ community, homophobia, transphobia and prejudice is still very much a tangible reality that most of my participants have encountered in their lives (Suckling 2018).

The power dynamics present in parenting spaces, make the potential of this prejudice even more exhausting, as described by Harriet.

Whenever you come out to someone, especially someone where there is a power differential, whether they be a health official or something like that, there is an anxiety associated, because who knows what their reaction is going to be? Having to deal with that- recently I've been visiting childcare centres for Pippa, and I pretty much have to come out to make sure it'll be a good place in the future. It's just tiring, having to do it over and over again, and bracing yourself a little each time.

While the constant questioning of my participants' identities is tiring, it is the lurking potential of discrimination that amplifies these interactions. Unfortunately, this potential is very real. While most of my participants have encountered prejudice on some level, Aneta's story, and her resulting feelings towards her sexual identity, shows the potential that discrimination has for shaping the lives of queer parents. It is vital when analysing the extent to which queer parents seek out recognition within mainstream kinship norms that consideration is also given to the ways they are actively excluded when they fail to do so.

Failing to Belong

For most of my participants, their location in urban areas means that they exist within a relatively progressive social landscape. While each of them has encountered prejudice of varying levels, many of them also have stories of support from the institutions and peers around them. This was especially true for Vic, who works in a government institution that has specific workplace policies in place for engaging with queer individuals. When her workmate above asked about her pregnancy process with Keely, her manager swiftly stepped in to ensure it did not happen again.

Our manager actually pulled her up on it, and told her "look, you just can't ask a fellow colleague those kind of questions, it's against workplace code of conduct and it's just not appropriate to be asking about personal lives that way". And she got the message. So it was cool, because I knew that the manager would step up.

Similarly, her workplace treated her identically to the other people becoming parents, carefully addressing it with a gender-neutral approach.

Work was interested and asked all the right questions. Before I went on parental leave, they gave me a big bag of stuff, and I've noticed the treatment is the same for the other pregnant women at work, and the fathers. I think that's the environment. It's probably the urban bubble.

Unfortunately, Vic is likely right in her suggestion that her urban location contributes to the lack of discrimination, and in fact, active support, that she has received in her workplace (Oswald and Holman 2013). In contrast, Aneta, who moved from a city, into a rural region, found a vastly different scenario. Working as a police officer at the time, Aneta was shocked by the homophobia she encountered early on in her new workplace, which was significantly more intense than anything she had experienced in the city.

When I first moved there and started working, I didn't tell them straight away that I was in a relationship with a woman, they just assumed I was straight. Man, it was culture shock working there. I'd come from the city, and suddenly I was in this rural place where they were anti-aucklanders, anti-gay people, anti this, anti that- you know how it is. I walked into the meal room one day and I heard one of my colleagues start talking about "the gaaays". And I went, "since we're having this conversation, I'm married to a women" and jaws just dropped.

Her workmates primarily reacted with awkwardness, and while she was sure conversations still happened behind her back, they treated her with a distant politeness from then on. However, after getting pregnant with Jonti, and telling her sergeant about her pregnancy, she quickly became sensitive to underlying heteronormativity and prejudice.

So six months into working there, our fertility treatment was successful and I had to tell my sergeant. I tried to hide it for as long as possible, because I knew there would be this big conversation that would come next. But I thought, how bad could it actually be? So I sat down, and I told him I was pregnant- and you could see this real confusion on his face. And he was just like "how?". And I said, "well, we used a donor", and he said "so you didn't find a bloke to sleep with"? So I start talking about technology and so forth, and he just interrupted me and

said “okay yeah, whatever, regardless, you have to wait for another month before leave”. And that was it. I just feel that if I was in a heterosexual relationship, there would surely be more “congratulations, I’m happy for you”, or at least something more than that.

For Aneta, as it is for many people, deciding to have a child was a big decision, and one that felt like a significant milestone for her. To be dismissed with no more than a confused comment by her workplace, felt out of tune with the expectations she had built based on societal narratives of pregnancy. Unfortunately, after having Jonti, and acting as a stay at home mother for him, and later, for Scarlett, her feelings of dismissal and isolation only increased.

When we first had Jonti and Scarlett, we were living in a different place to where we are now. That was a horrible experience. I went to playgroups, and as soon as people would find out that I had a wife, not a husband, that wall would come up. Suddenly I couldn’t get any playdates.

This isolation felt unjustified to Aneta, and entirely homophobic. Her experiences here speak to the limitations of the degree to which queer people can subvert kinship norms in their own favour. While she felt her experiences resembled those of her motherhood peers, apart from the gender of the person she was dating, her sexuality was enough of a difference to place her outside of their norm, resulting in social isolation.

It was really sad, because they would be saying “oh yeah, does your husband do this or that”- and then they’d stop talking to me once I’d tell them I had a wife, not a husband. But, it was the same for me, regardless of gender! I would have to make dinner for Jules when she came home- we almost had this heterosexual relationship because she believed that if she made the money, she could expect dinner. I just so wish I could have had those conversations with those women, because we going through the same thing regardless of whether our partners were female or male. But, I couldn’t have them. Straight away, people would just freeze, and not know what to say.

Despite the diverse experiences that occur within motherhood, Pākehā culture, and wider western society, views motherhood as a partly homogenous identity, that women who have children belong to together (Laney et al. 2015; Woodward 2003). In this sense, they

form an “Imagined Community”, a term coined by Benedict Anderson in his theorising on the emergence of nationalism (1983). He describes the nation as a politically imagined community, that rose through the development of print capitalism, allowing the formation of a national consciousness (Anderson 1983). There are immediate similarities between this concept, and the way Pākehā culture perceives motherhood. Anderson notes that members of a nation do not know each other personally, but share a sense of community regardless, formed out of ideological and experiential commonalities (1983).

Motherhood is viewed as a collective identity in Aotearoa New Zealand (Côté-Arsenault, Brody, and Dombeck 2009), and while constantly iterating, is signified by a focus on domesticity, and care for one’s children, as well as a degree of sacrifice for one’s family (Hays 1996, 131-152; Johnston and Swanson 2003; Lewin 2007; Glenn 2016). In actuality, experiences of motherhood in New Zealand Aotearoa (and around the world) are diverse, differing between and among cultures and classes (Taylor 2011; Dow 2015). The association of motherhood with exclusive singular care, domesticity, and devotion reflects the dominance of Eurocentric motherhood ideology in mainstream beliefs about effective caregiving. Research shows that migrant mothers’ caregiving practices differ significantly from their Pākehā peers (DeSouza 2005, 2014), and that Māori, Pasifika, Indian, and Chinese mothers in Aotearoa New Zealand are all more likely than Pākehā to share childcare with grandparents and extended kin (Ministry of Social Development 2004). Additionally, at the time of the 2013 census, there were over 160,000 families in Aotearoa New Zealand that were headed by single mothers (Statistics New Zealand), who must balance providing sole domestic and financial support to their children (Longhurst, Hodgetts and Stolte 2012).

