Queer Acknowledgments

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In January 2005, a group of neuroscientists created *Neurotree*, a user-edited web database that would "document training relationships within the field of neuroscience and display them in an intuitive 'family tree' format." Since then, the site has expanded to include the genealogies of many other academic disciplines, and the multidisciplinary *Academic Family Tree* now encompasses a "large, overlapping canopy of trees" with a database growing at approximately 150 people each week (see Figure 1). Moreover, the website allows visitors to visualize these institutional and disciplinary relationships, explicitly mapping out the connections between academics. Along with other similar websites like *PhDTree* and *The Mathematics Genealogy Project*, *The Academic Family Tree* captures how many scholars, especially young scholars, tend to think of their doctoral training as a form of kinship. As graduate students, it is not uncommon to conceive of advisors as our—often strict, but occasionally consoling—parents and the members of our cohort as the siblings with whom we come up with and learn this thing called academe. If asked to map out such relationships, like those who founded the sites above, we would likely produce something akin to a family tree as well (see Figure 2). As the site indicates, such trees are intuitive. More than an innocuous metaphor, though, the common sense behind these family trees carries serious implications about the significance we place on where we receive our graduate training and under whom, as

it suggests that such family structures determine who we are as scholars as well as who we, as we mature, will go on in turn to reproduce. But is this how academia actually functions? Do our advisors make us who we are? Can academia be neatly mapped into distinct—if overlapping—disciplines, as *The Academic Family Tree*'s "canopy of trees" suggests? One place we might turn to for a more expansive and divergent sense of academic influence is book acknowledgments, in which readers are offered a greater sense of the communities from which scholarship emerges and the interpersonal relationships therein. With this paper, we use these acknowledgment sections to theorize an alternative model for academic kinship that encompasses the many diverse influences surrounding any given scholar or her work.

"Queer acknowledgments" suggests two different tracks in our pursuit of this endeavor. For one, it refers to our selection of the acknowledgments sections of queer scholarship written over the last four years as our data. By entering the names of those acknowledged in twenty-eight queer studies books, published by five presses between 2009 and 2012, into a database and running it through social network analysis software, we map out the connections within to produce a model of intellectual influence that reveals hundreds of relationships unaccounted for by the academic family tree. More significantly, however, it signals our own queer approach to this mapping, as we theorize the results of this software analysis in a manner informed by queer theory's own work on kinship and genealogy. In particular, we turn to Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* in order to think about how family trees serve to orient graduate students as they feel their way through this strange space of academia such that other important relations, necessary to our scholarship, appear less legitimate. Acknowledgments sections, though overlooked and neglected by many, in fact expand or "queer" traditional

conceptions of academic kinship, as their mapping out through network analysis illustrates the many ways in which scholarship gets researched and written. While this method comes with its own limitations, obfuscating certain material and temporal realities affecting such scholarship, queer acknowledgments as an approach to academic kinship offers scholars invaluable new possibilities not just for conceiving of academia, at large, but for grappling with what it means to work as an individual within academia's sprawling networks of influence.

