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## SYMPOSIUM: MAKING FAMILIES

# Making matter matter: Meanings accorded to genetic material among Australian gay men

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**Abstract** As growing numbers of gay men enter into the reproductive realm, opportunities emerge for the rewriting or revision of kinship ties. Given the hegemonic status of genetic matter in the context of kinship, however, it is perhaps unsurprising that, amongst gay men, there are complex negotiations over how, and in what instances, genetic matter will be made to matter. This paper explores the question of genetic matter in the context of gay men's reproductive journeys by examining data from three studies: (i) an interview study with men who had donated sperm; (ii) an interview study with people who had entered into surrogacy arrangements; and (iii) a study of news media and blogs that document the experiences of people who have entered into surrogacy arrangements. Focusing solely on the gay men in these three studies, four thematic contexts were identified in which genetic matter was made salient with regard to kinship: (i) claiming kinship in the context of sperm donation; (ii) couples negotiating genetic matter in the context of surrogacy arrangements; (iii) minimizing the genetic contribution of women who act as egg donors; and (iv) controlling the flow of information about genetic matter to children. This paper concludes by suggesting the need for both the decentring of genetic matter in reproduction amongst gay men (e.g. exploring alternate routes to parenthood), and the recentring of genetic matter in instances where genetic relatedness is the basis of kinship (e.g. acknowledging the roles, needs and lifeworlds of all parties).

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## Introduction

In our recent book on the topic of surrogacy, Clemence Due and I explored how the word 'matter' is etymologically

derived from the Latin 'mater', meaning mother (Riggs and Due, 2018). Our focus on matter – specifically as goods made available for sale – allowed us to explore how the term is conceptually enmeshed with the normative figure of the

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mother, and how this renders women's bodies open to commodification. In the book, we consider, in particular, how the cultural determinism that positions women's bodies as primarily designed to serve the purposes of human reproduction all too easily slips into seeing women's bodies as market commodities in the sphere of assisted reproduction. In this article, I extend the ideas included in our book in order to examine how gay men may, at times, be complicit in reducing women to matter available for purchase. Specifically, I draw on Thompson's concept of 'strategic naturalization' (Thompson, 2001) to explore how, in some contexts, gay men reduce kinship to genetic matter (i.e. in the context of sperm donation), and in so doing naturalize genetic matter as automatically establishing kinship, whilst in other contexts, gay men naturalize their intent or volition in terms of kinship, and in so doing dismiss the role of third parties involved in the provision of genetic matter (i.e. in the use of egg donation for the purposes of a surrogacy arrangement).

I also draw upon Nordqvist's recent work on genetic thinking and everyday living (Nordqvist, 2017) to examine how both the naturalizing of genetic matter as denoting kinship, and the denaturalization of genetic matter as simply goods delivered for service, demonstrate that genetic matter is always given meaning within particular contexts, rather than bringing with it an inherent meaning with regard to kinship. Thus whilst, as Finkler (2000) has argued, the "hegemony of the gene" (p. 3) is highly salient in western cultures, and whilst genes are often taken as representing the 'truth' of kinship, they are more correctly understood as a discursive resource that is deployed differentially according to the context. In other words, the matter of genes is made to matter or have meaning dependent on the claims to kinship that are being authorized.

In focusing specifically on gay men, however, it is important not to be misread as pathologizing the ways in which gay men speak about genetic matter across a range of contexts. As such, in this paper, Turner's development of the concept of 'reproductive citizenship' (Turner, 2001) offers a vital addition to the accounts of both Thompson (2001) and Nordqvist (2017). Turner suggests that "the state's interest in sexuality and sexual identity is secondary and subordinate to its demographic objective of securing and sustaining the connection between reproduction and citizenship" (p. 197). This connection between reproduction and citizenship is vital, Turner argues, given the fact that "western societies in demographic terms enjoy only modest rates of successful reproduction, [and thus] the state promotes the desirability of fertility and reproductivity as a foundation of social participation" (p. 196).