Despite this diversity in experience, a societal imagining of universalised motherhood persists, manifesting in representations of rigorous primary and domestic care. Sociologist Sharon Hays conceptualises this as intensive mothering ideology, which promotes the idea that women are naturally predisposed to nurturing and should act as central caregivers, and that they must put considerable energy into ensuring that they are mothering in the “right” way (Hays 1996, 1-19). These ideas are present throughout Aotearoa New Zealand’s society, and partly sustained by the market which targets mothers as a demographic to sell to, constantly reaffirming that to mother effectively, women must spend extensive money and time on providing effective childcare (Lynch

2005; O'Donohoe et al. 2013; Han 2013). The commercialisation of motherhood reproduces the idea of a universal experience of mothering that is based on an often-exclusive set of characteristics (Lynch 2005).

The presumed universal gateway into this community by “becoming” a mother, is pregnancy, and birth (Rothman 2013; Côté-Arsenault, Brody, and Dombeck 2009). It is worth mentioning that the belief in a homogenous experience of maternity is also inaccurate, exemplified by the existence of Ngā Maia, a collective of Māori midwives that seek to integrate Māori perspectives into maternity institutions, citing the harm that a Pākehā norm-based practice can cause (Simmonds 2016). Mana wahine scholar Naomi Simmonds argues that universalised Pākehā birthing practices isolate pregnant women through medicalisation, and construct motherhood as a singular processual role, rather than one connected to the wider whānau (2016). Ultimately though, as asserted by Simmonds, “maternity stories within contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand remain entrenched within a Western colonial framework” (2016, 73).

There are also many entry points into this framework of motherhood that do not require giving birth, as made obvious through the stories in this thesis. However, from a societal perspective this motherhood is earned, whether through mothering oneself into a parental relationship like Kate, or through the ontological choreography of “creating” a child, despite not providing it with genetic material. In contrast, Aotearoa New Zealand assumes that birth mothers are social mothers until they explicitly step out of this role.

However, if imagined motherhood was solely about intensive caregiving, pregnancy, and birth, then Aneta would feel a sense of belonging in the motherhood communities around her, as she shares these so-called universal experiences. In fact, Aneta meets almost every single characteristic of the ideological mother, created through the legacy of Pākehā settler colonisation. She is white, able bodied, cisgender and feminine, in middle to upper class, and occupies a primary caretaker role of her children. Despite this, when it comes to the communities around her, it is not enough. Just as Anderson's framework has been critiqued for not addressing how exclusion is key to creating a nation, the imagined community of motherhood is constructed partly on othering those who supposedly do not belong (Marx 2005, 15–17). In Aneta's case, her sexuality still puts her outside of motherhood's norm. This shows the limitations for how far

redefinitions of kinship can go, who gets to make them, and who validates them.

Aneta's rejection by her peers shows that reducing Pākehā conceptions of motherhood to biological definitions alone would be a misreading of the complexities of expectations at play. The contradictory exclusion of Aneta solely because of her sexuality, despite her being tangibly a mother, and fulfilling social conventions of motherhood, reflects the imaginary nature of kinship. However, just as this leaves kinship norms open for interpretation by my participants, it also gives those against same sex families the ability to pick and choose from societal definitions of family. Aneta's peers emphasise the ties between heterosexuality and motherhood ideology, to exclude her based on sexuality, despite the commonality of motherhood experiences between them.

Even in the face of this exclusion, Aneta still wanted to belong with them. Unable to find people who could relate to the frustrations of being a stay at home parent while her marriage was breaking up, she felt more isolated than ever.

There was absolutely no support. I felt even more isolated. We were isolated by the fact that we had no family, or friends in Wellington, and then I couldn't make those friends who also had little children, who were going through the same thing as me. And that contributed to our marriage breaking up as well. I had nobody to lean on.

Aneta has since moved to a more progressive town, driven by the promise of a less homophobic environment. While there are now more queer people in her local community, she values their presence because they make it easier for her to exist, rather than because she feels connection to them specifically. She still primarily wants a social peer group that share her experiences of being a mother, regardless of sexuality. In fact, the homophobia that she faced in the past means that she is resistant to dating a woman again. Identifying as bisexual, Aneta is now intentionally seeking a relationship with a man, driven almost entirely by a want for inclusion into the communities around her.

I was so done with being married to a woman, and never getting invited to things, never going to things, and I see all these couples who do things in groups. To be honest, I just do want this man. I want to go on a camping trip with people,

and I want to go to a party, and not have people go “oh these are my token gay friends”- I just want to be seen as their mate.

During my interview with Aneta, my automatic response was frustration on her behalf at the way her experiences had harmed her sexual identity. However, as someone who also identifies as bisexual and is currently dating a man, the thought of intentionally doing so to hide my identity partly clashed with my political ideals about my sexuality. I anguished over this discomfort while trying to write Aneta’s story, caught between my empathy for her, and my political perspectives on what queerness should mean. I realised after listening to another interview, with Kate, that I was being hypocritical in this response.

In my first conversation with Kate, we barely talked about sexuality. While a good portion of our conversation focused on Dash, she also talked at length about the impact that being a young mother had on her sense of self, and her desire for inclusion into what she saw as society’s ideal family structure.

I met his Dad at a really tricky low point, and to be honest, it was a bit like: who would want a woman that’s had two children, with two different fathers? I just aspired to the picket fence. I wanted a family, I wanted a committed person. I wanted what I thought was normal stuff *laughs*. I just wanted to be normal! At the time, this felt the same as wanting something that was going to work. Marriage, owning a house, being those joneses, all of it.

At no point did I feel any uneasiness at Kate for her assimilationist response to her discrimination. Yet, the thought of assimilating into heterosexuality specifically, made me uncomfortable. Upon further reflection, I realised that while I could see Kate’s story holistically, as a justified demand for inclusion, I saw Aneta’s at representing a rhetoric within the LGBTQ+ community that I usually position myself against: the drive towards normality. I realised to fully understand the implications of both of our perspectives, I needed to explore the LGBTQ+ community’s political history and engage with the queer theoretical approaches on the applied level of my participants’ experiences. By addressing how the LGBTQ+ community’s goals have changed over time, and theoretical responses to these changes, I get closer to unearthing the risks, limitations, and potentials that the reinterpretations of kinship norms in this thesis carry.