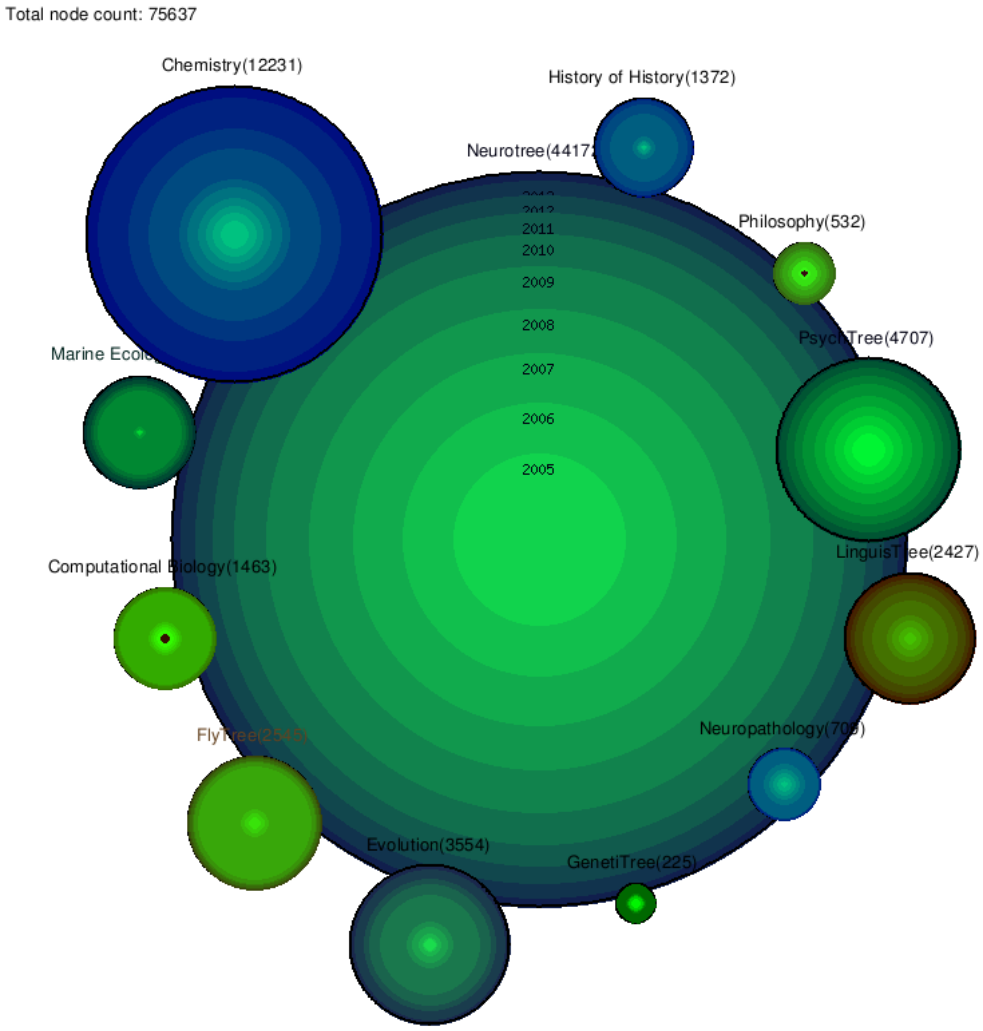

Figure 1. "Canopy of trees" created at *The Academic Family Tree*

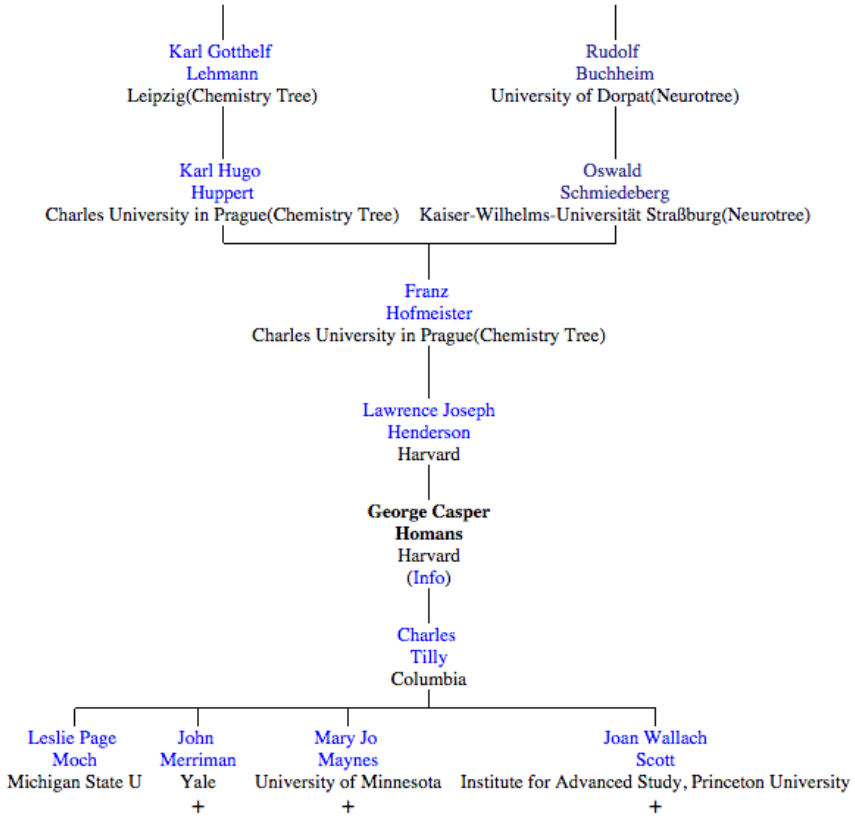

Figure 2. A history family tree at *The Academic Family Tree*

Acknowledgments as Networked Paratexts

In *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Gérard Genette describes dedications, epigraphs, and all that surrounds the body of the text in a written publication, what he terms the "paratext," as a threshold of interpretation. More than just a boundary or sealed border, according to Genette, the paratext is a zone of transaction, "a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that . . . is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it" (1-2). He defines each paratextual element by determining its location, the date of its appearance, its mode of existence, the characteristics of its situation of communication—i.e. its sender and address—and the function that its message aims to fulfill (Genette 4). Due to his interest in literary—rather than

academic—texts, Genette does not address acknowledgments. At the same time a number of his ideas are useful for understanding what aims they often seem to fulfill. Like dedications, acknowledgments are performative in that they constitute the act that they are supposed to describe. They recognize and thank those who contributed—through feedback, as an intellectual interlocutor, or via emotional support—to the writing of the text, but in doing so they also tell the reader that they are recognizing these people as contributors, and they are telling the person that they are recognizing that their gratitude is a public one. The acknowledgments are thus a demonstration and exhibition of affiliation. They proclaim relationships, whether intellectual or personal, and these proclamations, like those of dedications, are thought to be at the service of the book itself.