Turner's (2001) focus on fertility and reproduction is important. Whilst adults may parent children across a range of contexts, including those where no genetic relationship is shared, it is a genetic relationship that Turner argues is privileged within a reproductive citizenship framework. Not all people, of course, have ready access to such reproduction, whether due to medical or social fertility. Elsewhere, Clemence Due and I (Riggs and Due, 2013) have argued that exclusion from the realms of genetic relatedness to children can propel many people to seek entry to reproductive citizenship through whatever means possible, and that the injunction to do so brings with it an injunction to centre

their own genetic matter (or an approximation of it), and to marginalize the genetic matter of any third parties. As such, by focusing on gay men, this paper is mindful of how broader social forces are likely to structure the accounts examined, and specifically how gender plays an important role in the lived effects of social forces.

The analysis reported below considers four thematic contexts where genetic matter would appear to be salient to gay men, and considers how, in these contexts, gay men privilege their own understandings and needs over those of others, specifically women. As such, and following an argument made by Petersen (2015), when considering the reproductive journeys of gay men, we must not ignore the privileges that gay men may hold in a rush to affirm their experiences of homophobia in the reproductive realm. It is one thing to recognize the hegemony of the gene and the push towards reproductive citizenship, but it is another thing entirely to shy away from speaking about how both are taken up by particular populations.

## Materials and methods

In order to address the question of how gay men frame accounts of genetic matter, this paper brings three data sets to bear upon the topic: (i) an interview study of Australian sperm donors; (ii) an interview study of Australians who had children through offshore commercial surrogacy arrangements; and (iii) a study of secondary data sourced from media articles and blog posts by Australians who had undertaken surrogacy arrangements.

### Australian sperm donor study

This study, conducted in 2008, involved interviews with 30 Australian men who had donated sperm, of whom 21 were gay men [see Riggs, 2009 for full details of the study]. Ethical approval was granted by The University of Adelaide's Human Research Ethics Committee. Of the 21 gay men, six were parents, half were aged over 45 years and half were aged under 45 years, five men had donated anonymously to clinics, and 16 had donated to lesbian friends or acquaintances in geographic contexts where, at the time, lesbian women did not have access to donor sperm via clinics. Study participants were recruited via advertisements in national media outlets and online discussion groups. Interviews followed a semi-structured schedule of 10 items that addressed: (i) motivations to donate sperm; (ii) beliefs about family and children; and (iii) the emotional aspects of sperm donation. Half of the interviews were conducted in person and half via telephone. Interviews were transcribed and pseudonyms were allocated.

### Australian commercial surrogacy study

This study, conducted in 2012, involved interviews with 21 Australian men who had entered into offshore commercial surrogacy arrangements, of whom 16 were gay men [see Riggs et al., 2015 for full details of the study]. Ethical approval was granted by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee. Of the 16 gay men,

five had entered into a surrogacy arrangement in the United States, and 11 in India. Fifteen of the men were in couple relationships and one was single. Participants were recruited via the group 'Surrogacy Australia'. Interviews followed a semi-structured schedule, addressing: (i) the journey to surrogacy; (ii) experiences with clinics; and (iii) responses from friends, family and the broader community to the use of surrogacy to have a child. All interviews were conducted via telephone. Interviews were transcribed and pseudonyms were allocated.

### Australian media and blog post study

This study, conducted in 2012, involved a systematic search of Australian news media databases for stories on surrogacy, and an additional Google search for blog posts made by Australians who had entered into surrogacy arrangements [see [Riggs and Due, 2013](#) for full details of the study]. In total, 96 media articles were identified, all published between January 2009 and October 2012. Of these, only 26 directly reported the voices of Australians who had entered into surrogacy arrangements. Whilst it is acknowledged that direct quotes are not guaranteed to be unedited, the focus on direct quotes is intended to keep to a minimum editorial imposition upon the voices of those quoted. Of the media reports, the majority focused on heterosexual couples, with only six focusing on gay men. Five blogs were also identified. Of the blogs, three were written by gay men. Given that these were written by the men themselves, whilst curated for a public audience, they are taken as reflecting their voices with minimal broader editorial imposition. Given that the materials in this third study were publically available, no pseudonyms were allocated.