The Rise of “Normal” in the LGBTQ+ Community

While I was personally uncomfortable with Aneta’s statements about erasing her sexuality, there are queer academics and activists that would be much, much, harsher. This is mostly because her words reflect the rhetoric present in a shift within the LGBTQ+ community that has moved it away from radical rejection of norms, and towards vying for assimilation into existing heteronormative frameworks (Richardson 2005).

In the 1960s, social movements like Black Power, Women’s Liberation, and Anti-War movements triggered a radicalism within queer circles, especially in the United States, where the Stonewall riots occurred (Brandzel 2005; Humpage 2008; Dreher 2017). This was the beginning of an “Imagined Community” for queer people (Anderson 1983), initially organised in opposition to the nuclear family structure and middle class sensibilities, actively critiquing gender essentialism (Brandzel 2005). As a symbolic collective, they attributed their marginalisation to wider systems of power, and historical and material contexts (Dreher 2017). Showing solidarity to other social movements, queer activists questioned the authorities that constituted legitimate forms of sexuality, gender and belonging (Dreher 2017).

Over time, the increased representation of queer issues in public spaces have led to the socially recognised LGBTQ+ community, made up of those who identify outside of sexuality and gender norms (Richardson 1998, 2000). Today, the priorities of this imagined collective have shifted dramatically from rejecting the mainstream, due to social changes driven by neoliberalism.⁴¹ Now, the LGBTQ+ community organises around inclusion within the mainstream, rather than in opposition to it. Queer theorist Lisa Duggan refers to this as the emergence of “homonormativity”, which she defines as:

“a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of demobilised gay constituency and a privatised, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domestic and consumption” (Duggan 2002, 179)

Sexuality based oppression is not connected to class, as sexuality is not hereditary, and therefore queer people are born throughout the class structure (Fraser 1995). Because

⁴¹ Diane Richardson, a prominent sociologist and queer theorist, gives a comprehensive overview of these changes in her article *Desiring Sameness? The Rise of a Neoliberal Politics of Normalisation*(2005).

of this, as the stigma against LGBTQ+ community began to lessen, the community became less oriented around rejecting systems and critiquing the way they produced inequality, and focused more on recognition within the system (Fraser 1995). Internationally, the LGBTQ+ community now operates under the assumption that human rights are the gateway to acceptance⁴². This also allowed the LGBTQ+ community to separate itself from its historical connection to other modes of struggle, and see its own cause as apolitical, disconnected from any wider political perspective (Fraser 1995). In Aneta's own words, she reflects a wider rhetoric that now dominates the collective purpose of the LGBTQ+ imagined community:

I feel like acceptance is often seen as political, like this big thing! But, just see us as normal humans, not "this is something different!"

There is no denying that this channel of activism and advocacy has generated positive change for queer people. Since the 1980s in Aotearoa New Zealand, same sex activity between men has been decriminalised, same sex marriage has been legalised, and discrimination against queer people has been specifically outlawed (Ministry of Culture and Heritage 2014). However, to prominent queer theorists like Lisa Duggan, and Michael Warner, Aneta's call for less politics in the drive for queer acceptance, and her orientation towards inclusion within the mainstream, represents an erosion of the values of the LGBTQ+ community. The depoliticising of the LGBTQ+ community and the resulting focus on legal recognition alone, to queer theorists, creates a conditional form of acceptance, where queerness is only legitimised if it is represented in the vision of the heteronormative mainstream.

Normalisation in the Context of Kinship

This is perhaps best represented by the dialogue around the same sex marriage movement, which is the key issue now associated with the LGBTQ+ community on a global level. In Aotearoa New Zealand, rhetoric around same sex marriage when the bill passed in 2013 focused on normalising queer relationships. Campaigners for the bill

⁴² While I am unable to integrate further topics within the confines of this thesis, this rhetoric is often used to depict the legal gains in the west as proof of its progressive superiority to other nations and cultures. Jasbir K Puar's book *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2017) provides an excellent analysis of this phenomenon, and further critique of this shift in the LGBTQ+ community.

centred their dialogue around the similarities between heterosexual and same sex love, using this as a method for justifying the demand for access into marriage as an institution. The global same sex marriage slogan “love is love” was used by the members of parliament that supported the bill, as well as in the national campaigns that emerged in Aotearoa New Zealand at the time (Legalise Love Waikato 2013; “#LoveIsLove” n.d.; “Why Love Needs to Be Legalised” n.d.). Louisa Wall, the MP who spearheaded the bill articulated this in a quote that was widely shared:

“The bill is about marriage equality. It’s not about gay marriage, same sex marriage, or straight marriage. It’s about marriage between two people. There’s no distinction to be made” (“Why Love Needs to Be Legalised” n.d.).

For many queer theorists, this rhetoric undermines the possibilities and needs of the LGBTQ+ community (Duggan 2002, 2008; Warner 1993, 81–149). As clear by the narratives used in this national conversation, using a framework of equal treatment under law results in the LGBTQ+ community providing a level of “sameness” to heterosexuals to justify the desire for the same citizenship rights (Richardson 2005). This reinforces the heterosexual model as the ideal for romantic relationships (Boellstorff 2007b).

While these conversations do not always directly address the question of family or kinship, as Judith Butler⁴³ lays out in her article *Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual* (2002), perspectives on marriage and kinship are intertwined in western culture, and often manifest as one and the same. Butler, like other queer theorists, holds the belief that through prioritising marriage equality, the LGBTQ+ community validates the state’s power to define appropriate forms of relatedness (2002). From her, and other queer theorists’ perspectives, the LGBTQ+ community has become an active participant in the state’s delegitimising of both those do not marry, and forms of relatedness outside of the nuclear family ideal that marriage implies (Boellstorff 2007; Warner 2000, 81–149; Butler 2002).

⁴³ I am loathe to reference Butler after her support of Avital Ronell in the context of Ronell’s sexual harassment of one of her graduate students, which I felt weaponised queer conceptions of friendship as a way to justify inappropriate behaviour (Butler 2018; Chu 2018; Gluckman 2018; Wong 2018). However, this is one of the key pieces that directly addresses kinship in the context of the same sex marriage movement, and the LGBTQ+ community. Therefore, I draw on her original work only here, to signify my opposition to what her letter of support represented.