How, exactly, they are at its service, however, is not obvious. To many, they appear ancillary to the reading of the text, perhaps even decorative and unnecessary. When conducting research, it is common to follow the footnotes, to check out the primary and secondary sources cited in the text's body, and, while some of those named in the acknowledgments are undoubtedly cited again in the text itself, many, if not most, are not. Their influence, then, is not obvious or palpable. And, unlike the dedicatee, an individual thanked in the acknowledgments is but one of many and is thus only minutely responsible for the work she has supported. The service that they offer the work, thus, is not so much to be tied to singular relations between the author and a supporter of hers. Instead, they provide an idea of the tenor of the context within which the text was written and a sense of the breadth of its intellectual support and influence. They recognize that our ideas are not developed in isolation but through discussions with friends, acquaintances, and colleagues. And, accordingly,

they demonstrate that our ideas do not come out fully-fledged and perfectly crafted. Instead, they get clarified through elaborate processes of drafting, conferencing, receiving oral and written feedback, rewriting, and editing. In doing so, they humanize the text, subtly revealing the labor and affection that go into the work we do.

Because acknowledgments illuminate the interconnectedness of academia and offer a rebuke to the image of a scholar working alone in the cold, dark bowels of a university library, it would only make sense to study them as linked documents rather than as solitary texts. More specifically, it would be beneficial to conceive of them as a network of recognitions and, in studying them, to draw upon the methodologies of network analysis. In doing as much, we join the growing number of scholars who have been making use of network analysis, a trend spurred on both because our technological and economic systems have become increasingly reliant on tremendously complex networks and because network terminology and visuals have become part of everyday life thanks to widely popular social media tools. In fact, some scholars have already turned to network analysis in order to better understand the contours of academia. As an example, one might look to a website like *Eigenfactor.org* (University of Washington), which points out that "scholarly literature forms a vast network of academic papers connected to one another by citations in bibliographies and footnotes." Accordingly, the site allows visitors to visualize this network in a number of ways, examining how journals and papers map into various research fields.

Eigenfactor.org is typical, though, in that its focus remains solely on citations. Citations, after all, are a major focus in the ongoing quest for impartial academic evaluation, being used to assess journals and academic programs, not to mention the productivity of individual

scholars. Unsurprisingly, then, *Eigenfactor.org* states that one of its primary missions is to use network analysis to evaluate "the influence of scholarly periodicals." Because acknowledgments are viewed as less practical, in that they cannot be easily re-appropriated to measure and rank academic work, they have been subject to less scrutiny. Moreover, in the rare cases in which acknowledgments have become the focus of network analysis, the work has been largely exploratory and limited to scientific papers. In "Towards Building and Analyzing a Social Network of Acknowledgments in Scientific and Academic Documents," Madian Khabsa, Sharon Koppman, and C. Lee Giles note, to their dismay, that "books have more variation in their acknowledgement format than papers," thus making analysis ungainly (360). However, it is precisely this "variation" of book acknowledgments that intrigues us, as it opens up new possibilities for thinking about academic relationality.

In order to study book acknowledgments as networks and to unlock these new possibilities, we first collected twenty-eight queer studies books released in the past four years (see Appendix). Next, we manually entered the acknowledgments sections into NodeXL, a social network analysis template for Microsoft Excel. Once the information was in the program, we began the process of visualizing the data. The graph below begins to reveal several things (see Figure 3). For one, we can quickly see a few of our authors—including Elizabeth Freeman, Scott Herring, and the late José Esteban Muñoz—clustered in the middle of the graph, an arrangement that gives us a sense that these scholars are relatively important within the network. Additionally, it is easy to notice where acknowledgments are reciprocated, the highlighted edges indicating, for instance, that Ann Cvetkovich thanks David Eng, and vice versa. This visualization of the data demonstrates that, while academic influence in recent queer

studies scholarship radiates out in many directions through a confluence of myriad lines, repetition nonetheless happens. Affinities, other than institution and affiliation, group scholars together. This visualization, when coupled with the relative intimacy of the language of most of these acknowledgments, suggests that there could be a kinship structure to queer studies alternative to that of institutional family lines.