### Data analysis

It is important to note that whilst this paper focuses on instances of gay men discussing the meaning of genetic matter, this was not a focus of any of the studies. It is thus of note that participants oriented to the topic. For the purposes of the present paper, each of the data sets were examined, focusing solely on accounts provided by gay men. Adopting a deductive approach, the data sets were initially coded by identifying all of the instances where gay men spoke about genetic matter. Having extracted these coded data, a thematic analysis was conducted following the approach outlined by [Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#). This analysis was again deductive, in that it purposively focused on the contexts in which gay men spoke about genetic relatedness. Such an approach was adopted in order to examine whether or not genetic relatedness was spoken about uniformly across contexts, or whether it differentiated according to the context. Such an approach differs from previous work examining these data sets, which has focused more broadly on genetics talk regardless of context [see [Riggs and Scholz, 2011](#)]. The analysis conducted for this paper identified four thematic contexts in which genetic matter was discussed: (i) claiming kinship in the context of sperm donation; (ii) couples negotiating genetic matter in the context of surrogacy arrangements; (iii) minimizing the genetic contribution of women who act as egg donors; and (iv) controlling the flow of information about genetic matter to children.

It is important to note that no claim is made *per se* about the representativeness of the extracts included in the analysis in terms of the views of all gay men, or even that they uniformly represent the views of the gay men interviewed or who have written blogs or appeared in news media articles. Nonetheless, the four thematic contexts were salient across all three studies. In terms of the first context, an emphasis upon genetic matter as engendering kinship was true for 16 of the participants ([Riggs and Scholz, 2011](#)). In terms of the second context, negotiations over genetic matter were a consistent theme across all participants in a couple relationship. For the third context, there were two examples where gay men spoke in inclusive ways about egg donors, but this was an exception to the rule. Finally, in terms of the fourth context, whilst children were spoken about in a broad range of ways, in terms of the sharing of information about genetic matter, this was consistently spoken about by all participants in terms of controlling the flow of information. As such, although the extracts included in the analysis below are indicative rather than exhaustive, they are representative of the data sets as a whole.

Importantly, whilst the analysis reported below focuses on gay men's accounts of genetic matter, it does not simply take the accounts examined as mere reflections of a pre-given 'truth' about genetic matter. Rather, and following the point made in the introduction to this paper, it seeks to problematize (rather than pathologize) the normative logics that appear to underpin many of the accounts. As such, rather than simplistically accepting what individual participants have to say about genetic matter, the analysis focuses on particular assumptions or lacunae that would seem to inform some of the accounts analysed. As has been the case in other similar research projects (e.g. [Rudrappa and Collins, 2015](#)), highlighting contradictions between particular individual claims, and the broader logics that inform them, is necessary in order to understand how particular accounts are made intelligible.

### Results

Rather than attempting to arrange the four contexts in some sort of logical reproductive order, the following sections begin with the first study outlined above, and proceed from there. Given the salience of genetic relatedness across the contexts, it would be artificial to attempt to provide any other order to the contexts (i.e. decision making, to conception, to thinking about the future), and this would potentially serve to naturalize this type of ordering of events as if it were an inherently logical sequence.

#### Claiming kinship through sperm donation

The first context pertains to sperm donation, and highlights how most of the men interviewed made recourse to the idea that donating genetic matter to third parties would provide them with something in the future. In the first extract, for example, Paul draws a link between what will happen to his 'worldly goods' when he dies and being a sperm donor.

Paul: An interesting thing is now that I am middle aged and don't plan to die soon, the interesting question comes up to who am I going to leave all my worldly goods to. It is important to me or

would be nice to know that when I fall off the perch that I will leave something behind, or part of me behind, you know (known donor in private arrangement).

There are many things that one can do with one's property when one dies. Property can be left to friends or extended family members, or indeed property can be donated to charity or to the state. Paul, by contrast, connects leaving his worldly goods to a specific 'someone', the reason for this seemingly being answered in the second sentence of the extract, where Paul refers to 'leaving something behind'. This 'something left behind', it would seem, is genetic matter – a 'part' of him – that resides in a child conceived of his genetic matter, and who, it would appear, he intends will inherit his worldly goods. Beyond the donation of sperm as an act of altruism, then, for Paul, genetic matter appears to signal a claim to relatedness in the form of kinship. A similar claim is made by Joe in the following extract, albeit more explicitly.