Butler claims that the validation of the nuclear family ideal derails the possibility of alternative forms of kinship, such as polyamory, non-monogamy, platonic partnership and so forth, ever gaining similar legitimacy (2002). This has lasting implications for those outside the marital norm, as social institutions are emboldened in shaping their services and legal frameworks around marital life (2002). In Aotearoa New Zealand, marriage is seen as the default for relationships (even the recognition of “de facto” relationships bases itself on the marital ideal of long term monogamy and cohabitation). Those who fall outside of it, like single parents and divorcees, must conduct additional navigation of state institutions. As for people who intentionally reject marriage and monogamy, and have no past or future relationship to it, additional navigation is likely to be unprosperous.

In Aotearoa New Zealand’s understandings of kinship, we must also consider the implication of validating societally defined normativity and depoliticising the demands of the LGBTQ+ community. Within the legacy of settler colonialism, legitimate forms of family are not just married. The image of family that Aotearoa New Zealand’s state institutions and public considers to be value neutral is also Pākehā, able-bodied, cisgender, and middle to upper class, alongside being heterosexual (Eng 2010, 1–23; Puar 2013). Therefore, by positioning queer needs in the mirror image of the heterosexual hegemony, the LGBTQ+ community also repaints itself into the other characteristics considered to be normal in Pākehā culture, erasing its own diversity (Eng 2010, 1–23; Puar 2013). This approach consequently does not only reproduce heterosexual romantic love as society’s ideal, but also has the potential to greatly harm those who are othered on intersections outside of just sexuality (Eng 2010, 1–23; Puar 2013).

Reflections on the Risks of Reproducing Normal

Upon delving into this scholarship, I began to worry that the subversion of kinship ideals that my participants had shown, were superfluous when they also reproduced mainstream narratives of heteronormativity. I could no longer discern whether Kate’s navigation of the foster care system was an impressive display of reworking ideas of what it means to be related, or a reinforcement of class ideals and gender essentialism. While I had been seeing Aneta and Harriet’s navigation of ontological choreographies as proof of

the flexibility of kinship norms, perhaps their orientation around repurposing dominant kinship narratives, showed its enduring strength. Even Vic's nonchalance, the only mother in the thesis who was largely unconcerned with the norms she exists within, felt like a product of the insulation her class and ethnicity provide her with.

I thought back to Sam and Lauren, and how prioritising fitting into the mainstream, in Aneta's call to be treated "as normal", could hurt them (Young 1989). Without differentiated services, a clinic like FA unintentionally continues to reproduce the cissexist gender essentialism that makes fertility treatment feel inaccessible to Sam. I also started to think about the voices that are not represented in this thesis, like the biological mothers whose children are removed from them and put into the foster system (Duff 2018a). So often these women are Māori, or occupy a position in the lower class (Duff 2018a). Without the ability to enact narratives of mainstream family based on whiteness and middle to upper class beliefs about parenthood, their ability to navigate Oranga Tamariki is far less than Kate's. Hence, when I listened to my transcript with Aneta, despite my own voice on the recording automatically moving to a place of comfort, I felt anxious about the themes within the interview. The connection between belonging, and strengthening heteronormative kinship beliefs, at first felt insurmountable.

And then I listened to it again.

This time I forced myself to be conscious of my intellectual and political position and focused on instead paying close attention to her words. I did not hear assimilation. First, I heard deep sadness based on tangible exclusion, by workmates, from play groups, from spaces that Aneta wanted to belong to, and by rights of being a mother, should have been able to do so. I also heard an attempt to find a space within the imagined LGBTQ+ community, and a sense of frustration at also not finding a home there.

We tried to find people like us, we thought, well since our children have two mums, it would be good for them to see other families that have two mums, or two dads. So when Jonti was just a baby, we went to "Out in the Park" in Wellington. And that was a real shock, because it was a really different scene to the Auckland scene. I was quite taken aback by how out there it was. It was supposed to be a family event, but then it was more of this, on display, over the top, sexualised thing. We didn't feel comfortable as a family going there. That

was disappointing, because that was our second year here, and we were like, aw, is that what the Scene is about? Hardly any families.

A queer radical theorist such as Michael Warner, who stands in opposition to what he sees as a “sanitisation” of queerness through the erasure of sex in the LGBTQ+ community over time, would take issue with Aneta’s points (2000, 40, 41–60). To him, sexual difference is the defining factor of the queer community, and so to remove it creates a contradictory appeal for acceptance that will always be unsustainable.

This discloses the whole sad comedy from which the lesbian and gay movement has yet to emerge. Sex and sexuality are disavowed as “irrelevant”, in an attempt to fight stigma. But the disavowal itself expresses the same stigma! (Warner 2000, 46).

However, in Aneta’s case, she is not critical of the presence of sex because of her own sensibilities, but rather because of the opposition it represented to being a child friendly space. The politics of sexual visibility around children is a whole other conversation, but for Aneta, this was simply a search for a place where she could feel included as both someone who is bisexual, and someone who occupies a motherhood role. Even someone like Kate, who is studying a topic related to queer studies, does not feel like she has a strong connection to the wider LGBTQ+ community, because of her responsibilities as a mother.

Because Jude had recently moved here from another city when we met, most of her friends at the time were other early childhood teachers she had met through work, plus, we were parents because I already had kids. So when we got together, we didn’t go to local gay community things, because they’re all at night, and we had to look after the kids, and have dinner, and do family things. We have a group of queer friends, and they’ll talk about this web of connections, and I don’t know any of them.

The reality of childcare makes it difficult for parents to participate in the activities associated with the imagined LGBTQ+ community, as despite the shift towards a normalisation politics, many events are still held during the evenings. Warner’s points are still valid, in the sense that it is the heteronormative arrangement of society that prevents this attendance, because of the isolation of the family unit in Pākehā culture. In saying that, the LGBTQ+ community can feel inaccessible for mothers in other ways. The

domesticity inherent in social understandings of motherhood counteracts with much of the liberatory and anti-heteronormative rhetoric present in queer politics, and because of this, motherhood is fairly invisible within queer culture (Mamo 2007, 58–62).

Perhaps if kinship ideology was more collective, queer parents would have the freedom to participate in queer culture regardless of having dependent children. Perhaps if the LGBTQ+ community was more inclusive of domestic needs, queer parents would also have that freedom. Regardless, this, along with the ominous presence of homophobic potential from parenting spheres, means that it can be difficult to find places where both identities can flourish. Aneta's tendency towards family life, and prioritisation of her identity as a mother, is not a political statement. While influenced by a political history, it is simply a reflection of her needs, circumstances, and personality.