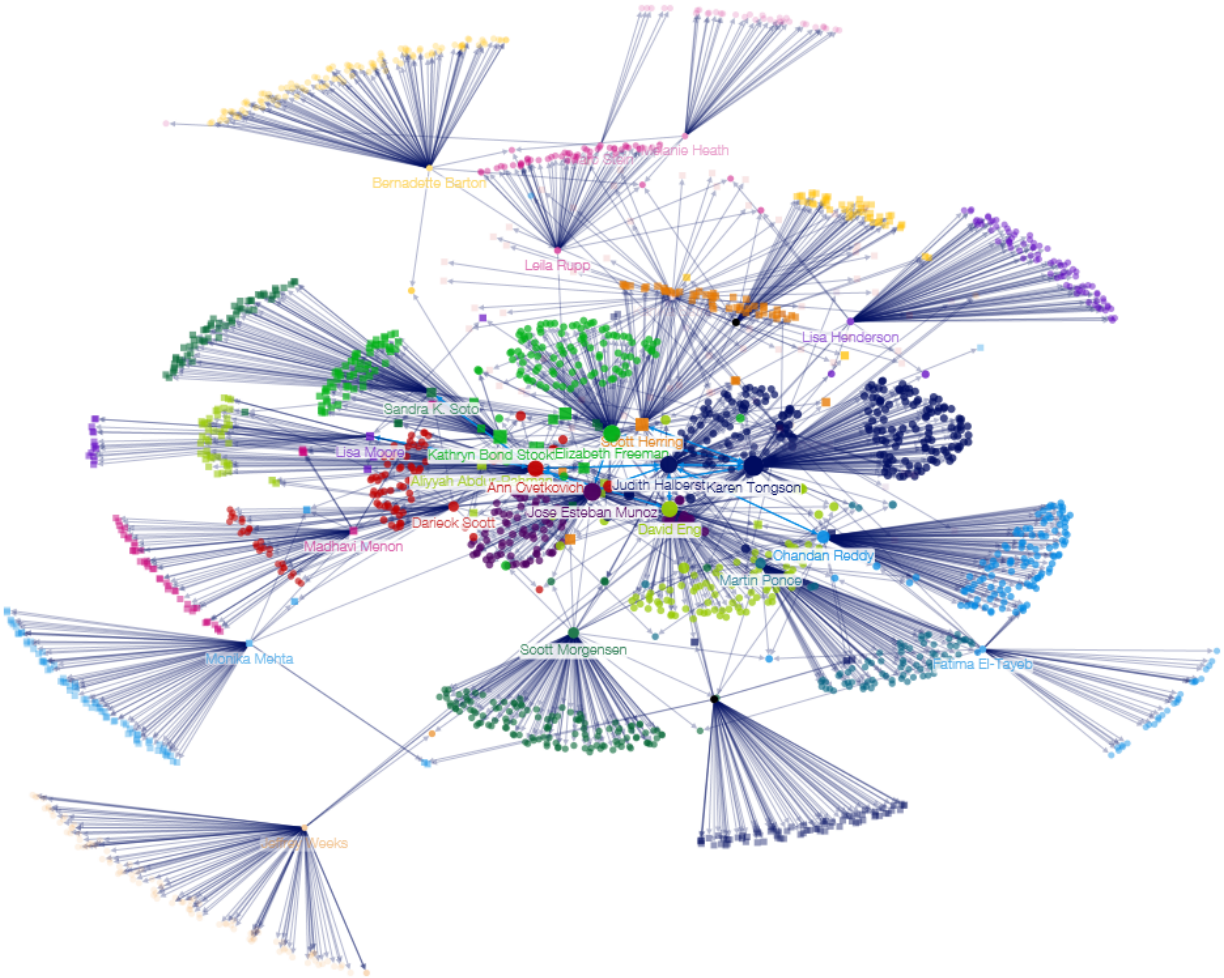

Figure 3. Queer studies network

Genealogy, Queer Kinship, and Acknowledgments

Kinship is a concept central to queer studies, because the excessive repetition of the heterosexual family structure has normalized this particular set of relations, in turn making others unimaginable. As Freeman writes in "Queer Belongings: Kinship Theory and Queer Theory," "Heterosexual gender norms . . . 'make' kin relations, in that they regulate human behavior toward procreation while appearing to be the result of some primal need to propagate the species. Meanwhile, whatever the connections forged by queer gender performances and other embodied behaviors 'make' remains unintelligible as kinship" (297-298). Queer studies' approach to kinship, then, is more than an advocacy of gay and lesbian politics' "chosen family," which appropriates and then transforms heterosexual kinship but emphasizes individualistic choice and presumes a range of racial, economic, gender, and national privileges in doing so. Queer studies, meanwhile, pursues entirely other ways queer people have created kinship, outside of families, and emphasizes the *doing*, rather than *being*, of kinship—normative or otherwise (304-305). While heterosexual kinship reproduces itself, queer kinship sustains and transforms physical and emotional attachments over time. This renewal is not the same as a recreation of self, which again would be grounded in identity. Instead, it responds to our needs for connection, opens more possibilities for connection between people across time, and grants these connections a future, albeit with uncertainty and openness in form (299).