Joe: Doing this means I will be creating a child, and I think for me, the thing out of it, is not so much the creation of a child which is kind of exciting, of course, but I think for me by the time any child would be wanting to see me, I will be you know 65. I would be retired or about to retire I think at that sort of third age of life to have something like that come into it, so it's about giving me something, a little package, a little present (known donor in private arrangement).

In this second extract, Joe clearly states that he 'will be creating a child'. In this statement, Joe makes a claim to agency through the creation of a child from his genetic matter. This claim to agency foreshadows his statement in the second sentence of the extract, namely that the child he creates then becomes a gift that he, in effect, gives to himself. Again, genetic matter for Joe is not simply a substance absent of meaning, and specifically kinship-related meaning. Instead, a child created from donor sperm becomes a container of meaning for Joe (the presumption being that the child would want to know Joe and have a relationship with him).

For these two men, then, genetic matter produces a claim to kinship. It is arguably not a stretch to suggest that this represents a possessive claim to genetic matter, given that for neither man was there a plan that they would be actively involved with the children conceived of their donations. A claim to kinship, then, appears to be made on the basis of genetic matter alone; a pattern that was evident across most of the interviews conducted as part of the first study (Riggs and Scholz, 2011). That kinship was not desired by the recipients (given that, for the majority, they had little choice but to access sperm through private arrangements due to restrictive laws, and not *per se* because they desired contact with a donor), and may not be desired by the children in the future, suggesting a potential mismatch between the views of the men and the views of other parties. However, the men privileged their own views when accounting for their role as donors.

### Couples negotiating genetic matter in the context of surrogacy arrangements

Whilst in the first thematic context above, sperm was considered by the men as a marker of kinship, in this second

thematic context, sperm was largely treated less as a marker of kinship and more as mere genetic matter. This is perhaps understandable, given that all but one of the gay men interviewed as part of the second study were in couple relationships. Previous research (e.g. Dempsey, 2013; Murphy, 2013) has clearly identified that discussions about genetic matter (and specifically which man's sperm will be used) are often salient in the context of cisgender gay couples entering into surrogacy arrangements, with the importance of genetic matter typically minimized. Such claims, however, are potentially less about a lack of investment in genetic matter *per se*, and perhaps more about a desire to ensure equity between both fathers, as evident in the following extract.

John: For us, you've got one of the Dads who is not the bio-Dad, he's what we call the non bio-Dad. And surrogate people never refer to, never ask 'who's the bio-Dad?'. Apart from it's just poor form and rude, we're not creating our families to define ourselves through biology, because this is about creating a family through love and both people are the fathers, and it's completely irrelevant who's the bio-father. It may be relevant for the child at a later age when they want to know, and we all hope that once the child gets to that age to understand that and process that information, they'll also understand that family is about love and it really doesn't matter about biology.

John's claims in this extract are of note for at least two reasons. First of all, despite repeatedly stating that 'biology' doesn't matter, the term 'non bio-Dad' is introduced. Whilst John suggests that asking questions about biology are 'poor form and rude', he nonetheless is aware that the category 'non bio-Dad' exists. This would suggest that the meaning of genetic matter is salient, but that some men attempt to minimize its potential salience. The second reason why this extract is of note is for the claims it makes about family, namely that families are 'about love, and it really doesn't matter about biology'. This statement belies the very fact of the mode of family formation itself: John and his partner could, for example, have become parents through foster care (with long-term placements a possibility in Australia). To make the choice to enter into a commercial surrogacy arrangement, it could be argued, is by default to make genetic matter matter. A similar account of genetic matter appears in the following account taken from a blog written by a gay man who had entered into a commercial surrogacy arrangement in India.

Ralph: Can you guess what the most common question is that people ask? It's "Who's the father?". We have answered every single question put to us, but we won't answer that question. There's absolutely nothing wrong with people asking, it's a natural question to ask – but here's why it's off limits: when this process is complete, one of us will be the biological father or the biodad. He will have all the parenting rights that you would expect given that his name will be on the birth certificate. But the other father will not have any rights. This means that there can certainly be trouble with the non-biodad with the child at hospitals, schools and, of course, also if the biodad dies (<http://twodadfamily.com>).