The Transformative Potential of Remaking Kinship

As I kept listening to our interview, and the conversation topic shifted from belonging, towards her approach to parenting, I also became less convinced that her drive for inclusion resulted in reproducing heteronormativity. Her political position seemed irrelevant to the actions she takes daily in making kin. If I had to place my participants along a political spectrum from assimilation to radicalness, they would fall equally along it, ranging from Aneta's points here, to Sam and Lauren, who intentionally position themselves against mainstream markers of heterosexuality. However, as I reflected on Aneta's experiences, I began to feel that focusing on their political intent centred the wrong phenomena.

In my attempt to see their perspectives through the lens of queer theorists, I was ignoring the inherently radicalness of their remaking, and diminishing their agency and intent in destabilising the kinship norms around them. Despite depending on the discourse of heteronormativity to make sense of their experiences of kinship, they simultaneously reconfigure kinship norms from within. The fact that Aneta, and others at various times, intentionally seek entrance into this "within" does not make them at fault for upholding these power structures, which the state, colonial legacy, and capitalism, reproduce each day. While the imagined collective of the LGBTQ+ community reproduces values of

normativity, to disparage this on an individual level is to pay attention to the wrong source of villainy.

The fair and justifiable discomfort my participants have towards their erasure, experiences of prejudice, and structural discrimination, helps to rationalise their tendency to turn to mainstream conceptions of kinship. Doing so assists in understanding their own experiences of family and making these legible to the rest of society. However, the idea that doing this is the crux in sustaining hegemonies of kinship, is untrue. While queer theorists may position my participants as complicit, and potentially even responsible in reproducing these norms, this diminishes their cognisance, and creates a false dichotomy between radicalism and assimilation. A quote from Tom Boellstorff, in his critique of Warner's interpretation of LGBTQ+ support for same sex marriage as "false consciousness", displays the cost of purporting this binary.

This dichotomy he and others set up between false and true consciousness leaves no roots for the messy middle ground of reverse discourse, counterhegemony and all those ways of thinking and being that work within a system of power. It is in such spaces that subjects transform or rework that system of power in ways those who dominate could never have predicted (Boellstorff 2007b, 236).

This inclusion of queer families into mainstream visions of family does not need to represent an assimilation into dominant systems of power. In fact, judging by the response of those most invested in the heteronormative family unit, it symbolises the opposite. I remind the reader that conservatives saw same sex marriage, as an assault on "the natural" family in Aotearoa New Zealand (McCroskie n.d.; Lyons 2012; Kurtz 2012; Kilgallon 2013). In Australia, the narratives during the equal marriage debate in 2017, shows that same sex marriage, and by proximate, queer families, continue to represent a threat to those who attempt to universalise and naturalise static, heteronormative, kinship (Steger 2017; Karp 2017). While I am doubtful that marriage equality will have the intensely world changing impact its opponents are apt to claim, the existence of queer families does have the potential to be transformative in the context of a heteronormative Pākehā culture.

A critical reading of Aotearoa New Zealand's history reveals that heteronormative kinship norms based on biological relatedness and isolated family units, are not in fact universal, or timeless. Nor do actual Pākehā kinship practices neatly reflect kinship ideology. Despite this, these societal imaginings continue to exist. Although the participants in this thesis oscillate back and forth between reproducing, rejecting, and assimilating, into normative kinship ideals, their sheer presence is outside of Aotearoa New Zealand's mainstream visions of family. Through actively parenting every day, despite this exclusion, they therefore clash up against these narratives, and must repurpose them in ways that at times are almost unrecognisable to their origin.

This means that regardless of their intent, whether it is a drive for inclusion into the mainstream or a rejection of it, they widen the conception of what family can look like in Aotearoa New Zealand. In my concluding section, I share some of these stories, stories that exemplify the generative space that my participants exist within, and the radical potential that their families have for shifting hegemonic visions of kinship. This offers transformative possibilities for families that sit outside heteronormative conventions, and all the other classist, cissexist, racist, ableist, and sexist images that heteronormativity shares interdependence with.

In this, my participants represent a challenge to the universalising and naturalising ways Pākehā dominated Aotearoa conceives family. Rather than interpreting their remaking of kinship norms as a reproduction of these values, I choose to see them as proof of kinship ideology's flexibility, offering hope and potential for other ways it could be iterated into being more inclusive. Instead of asking what mainstream conceptions of kinship does to queer families, I pose a different question: What do queer families do to kinship?

Chapter 6

Conclusion: Unsettling Kinship

While one could interpret some of my participants' behaviour as reproduction of heteronormative understandings of family, the context of their own family structures means that they are radically remaking ideas of kinship. To emphasise this before I conclude my analysis, I briefly share ethnographic moments where possibilities outside of heteronormative kinship are most clear. I interweave each participant's experiences but choose to place Harriet and Aneta in the centre. Compared to the other participants in this thesis, Harriet and Aneta's stories contain the most obvious and significant impacts of kinship ideology. Kate, in her opposition to the biological kinship ideology asserted by the state, raised Dash intentionally outside of these norms, never putting much energy into finding meaning within them. Vic, existing in her urban bubble alongside other progressive peers, can distance herself from heteronormativity, seeing the contradictions in its logic. As Lauren and Sam are yet to have children, it is difficult to predict the ways kinship norms will manifest in their lives, or how they will respond.

In contrast, Harriet and Aneta have had to put considerable effort into navigating mainstream kinship ideology, both in their use of ARTs and personal perspectives of biology, but also in their negotiations with their peers, and partners. Despite their constant tensions with normative kinship, both have responded with family formations that stand in opposition to mainstream narratives of what kin should be. By sharing their stories, I aim to highlight that even in the face of enduring kinship norms, the existence and practices of queer families have radical potential for remaking visions of relatedness in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Queering Normative Kinship Practices

I start with Harriet. In chapter three, I shared Harriet's experience with Chris, as an example of biological motherhood norms prevailing, and the complexity and hardship this can cause queer families. However, while that side of the coin holds ongoing sadness, the other side, in the form of her friendship with her other ex-partner Jane, shows the possibilities that eschewing static prescriptions of kinship can provide. Rejecting genetic and romantic kinship beliefs, Harriet continues to seek relatedness with Jane, and refuses to let their romantic break-up influence the care they give Oliver.

This contrasts significantly with reigning beliefs in Pākehā culture about the extent of connection people can and should maintain after breaking up (Schneller and Arditti 2004; Doering 2010). Romantic relationships hold the highest hierarchy in western society, and are positioned as one of the primary goals of an individual's life (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995b, 44-70)⁴⁴. While there is a lot of fluidity in the way people actually experience break-ups (Simpson 1994), pop culture generally depicts them as an emotionally damaging process that destroys any significant ongoing ties between the people involved (Schneller and Arditti 2004; J. Weinstock 2004; Doering 2010; Emery 2011, 39-61, 69-73). When children are involved, ongoing interactions between parents are common, but are usually maintained for the child's wellbeing, rather than to foster any existing relationship between ex-romantic partners (Cartwright 2010, Cartwright and Gibson 2013). In contrast, despite Harriet and Jane's break up, and her pursuit of a relationship with Chris, Harriet maintains a close friendship with Jane and considers her to be part of her family despite not experiencing any lasting romantic feeling towards her.