In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed provides an account of how kinship structures and one's iteration of or deviance from their norms through sexual orientation come with a nearly physical sense of adherence or divergence, respectively. Following genealogical lines is one way we navigate the world around us. Heterosexual orientation is what keeps us on course. And yet,

in following its lines, the lines erase themselves, such that *how* we have arrived where we have seems to have disappeared from view. Reproducing these lines in turn puts some objects (such as marriage, family, a house of one's own) within reach and makes those out of reach inaccessible. It is the same with lines of thought. Paying greater attention to influential texts' acknowledgments might be one way for us to remind ourselves of this. We did not come to our objects of study, methodologies or approaches by way of solitary thought or inspiration. We have been directed to where we are by the work of many scholars who came before us, and in pursuing our own scholarship we may eventually be directing that of those—students, other mentees, and strangers alike—who come after. However, as the complex networks of acknowledgments sections show, the family tree fails to account for variations to this experience and the many people, other than our advisors, who have influenced the directions we have gone and participated in our orientations. There are certainly ways in which academia, much like genealogy, works to keep scholarship "in line." However, how successful it is at doing so and what sort of lines it in fact creates, through such repetition, is not so straightforward.

In the case of the family tree, the vertical lines of descent seamlessly meet the horizontal lines between husband and wife and between siblings, and with the hope that "the vertical line will produce a horizontal line, from which further vertical lines will be drawn" (Ahmed 83), any relations other than that of the couple and their biological children get concealed. Figured as a family tree, like those on *The Academic Family Tree*, academia can be seen as pridefully begetting lines of scholars, which in turn beget others. Through this strong and direct association with advisors, presumptions about our fields of study and methodologies are made and we gain entry into nominalization, such that we are spoken of as "Foucauldians"

or “Deleuzians.” We are presumed to have learned disciplinarity in an institutional fashion, and it is expected that we will then go on to pass this learned practice on to our own students later. However, neither sexual subjects nor scholars always follow the lines laid out before them. Sometimes our orientation directs us to other lines and, in following those lines, new objects come within reach. “Queer,” Ahmed reminds us, “is, after all, a spatial term, which then gets translated into a sexual term, a term for a twisted sexuality that does not follow a ‘straight line,’ a sexuality that is bent and crooked” (67). Just as following a straight line provides access to certain “straight” objects, queer people are those who, because of their orientation, see the world slantwise and act out of line with others, which in turn allows different objects to come into view (107). Seeing orientation not as an identity but a process, Ahmed claims that reorientation takes work (101). It requires reinhabiting one’s body and it affects what we can do and how we are perceived in what we do; it affects how we navigate public space (101). Queerness, as a process of reorientation, is not merely about one’s sexual relation to others but one’s relation to a heterosexually oriented world (102).

In their proliferation of lines that radiate out in many directions, connecting scholars in unexpected ways, the maps we have produced of academic networks through queer studies acknowledgments sections appear quite queer themselves. They make a mess of our neatly ordered “intuitive” family trees. What to make of this mess? What objects, if not academic reproduction, are made palpable? In addition to providing network visualizations, the software also offers metrics that quantify what we see and what can be used to determine which of the scholars are key nodes within the network. Two of the centrality measures that it offers for analysis are the in-degree and out-degree numbers, which tell us both how many times a

person is acknowledged and has acknowledged others. In-degree, as the name implies, gives us the former; it lets us know the number of times a given scholar is mentioned. Both Lisa Duggan and Muñoz, for example, have ten mentions, followed closely by Ann Pellegrini with nine. These high numbers are probably explained, at least in the case of Muñoz and Pellegrini, by them having served as general editors of the NYU Press Sexual Cultures series. Out-degree, meanwhile, lets us know how many people each author thanks. This reveals quite a wide range in acknowledgment practice, with Karen Tongson thanking 176 people and Marc Stein thanking 7. While some scholarship is undoubtedly more collaborative, this difference most likely also signals a particular attitude towards the acknowledgment process, whereby some reserve such official thanks for those with most direct influence on the writing of the text and others make fewer distinctions and give credit to all. This choice to thank many, rather than just a few, could in itself be considered a “queer move,” in that it quite consciously refuses the premise that scholarship is an isolated process with clearly demarcated lines of intellectual influence and instead offers a much more collective conception.