Similar to the previous extract from John, in this extract, Ralph utilizes the language of 'biodad' and 'non-biodad', thus reiterating that there is a salient distinction between

the two. Indeed, he acknowledges that wanting to know 'who's the father' is a 'natural question'. This statement is important, as the reference to 'father' here is to the genetic father. What is natural, then, is not simply that people ask the question, but that it is 'natural' to view the genetic father as the primary or truest father. This type of logic evidences the privilege accorded to genetic matter. Whilst Ralph provides clear evidence as to why the distinction is salient – differential rights accorded to the two fathers – his own discussion of the topic challenges as much as it reiterates the primacy accorded to genetic matter.

### Minimizing the genetic contribution of women who act as egg donors

This third thematic context orients to instances in both the second and third study where gay men spoke about the genetic matter of third parties, and specifically women who acted as egg donors. As noted in the section on data analysis, there were two instances where gay men spoke about desiring to establish relationships with women who acted as egg donors. However, these were exceptions to the rule of gay men reducing the role of women who acted as egg donors to mere genetic matter. The following quote is an example of the rule.

Tom: The egg donor we chose, it said on her application that she's happy to help people but please respect her anonymity. So we knew that upfront and we thought that made her a particularly wonderful prospect for an egg donor, given our interest really is in our own family, not in adding any more people into our family. If we had our own eggs it would be easier, but we don't, so we just needed that bit of help.

For Tom and his partner, the woman they chose to be their egg donor was particularly appealing precisely because she would be anonymous. Whilst Tom acknowledges that they 'needed that bit of help', the help in this instance is reduced to the eggs themselves, rather than necessarily being reflective of help being provided by a woman *per se*. It could, of course, be argued that Tom acknowledges the contribution of the genetic matter provided by the woman who acted as an egg donor (in that his family would not include a child if the eggs had not been donated), but it is instead argued here that in not wanting to 'add any more people into our family', the genetic matter contained in the donated eggs is very much divorced from the woman who donated the eggs (given the entire point of receiving the donated eggs is to add someone into the family: a child). In other words, genetic matter appears to represent a potential child to Tom, but does not represent the woman herself.

Similar to Tom's account, which minimized the genetic contribution of the egg donor by largely focusing on genetic matter as an abstract entity, in the second extract included in this thematic context, Doug also appears to reduce women who act as egg donors solely to their role as donors.

Doug: We had run out of eggs from the egg donor we used the first time so we needed another egg donor in India so we could have a second child. We were a bit annoyed with the clinic to be honest, because they hadn't harvested enough eggs for us for

potential future children. But in the end they were great as they found another donor for us who had a great track record producing lots of eggs so in that sense they did well, and it means if we want another child we can.

In the extract from Tom, even if genetic matter contained in donated eggs was largely divorced from the woman who donated them, Tom nonetheless spoke about the woman as a person who, at least in his understanding, had made an active decision to donate eggs, and an active decision to request that her anonymity be respected. By contrast, in Doug's account, there was no discussion of the women's agency. Instead, women are referred to as valuable solely for the amount of eggs they can produce, with the agency resting with Doug and his partner (e.g. in terms of deciding about having more children). Again, then, whilst there is an implicit acknowledgement that the genetic matter contained in the eggs is needed in terms of family formation, the depersonalized account provided by Doug does little to indicate an appreciation that the women themselves have made a contribution to family formation (as opposed to the eggs themselves which, as for Tom, become the sole point of focus for Doug).

### Controlling the flow of information about genetic matter to children

This final thematic context explores the ways in which gay men, in both interviews and media reports, oriented to the potential future desires of their children to have information about their conception and all involved parties. Whilst, as a whole, the men acknowledged that children may want some information, the flow of that information was treated as a primary concern, as is evident in the first extract below.

Luke: I think every child should know where they come from, I mean I think it's important just in the sense of, we don't tell anyone who the bio-Dad is, not even our family know. But we work on the basis of, that's his information, we'll give it to him when we think it is appropriate, and he can do with it what he wants. He'll get it from us in a controlled manner, we don't want it accidentally mentioned to him by a drunk person at Christmas time or something like that. We want to make sure we can control it, so we haven't shared that information with anybody at this stage.