We have an amazing relationship. We've been separated for four years, and we still tell each other we love each other every day. We didn't work out as a couple, we're just not suited to each other that way, but we really really love each other.

While many divorced parents organise custody in order to avoid having to maintain a close and communicative relationship (Emery 2011, 100-125), Jane and Harriet continue to face parenting as a team. This is not solely because they feel it prioritises Oliver's

⁴⁴ To build a deeper understanding of the rise of romance in western culture, I recommend *Habits of the Heart* (Bellah et al. 1985) and *The Normal Chaos of Love* (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995b).

needs but also because they genuinely enjoy spending time together as co-parents and friends.

We always spend time together on the weekend. I know when some families separate, they might just drop the kids off- we never do that. We always spend time together, it might be lunch together, or meeting up at swimming, but we often have collaborative communicative time together as parents and as friends.

The relationship that Harriet and Jane maintain also disrupts ideas about what it means to be related as Harriet's other child Pippa shares the same sperm donor as their son Oliver. Jane helped pick this sperm out with Harriet, and Pippa's resemblance to Oliver means that she feels a bond towards her, regardless of her not being her daughter.

Jane has a bond with Pippa as well, because she looks so much like what Oliver looked like when he was tiny, and so that's another interesting dynamic. She chose that sperm, and because Pippa looks so much like what Oliver looked like when he was a baby, it brings Jane back to that time when Oliver was really little. And I see Jane as having an important role in Pippa's life as well. I mean, I can imagine Pippa wanting to go stay at Jane's because that's where Oliver is.

While this has the potential to be complicated in some narratives, for Harriet and Jane it becomes a generative space where they disregard the intricacies of these multiple modes of relations and instead simply embrace Jane's connection to Pippa. Neither of them perceives Jane to hold a parental role towards Pippa, but they are unafraid of blurring societal boundaries about what an individual's relationship to an ex-partner's child should look like. To Harriet, this arrangement "just makes sense". She feels no need to separate or sever ties to make their family fit into conventional understandings of what break-ups, co-parenting, and kinship looks like. Instead, she actively pursues a friendship with Jane that involves both of her children in the way that works best for all involved. While with Chris, forming family ties has been complicated because of Chris's beliefs in biological kinship, Harriet's relationship with Jane shows the potential of eschewing these norms.

While Harriet's relationship with Jane may not resemble mainstream understandings of what break-ups look like, their story represents a wider pattern in queer women's communities that show the radical potential that queerness has for kinship. Despite the variance in actual experience, maintaining friendships with exes is a stereotype regarding queer women and is practically considered to be normative behaviour (Hite 1989; Slater and Mencher 1991; Stanley 1996; J. S. Weinstock and Rothblum 2018; Garrison 2019). While this is obviously not a universal experience, this cultural trend signifies an alternative conception to mainstream kinship understandings of romance. Partly due to the genuine smallness of queer women's social sphere, which means dating pools and friendships must often overlap, this perspective also emerges from the ideology within the LGBTQ+ community.

The legacy of critique against heteronormativity within the LGBTQ+ community includes a rejection of romantic prioritisation, both through criticisms of monogamy but also through an emphasis on the importance of friendship (Weinstock 2004). The LGBTQ+ community emerged in a time of intense prejudice, which meant that many queer individuals faced ostracism from their biological families (Weston 1991, 43–73). In the face of this, friendship became a key way for queer people to form kinship, seen by many as more important than one's biogenetic family of origin (Weston 1991, 103–29). This, when combined with the societal exclusion from validated romantic love and a strong suspicion of the heteronormativity of monogamy, means that friendship, rather than solely biology or romance, continues to be a key factor of defining one's kin for the LGBTQ+ community (Weinstock and Rothblum 2018; Garrison 2019).

In my interview with Lauren and Sam, they talked about this regarding an asexual friend of theirs, that they view as part of their family. In response to Lauren's reflections about how she does not believe her romantic relationship with Sam needs to be prioritised over this friend or other platonic relationships, Sam illuminated:

Yeah, but that's where queer people fuck shit up right?

In a sense, Sam is absolutely right. By queering kinship, Harriet and Jane create their own kinship understandings. The importance of friendship in the imagined LGBTQ+ community provides the landscape for Harriet and Jane to abandon normative notions of disconnection between exes, and instead embrace their friendship. Because they do not view romantic love as the singular and most important form of relatedness, the loss of it between them does not have to result in the end of their kinship. The implications of this for heteronormative and static kinship beliefs is momentous. Instead of forming a stationary relatedness through romance, that then dissipates upon breakup, this approach allows Harriet and Jane to experience flexibility within their relationship, practicing whatever form of relatedness that best suits their needs. This represents the radical nature of queerness for mainstream conceptions of kinship.

As mentioned in the previous sections, what seems revolutionary can also represent a confirmation of the traditional. One could interpret Harriet and Jane's relationship as a reaffirmation of conventional kinship, in their prioritisation of child wellbeing and the associations drawn between this and a two-parent nuclear family ideal. This exemplifies the dual meaning of the flexibility of kinship. When one sets aside a static and biogenetic conceptualisation of kinship, it allows us to see it as a conscious creation and arrangement of understandings of family, as individuals pick and choose from the multitude of characteristics that dominate the mainstream (Franklin and McKinnon 2000, 14). This fluidity may be the factor that allows kinship norms to continue to exist. Because kinship norms can be repurposed, they are repurposed, which continues their legacy as people construct their families in relation to them.

This is the main critique that some queer scholars offer to the existence of queer families: that the malleability of kinship ideology is in fact a signal of its enduring dominance and therefore the remaking of kinship by queer families symbolises assimilation into heteronormative domesticity (Weston 1991, 197–202; Warner 2000, 41–81; Butler 2002; Boellstorff 2007b). As Butler states “a norm does not have to be static in order to last; in fact, it cannot be static if it is to last.” (Butler 2002, 37). But, queer families are not heterosexual, so they can never exactly replicate normative kinship expectations regardless of intention. If their inclusion into mainstream visions of family somehow

symbolises the endurance of kinship ideology as Butler states, this begs the question, what is actually enduring?