The same software offers centrality measures that put greater attention on who exactly is being thanked. That is to say, it calculates the importance of a particular node in a network not just by looking at how many connections it has but also whether it is connecting to other nodes with many connections. One such calculation is eigenvector centrality. By that measure, we can assess the most "important" scholars of our sample as being Tongson, Muñoz, Judith Halberstam, Freeman, Eng, Cvetkovich, Kathryn Bond Stockton, and Chandan Reddy. While this calculation naturally tends to skew towards scholars who thank more people than do others, it is not always that simple. For example, we can observe that Gayatri Gopinath has the ninth

highest score, even though she does not have a book in our database and thus has an out-degree of zero. Instead, her high score is driven by being thanked by several other scholars who have high numbers. Martin Manalansan also scores very high despite having an out-degree of zero. A related calculation to eigenvector centrality is PageRank, an algorithm made famous by Google and described by network theorists David Easley and Jon Kleinberg as "a kind of 'fluid' that circulates through the network, passing from node to node across edges and pooling at the nodes that are the most important" (359). Therefore, even though Reddy and Freeman have almost identical in-degree and out-degree numbers, Reddy rates higher on PageRank, thus suggesting he is slightly more influential within this network because he is linked to more highly connected individuals than Freeman.

This sort of investigation into queer studies networks mostly follows along the path established by the previously mentioned network analysis studies, whose primary goals appear to revolve around questions of status and impact within specific fields. However, if we are to argue for acknowledgments' reorientation of academic kinship away from the model of the family tree, we should perhaps not fixate on questions of influence and importance, in the process reifying hierarchies. Fortunately, there are other ways to approach acknowledgments sections through network analysis. To begin, we can examine the network as a whole. One typical way to do so is to look at a network's density, which in this case is the ratio of the number of connections between scholars in the network to the total number of possible connections between all pairs of scholars. This number can then help us determine just how closely connected our network might be. Looking at our queer studies network, that number is incredibly low—just 0.0006. However, such a low number is to be expected given how many of

our nodes are people named by scholars who do not have their own works in the database, thus giving them no chance to form connections with other nodes. If we limit our network just to scholars whose books have been entered, then the number jumps to 0.07, though that remains a relatively low number and perhaps indicates that queer scholarship is only loosely connected. We also have the option to break down our networks into even smaller networks using other variables. For instance, we can split our network into smaller groups based on publisher. Once we do this, we can see the density take an even more noticeable jump. NYU Press, for example, has a density of 0.1. Duke University Press, meanwhile, has a density of 0.22. A scholar's publisher, then, seems to be indicative of relatively strong sub-communities. This can also be seen visually if we separate out the Duke and NYU authors (see Figure 4). We can imagine performing similar exercises by creating sub-groups based on research interests. Such efforts could potentially help us locate where academic kinship is strongest.

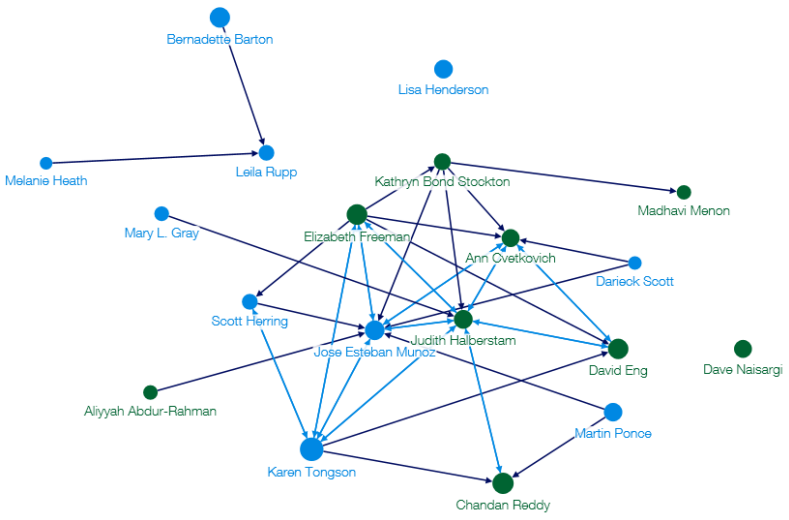

Figure 4. A visualization of Duke and NYU authors

Another possible approach might begin by trying to network the life of an individual scholar. Here it is important to distinguish between the different types of acknowledgments sections found across academia. Whereas the acknowledgments sections in the types of journals being studied by other scholars tend to be rather straightforward, a typical acknowledgments section in a queer studies work, as exemplified by Tongson's acknowledgments, reads like a life story. Not only are editors, advisors, and departmental colleagues thanked, but so are friends, partners, and family (and, in Tongson's case, childhood teachers, friends from "da club" only identified by initials, and a cat), all of whom have influenced the events that have culminated in the completion of the manuscript. A "queer move," in that it not only reveals the scope of academic influence but the breadth of kinds of influence within this scope, with Tongson's acknowledgments indicating that her project came out of research in non-academic communities. Acknowledgment sections, then, are more than just lists—they contain narratives that reveal how scholars come to be who they are. They also could be read for indications of what sort of future relations for academia their authors would like to create or sustain. In isolating just Halberstam's network, which produces a type of graph referred to as an ego network (see Figure 5), we could further explore clusters that appear and attempt to determine whether they might come from previous teaching appointments, shared time in grad school, or instead through less-institutionalized friendships of various kinds. For each and every scholar, there is a narrative lying beneath these lines and nodes—intellectual narratives that cannot be contained by the romance of academic procreation implied by the family tree.