The account provided by Luke is dilemmatic, in that, on the one hand, Luke states that "every child should know where they come from", yet, on the other hand, at present the child is prevented from having access to information, and will only be given it at a time deemed suitable by the parents. Whilst Luke's reasoning for not sharing the information with family members is logical – Luke and his partner don't want the information shared with their child in an inappropriate way – it is nonetheless premised on an adult-centric account of children's capacity to understand information. This type of framing of information about genetic matter and reproduction means that, by default, it is treated by Luke and his partner as only becoming salient to their child at a time of their deciding. In a sense, this predetermines, to a degree, what the child might do with

the information. If the child is restricted from having information – thus implying it is a secret – and is only given certain pieces of information when deemed appropriate, it is reasonable to suggest that this has implications for how the child might perceive and engage with any information provided.

In the following and final extract taken from a media report, a similar logic of disclosure is employed, but with different factors involved.

Eggs were harvested in Thailand, checked for health then each man fertilized one of the eggs in a Bangkok IVF clinic. The men do not intend to contact the donor mother, although they have left the door open should Tate or Estelle be curious in later life. “There will be no secrets from the children when they are old enough to understand,” Matt said. “We have decided we will not contact the donor but we do have photos of her which we will give to the children” (Crouch, 2014).

The account provided in this final extract is similar to that provided by Luke, in that the men interviewed were open to sharing information with their children, although any information shared would be directed by the parents at a time when the children “are old enough to understand”. Different to the account provided by Luke, however, Matt explicitly states that his family will have no contact with the woman who acted as an egg donor. Whilst photos will be available for the children to see, the lack of any ongoing contact with the woman (including prior to conception) means that even if the children decide in the future that they would like to meet or get to know the woman who acted as an egg donor, this may be precluded by the very fact that no contact has been maintained. On the one hand, then, Matt and his partner are suggested to have “left the door open”, yet, on the other hand, the door is very much closed. It is thus one thing to have no secrets, and another thing entirely to actively foster opportunities for a connection should it be desired.

## Discussion

This paper has brought together data from three studies in order to consider how gay men accord meaning to genetic matter, and how they link or unlink it from kinship. Specifically, the analysis has presented four thematic contexts in which genetic matter was discussed by gay men, and has linked these contexts through practices of strategic naturalization (Thompson, 2001) which demonstrate the ways in which genetic matter does not come with an inherent meaning, but rather is accorded meaning dependent on the context (Nordqvist, 2017). For example, in the first thematic context, genetic matter is taken as a marker of kinship by gay men who act as sperm donors, whilst in the second thematic context, the idea that sperm is a marker of kinship is minimized so as to create parity between two fathers. In the analysis, however, it was suggested that such attempts at creating parity largely only serve to reinforce the idea that genetic matter is inherently imbued with kinship properties.

Further, in terms of links between the thematic contexts, in the fourth context, children are depicted as having the

right to information about all involved in their conception, and to do with this as they will (including making contact with third parties). However, this right is tempered by the views outlined in the third thematic context, where women who act as egg donors are largely reduced to genetic matter that is devoid of the possibility of kinship claims between women and children. Such contrasting accounts provide a clear example of strategic naturalization at work, where children conceived of donated eggs become kin to their gay intending parents, yet the women who donate the eggs are excluded from kinship categories. This links back to the first and second thematic contexts as summarized in the previous paragraph, in that in the context of ‘biodads’ and ‘non-biodads’, there are active attempts at minimizing the role of genetic matter, just as in the context of discussions about women who act as egg donors and disclosure of information about them to children, the role of genetic matter is minimized to a degree.

The complex links between the four thematic contexts suggest that for the men whose voices were included in the three studies, genetic matter is made to matter when it suits, and made not to matter when it does not. Arguably, however, the lynchpin to this claim is the second thematic context, where the ambivalences inherent to the categories of ‘biodads’ and ‘non-biodads’ suggest that perhaps a large part of the juggling evident in all of the extracts derives from the fact that, despite the flexible deployment of genetic matter as a category that seemingly can be taken up or discarded at will, the ‘hegemony of the gene’ (Finkler, 2000) remains. In other words, whilst the category ‘genetic matter’ can be used to make or deny kinship claims, underlying this is what Schneider (1980), Strathern (1992), Franklin (1997) and, most recently, Nordqvist (2017) have identified as the treatment of genetic matter as reflecting an absolute truth about kinship.