I move now to briefly sharing Aneta's story, where an unamicable break-up in which Jules initially asserted biogenetic motherhood over their daughter Scarlett has now moved into a co-parenting arrangement that clashes with heteronormative ideals. Aneta and Jules currently live three houses apart from one another, a living situation intentionally chosen to allow a collaborative and fluid co-parenting space between them. This eliminates a significant portion of the complications that usually originate upon family break-ups (Simpson 1994), mitigating the issue of residence by allowing Jonti and Scarlett to move freely between the houses. The children spend most of their time together with whichever mother has more flexibility on the day and then co-sleep with their biological mothers at night. Aneta and Jules hope that this is a permanent scenario and aspire to a time where they have more resources to bring their lives even closer together.

Even last night, Jules was so stressed and saying she missed the kids so much because they've been with me heaps lately- we'd love to live in just one big house, and co-parent that way. As flatmates, we'd be able to do so much more. I could study, I'd have more time, even cleaning would be easier because we'd have two people to help. Our dream is to get a lifestyle block and build two houses right next to each other with a little hallway or a tunnel between both houses, because we would want the kids to be able to move freely between whichever homes they want to be in.

It is true that one could interpret this as the endurance of nuclear family values through the prioritisation of both children having access to their parents. From Aneta's perspective though, this arrangement is not a reproduction of a heteronormative domesticity. In fact, she sees their sexuality as liberation from societal expectations around co-parenting, allowing them to construct an arrangement based solely on their needs.

I don't think our co-parenting relationship would work with a heterosexual couple, because society has ideas about what a heterosexual separation looks

like. And the man sees the child on the weekends, and the woman has them during the week. Or they each have set days that they have the kids. Whereas, we just blended it all.

To present Aneta, and any form of kinship understanding that engages with heteronormative beliefs as solely assimilationist, seems to me to reproduce the functionalist beliefs that reify heteronormativity as invincible. State, colonial, and capitalist action created the Pākehā concept of family and the drive by some queer individuals towards family making does not solely function to sustain this power. Practices like polyamory, intentional singledom, and platonic partnership, can all also be co-opted into furthering colonial, capitalistic, and state norms (Boellstorff 2007b). There is no inherent destabilising core to any static role, but rather the actions enacted through them that offer potential (Boellstorff 2007b). Perceiving the activities of families such as the ones in this thesis as a solidification of heteronormativity does an injustice to the generative space they create and ignores the radical possibilities for change that they symbolise.

When Aneta elaborated on why her and Jules felt empowered to create their own co-parenting structure, she pointed to their gender make up as the reason they were able to reject the expectations that would apply to a heterosexual couple in a break up.

It's because we're two females. Because we're in a non-heterosexual relationship, we've made our own rules. We've made our own normal.

In this, Aneta queers family norms. She shows a conscious departure from heteronormativity, and uses the places she does not fit - something that at times does cause her pain - as a jumping board for creating a family that works for her. To view queerness as something that should automatically disconnect an inner desire to form a family, as some radical queer theorists and activists have claimed in the past (Weston 1991, 198), is to put queer people entirely outside of a human practice that has always existed - albeit in a myriad of different forms . As Kate stated, in an early conversation:

People say: why do queer people want to get married? Isn't that all straight stuff?

But actually, none of that's exclusive is it? Just because you're lesbian, doesn't mean you don't want family, or just because you're a gay man, you don't want to parent.

To some, the LGBTQ+ community's drive to family-making feels assimilationist, while to others it represents assertion against their exclusion and a radical claiming of kinship norms that were not designed for them. Ultimately, it can be both, and still represent possibilities for change. Just as kinship is not static, neither is the way queer families engage with it. Instead, they oscillate back and forth between rejection and assimilation, which creates a generative space for widening Aotearoa New Zealand's conceptions of kinship. Queer reimagining of kinship can be radical, and assimilationist, progressive, and conservative. They can be all these things at once. Regardless, the flexibility in these norms reveal something innately fluid about kinship that can be captured and remade, which shows a potential for remaking it so many times over, it slowly loses its initial characteristics, and its normative power. Take for example, Vic's approach to navigating gender roles in relation to her child, Flynn.

We joke around about heterosexual stuff, we laugh about who's the man of the house, we laugh about those gender roles, because yes, it is super annoying, but you have to see the humour in it. I mean, you can put a pink hat and pink pants on him, and Keely goes out and she gets heaps of comments about him as a girl baby. We know that these gender norms exist, but why not have a little bit of fun with it? So, we don't see ourselves as conventional, or ever wanting to be a nuclear family. We don't have gender roles in our relationship. Honestly, we both feel that gender is kind of irrelevant.

For Vic, rejecting heteronormativity feels more intuitive than embracing it. While she is conscious that it is likely her urban and progressive setting that allows her to have this attitude, her nonchalance in response to these norms offers hope for the future of kinship. Of course, she exists within Aotearoa New Zealand's wider heteronormative landscape, which requires her to interact with kinship norms in the shape of bureaucracies, social institutions, and interactions with strangers. However, the criticalness that exists towards heteronormativity in her personal social context allows her to see dominant

family narratives as existing somewhat outside of her reality. Rather than being hidden evils that shape her world, heteronormativity feels almost adjacent to her and her partner.

While Vic's behaviour, and the other practices exhibited by the participants in this study, are unable to destroy kinship norms, they show a potential for moving them further and further away from their colonial, capitalistic, and heteronormative origins. While kinship ideology's flexibility allows it to last, it also allows it to change. Instead of focusing on what kinship norms have done to queer families, concentrating on what they have done to kinship provides an exciting metaphor for Aotearoa New Zealand's vision of families in the future.

Joining the Disruptive Chorus

In Tom Boellstorff's critique of anti-marriage equality rhetoric, he paints the inclusion of queer people into marriage as a contamination of its inherent heteronormativity, an infectious nick that could destabilise marriage altogether (Boellstorff 2007b, 242-43). I see the interventions that queer families make on kinship in an equivalent way, a collectively created chink in the armour of normative kinship beliefs. This joins a chorus of attacks, each of which creates their own hole in the logic of a static kinship based off an isolated heterosexual family unit.

There is the clang of queer history, prioritising friendship, embracing romance outside of monogamy, and rejecting the notion that biology makes a family. We have the crash of feminism, tearing apart gender essentialist ideals and consistently fighting against the inherent patriarchy that a heteronormative kinship represents. Tangata Whenua make strong, constant, knocks, against individualistic notions of family and continue to illuminate Pākehā beliefs about family as colonial constructions. Trans, non-binary, and genderfluid voices, brush up against naturalised reproduction, threatening biological ideals that have long been positioned as innate to becoming parents. Disability scholars and activists rip holes in the implied able-bodiedness of a reproductive and parenting process that supposedly occurs organically. Anti-racism hits from all angles, globally disrupting whiteness's claim on being value neutral, unmasking ethnic ideals in the

western family. Leftists lay traps to slice at the ties between normalised domesticity and capitalist interests. The list goes on and on.