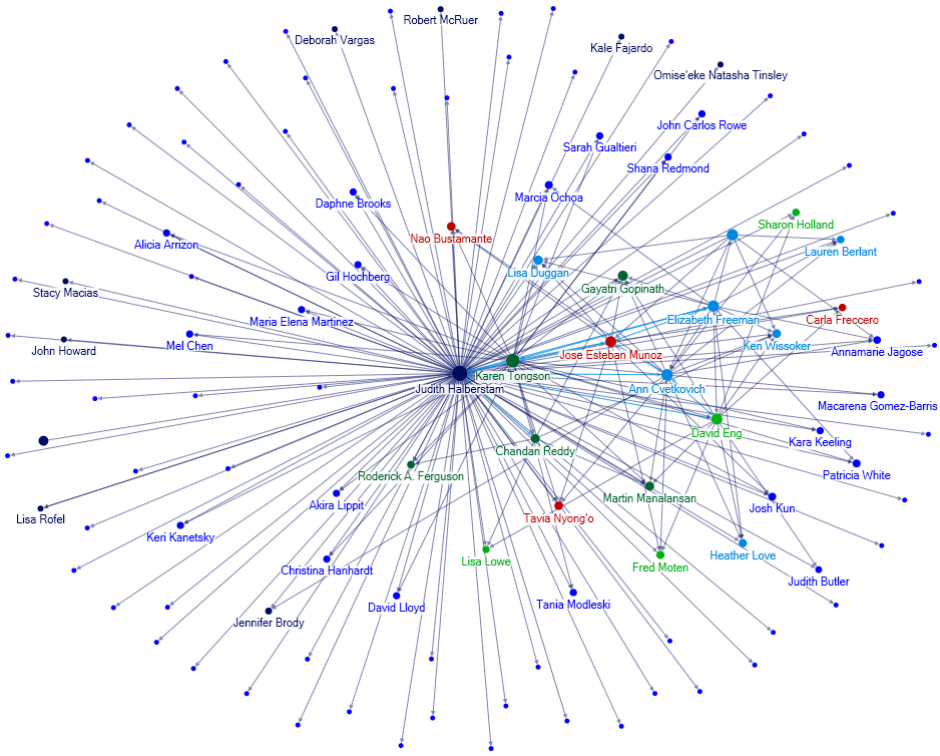

Figure 5. Ego network for Jack Halberstam

Material Matters

While the sections above have described how network analysis provides new ways to understand academia, it should also be noted that network analysis has been subject to critique. In his software studies work *Protocol*, for example, Alexander Galloway tackles at length the concept of the distributed network—a network that lacks centralized hubs. Rather, each node within the network is independent and has the ability to link to any of the other nodes. As Galloway further explains, the "perfect example is the rhizome described in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus,*" linking together many autonomous nodes "in a manner that is neither linear nor hierarchical" (*Protocol* 33). Therefore, the distributed network shuns concepts of trees and roots, much as we do in reorienting academic kinship away from the traditional model of the family tree. As the analyses of our sample above

demonstrate, however, many network analysis metrics within the NodeXL software attempt to assess influence and importance and thus reinforce hierarchies. Furthermore, the algorithms that plot the graphs pictured throughout this paper naturally center more connected nodes. Thus, there exists tension between the rhizomatic ideal of the distributed network and attempts to analyze networks using network analysis software.

Perhaps even more importantly, though, in *The Interface Effect* Galloway suggests that network visualizations often obscure more than they illuminate. Galloway, for example, asserts that network visualizations hide their inertness—that is, their inability to provide us any true sense of orientation—behind "candy colored lines and nodes" (*Interface* 98). According to Galloway, this inability to see gets to a larger problem of being unable to represent the control society—this "control society" terminology referring back to Deleuze and Guattari's conception of the contemporary condition (91). This is a hard argument to dispute, for the ubiquitous nodes and links of network visualization always divorce us from the material and ideological realities of networks. The most common network visualization, for example, might be those produced out of the data from social networking site *Facebook*. When we "friend" someone on *Facebook*, though, it is not a mere matter of two circular "friend" nodes being connected via a new straight line. Rather, our connection is facilitated by way of an apparatus that mines our information and packages it for any number of advertisers. Moreover, our connection on the site is routed through any number of servers, whose material existence always get effaced from network visualizations. Similarly, the graphs included above hide any number of material realities behind their seductive "candy colored lines and nodes." For instance, the maps do not

consider whether scholars might be tenured or, alternatively, working as adjuncts—a divide that speaks to not just financial security but academic freedom as well.