Turner’s (2001) account of reproductive citizenship perhaps offers some further insight into why genetic matter is such a seeming source of trouble for the men represented by the three studies. Given that, as he notes, the injunction to reproductive citizenship is not simply about parenting but is about parent–child relationships involving a genetic connection, genetic matter is, by default, made salient in contexts where reproduction is experienced as an injunction. As noted in the analysis, it would seem evident that, for some gay men, this pushes them towards surrogacy as the only viable option through which to become parents, yet for most (i.e. cisgender) gay men, this automatically brings with it the need for third parties for whom genetic matter must be accounted. To fulfil the role of the agentic reproducing citizen, gay men must contend both with their own genetic contributions (or non-contributions in the case of couples), but also those of women who act as egg donors, and indeed the biological and epigenetic contribution of women who act as surrogates.

Finally, in terms of the findings and to return to the opening of this paper, it is important to consider again the etymological relationship between matter and mother. For the gay men included in the three studies, it is perhaps understandable – given the cultural propensity to evoke the category ‘mother’ for all women involved in gay men’s reproductive journeys (i.e. women who act as egg donors and/or surrogates) – that the relationship between genetic

matter and women as mothers would be minimized. Yet this, it would seem, slips all too easily into denying the role of women at all, instead reducing women to service providers, genetic matter or goods to be chosen from a list. The narrative “we do have photos of her” included in the final extract perhaps best exemplifies this, with women frozen in a snapshot that tells nothing of their lives, and offers nothing in the form of possible kinship.

Importantly, the suggestion here is not that women should be automatically accorded the status of mother or included as kin. Rather, the suggestion is that whether or not genetic matter is made to matter, and how this is achieved, is only one part of the story. The other part of the story must be a focus on the very real effects of the rhetorical strategies that underpin the flexible development of genetic matter in terms of kinship. The point is not to posit that the ‘truth’ of genetic matter is kinship. Rather, the point is that there is a sense in which eating one’s cake and having it too in the context of gay men and reproduction is a recipe for the recentring of men’s privilege, and the perpetuation of reducing women to matter.

Moving beyond the recentring of men’s privilege, as is the focus of this symposium, requires a queering of reproductive citizenship, so as to decentre as much as recentre genetic matter. Decentring would involve refusing to take up the injunction to genetic relatedness implicit in the push towards reproductive citizenship, instead exploring a multitude of routes to parenthood. By contrast, and for those who do take up the normative injunction to genetic relatedness, this would involve acknowledging that once one steps on to the playing field of genetic matter, picking and choosing how such matter is made to matter brings with it certain responsibilities. This includes taking seriously the roles of all parties (including both their genetic and personal contributions and intentions), recognizing the broader lifeworlds of all parties (and specifically the aspects of these that render certain women vulnerable to commodification), and seeing children as equal parties, rather than as adults in waiting. To do otherwise is to reproduce the very inequalities that structure reproductive citizenship itself.

In conclusion, whilst the findings reported in this paper draw on three separate studies that did not focus specifically on the meaning of genetic matter, they make a useful contribution to how we understand gay men’s accounts of kinship in the context of both sperm donation and surrogacy. Importantly, however, the four thematic contexts explored in the analysis are likely to be but some of the many contexts in which genetic matter is salient to gay men. Pralat (2015), for example, explored the intersections of the meanings of sperm to gay men in the context of reproduction compared with human immunodeficiency virus transmission. This would suggest the importance of the ongoing examination of the multiple contexts in which gay men make sense of genetic matter – both their own genetic matter and that of other parties. Connecting this to broader contexts of discrimination, but – as Petersen (2015) suggests – always mindful of the privileges that many gay men hold, offers an important opportunity to continue to explore the flexible deployment of accounts of genetic matter, including when it is made to matter, and when its meaning is rendered immaterial.

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