In fact, the list never really finishes. Kinship ideology's multifaceted and fluid nature makes it possible for anyone to belong to mainstream kinship in some form, but simultaneously prevents anyone from belonging to it completely. There are fathers who want to be more involved with their children than societal narratives depict, mothers who are told they are getting it wrong regardless of whether they stay at home or work. There are grandparents and extended families helping to raise children, while there are also people who choose to never have children at all. Together, all these actions and experiences erode the perceived universality of kinship ideology. While it may be impossible to create a vision of kinship that includes everyone, destabilising its universality may help eradicate the prejudices and marginalisation that stem from a naturalised Pākehā family ideal in Aotearoa New Zealand.

There is no definitive telling of whether these assaults will result in the eventual downfall of normative kinship ideals, or what our analytical explorations contribute. This project only covers the specific manifestation of kinship norms in motherhood, and even within this focus, still orientates itself around a cisgender majority. Future research that is more inclusive of transgender parents, as well as those that identify as non-binary or gender fluid, would add significant depth to this analysis.

To ensure that our voices are contributing to the chorus of challenge above, I also feel that Pākehā anthropologists researching kinship, like myself, must meet Lily George's call to stir up the silence (2017), and integrate whiteness as an axis of analysis. Otherwise, even in trying to destabilise hegemonic kinship norms, we reproduce other exclusionary ideals, through naturalising whiteness as a given characteristic. Personally, I endeavour to move towards conducting decolonial research that aids Māori with reclaiming their land, rights, and culture. However, even in my limited engagement with Māori perspectives and scholarship in this thesis, it was at once clear how much richer and more critical my analysis became. Addressing Pākehā culture as a construction of settler colonialism, created the foundation that allowed me to discredit naturalised static understandings of kinship.

This very fact that kinship understandings are not, and never were, universal, offers motivation to continue in the onslaught of collective strikes against naturalised norms. Boellstorf frames the interactions between queerness and marriage as generative of a material poisonous to the institution of marriage, hopefully one day resulting in its downfall. Perhaps though, there is also something to be said for the power of remedy. The concept of relatedness is not necessarily a harmful one, when no longer imbued by static notions intertwined with powers that dominate and marginalise those outside of their desired image. There is the potential that the constant interventions, reimagining, and challenges, to kinship norms, move them away from the visions of heteronormativity, and its marginalising cohort of ideals.

There is no sense in promoting a defeatist stance of absolute domination by heteronormative kinship, and the sexist, racist, ableist, cissexist, and classist ideals it carries company with. While it emerges from a European legacy thousands of years old, the current iteration of what is considered normal for kinship in Aotearoa New Zealand specifically, has only existed for a couple of centuries at the most. As the work of Ani Mikaere (1999), Leonie Pihama (1994, 1994), Nga Huia Te Awekotuku (1991, 2005), and Elizabeth Kerekere (2017) tells us, there was once a time where kinship understandings were more inclusive of those outside heteronormativity. Kinship ideology in Aotearoa New Zealand is not natural, or timeless, but rather a messy and harmful chapter within the nation's history. As the pages of time turn, there is room for many more iterations.

Malleable Potentials

In my last interview, catching up with Harriet for the second time, she shared her views on the longevity of heteronormative family expectations.

There's this 1950s model of man/women and their children. It was a model for a limited time, but it also doesn't need to exist beyond its moment. We are constantly evolving. Why wouldn't family constantly evolve as well?

My participants, and other queer people who pursue families, are unable to liberate themselves completely out of complicity and reaffirmation of heteronormative kinship,

nor do they have the power to entirely eradicate these norms from society. The impact of their actions for people like Sam and Lauren, and other potential parents outside of normative kinship's vision, is difficult to determine. What is clear, is that their existence can hold multiple meanings at once. Therefore instead of interpreting queer families as either evidence of the continuing dominance of heteronormative kinship or as radical departures that revolutionise perceptions of family, I suggest we instead see them as potential contributors to the end of this kinship iteration's moment.

In the opening chapter of this thesis, I gave an overview of the interventions that settler colonialists made towards pre-existing Māori understandings of kinship. By doing so, I established that kinship ideology in Aotearoa New Zealand is a cultural construction, rather than a static result of nature. In chapter two, I emphasised that this construction is multifaceted and fluid by exploring the state's inadequate management of contrasting kinship ideals within the foster system. By concentrating on Kate's pursuit of custody over Dash, I demonstrated that kinship ideology's lack of concreteness creates space for individuals to rewrite conventional family scripts to better fit their own realities. In chapter three, I further examined reinterpretations of mainstream kinship norms through analysing my other participants' usage of ARTs. Through my assessment of ARTs' limitations and their inherent heteronormativity, I clarified that the ability to remake kinship ideology is often uneven and partly dependent on belonging to other normative identities. In chapter four, I considered the implications of my participants' pursuit of inclusion within mainstream kinship narratives in the context of LGBTQ+ and queer politics. I showed that regardless of what their actions represent politically, their engagements sit outside of normative heterosexual kinship structures, and therefore offer transformative possibilities for conceptions of family in Aotearoa New Zealand.

As I conclude, I want to emphasise the significance of the continued existence of queer kinship in the face of Aotearoa New Zealand's intensely heteronormative contemporary history. My participants' stories provide comforting evidence of kinship ideology's malleability, regardless of its dominant representations. If kinship norms are malleable, they can be remade again and again. Because of this, for as long as kinship remains pliable, new visions of family, visions that are more inclusive, and less marginalising, remain potentially possible.

I remember a moment from fieldwork, after visiting Aneta in her home. We sat in her lounge sharing a sponge cake she had bought for the occasion, and I listened to her voice wobble as she recounted Jules's attitudes towards Jonti in the past. Forming a family outside of heteronormative expectations was hard and messy work. Near the end of the interview, Jonti emerged from his bedroom, and dragged me outside into the sunshine to show me their backyard. As he climbed a tree so high I looked back frantically for Aneta, he pointed and announced, "there's where my other Mum lives, look!". Sure enough, I could see the roof of Jude's house, less than a hundred meters away. Outside of the walls of Aneta's lounge, instead peering up at Jonti set against the bright blue and expansive sky, the potentials for alternative practices of kinship felt unbounded. After conducting this research, I choose to believe they are.

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