Not only do we need to consider the limitations of network analysis as a methodology but also the ways in which conceptions of queer kinship delimit what relations we take into consideration in our study of acknowledgments. While kinship and its immediate intimacies have been central to the development of queer studies, more recently a number of queer studies scholars, including many of those whose book acknowledgments are mapped out above, have begun to think about generations and cross-temporal queer relations on a historical scale that truly tests the limits of kinship sans genealogy. In recent studies, Freeman, Muñoz, Christopher Nealon, Carolyn Dinshaw, Heather Love, and others pursue how entire historical periods might relate to one another. Together, they are interested in the queer historical impulse to engage with gay and lesbian and pre-gay pasts in order to extend community-building resources across time. Recognizing that sexuality is historically determined and thus different now than it was at the turn of the century, in ancient Greece or the 1970s, these scholars explore how queer people today nonetheless turn to these moments and commune with them and their subjects through archives, media, and art. In so doing, Dinshaw and Nealon's historiographical models, with their interest in the affective, resemble friendship or community. For Freeman and her "erotohistoriography," lesbian pasts become like lovers, opening themselves to our touch. Love, however, is critical of the ways in which so often the pain and negativity of queer living gets positioned as solidly in the past, such that those of us in the present reject stories of violence and oppression as irrelevant to our experiences or try to rescue those who suffered by concocting linear progress narratives. Such friendship, Love

claims, is an impossibility, not because of the obvious separation of time but because much of queer historical experience is characterized by isolation and untouchability. Rather than a historiography that characterizes queer self-recognition as consoling, she pursues those that shatter and argues that these negative or ambivalent identifications can “serve to disrupt the present” (45). Such historiographical conceptualizations of queer kinship reveal the limited temporality of most models of kinship, which focus on contemporary relations and flounder when asked to expand across generations without making genealogical claims of descent or inheritance.

The limitations of network analysis and queer kinship are worth noting, but they are also not reasons to abandon network analysis and queer kinship, thus foregoing the types of insights described in the previous sections. To that point, one of the most frequently enunciated concerns within the digital humanities is the need for humanists to become involved in the design of the digital technology of which they make use in their research. Anne Burdick et al.’s *Digital_Humanities*, for example, explains that much of the software currently being used by digital humanists was originally created for business purposes or for the use of social scientists. These origins, then, craft the types of data than can be used, the types of questions that can be asked of that data, and also the types of answers that will be received by the researcher. Thus, the authors call on digital humanists not just to articulate these shortcomings but also to articulate how exactly the software might better serve their purposes. Speaking more specifically on the topic of visualization, for example, the authors write, "Visualizations designed to specifically address the communication needs of humanities research will only be created if humanists become actively engaged in their design" (Burdick et al. 42). Galloway’s

criticism in mind, then, we might ask how we can better design network analysis software to consider material realities and account for the inequalities within academia. Similarly, if our queer method of mapping and analyzing acknowledgments through computing tools were to be pursued and expanded to broader periods of knowledge formation, queer historiographical models, such as those of Love and Freeman, should be taken into consideration, so as to account for a researcher's own relation to the acknowledgments she studies.

Conclusion

In deviating from the typical modes and means of research by using social network analysis software to map out those named in acknowledgments sections, previously invisible lines of connection, association, and exchange become apparent. Acknowledgments both reveal these lines and, like family trees, produce them. Analyses of acknowledgments suggest that some people seem to have great influence on the field, and some of these, such as Halberstam, are clearly scholars who have made substantial intellectual contributions to queer studies and over the years have mentored, edited, and debated the work of many others. This is not, however, necessarily the same thing as a top-down form of influence, but, as the visualizations also suggest, a cooperative and multidirectional process. Furthermore, not all nodes are the same in scale or status, and some may appear in any such mapping quite routine, while others are unexpected. Queer studies has grown to be quite interdisciplinary, always attempting, if not perfectly successful, to remain outside the system of disciplinarity by drawing on many methodologies and fields of research. The acknowledgments sections we sampled certainly reflect as much. In the moments where queer studies appears to replicate the prevailing conceptions of academic structures, as in the centrality of esteemed scholars within

our network, they simply suggest that queer kinship intersects with and works through ongoing structures. Through this tension, acknowledgments offer a site for rethinking the most quintessential elements of academia, such as mentorship and publishing, how we do such things most productively, and how we might think about doing them differently. Approaching academic kinship by paying closer attention to the maps made by acknowledgments sections could itself bring different objects—including creative and critical texts, affects, approaches, and modes of thinking—within reach. Taking up acknowledgments as a site of such potentiality and mapping out its many lines of influence, suggests that academia has been for quite some time already fairly queer. Perhaps it's time we acknowledge as much and begin acting out of line with others.

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