Care is central to life, and yet is all too often undervalued, taken for granted, and hidden from view. This collection of fourteen substantive and highly innovative essays, along with its insightful introduction, seeks to explore the different dimensions of care that shape social, legal and political contexts. It addresses these dimensions in four key ways. First, the contributions expand contemporary theoretical understandings of the value of care, by reflecting upon established conceptual approaches (such as the ‘ethics of care’) and developing new ways of using and understanding this concept. Second, the chapters draw on a wide range of methods, from doctrinal scholarship through ethnographic, empirical and biographical research methodologies. Third, the book enlarges the usual subjects of care research, by expanding its analysis beyond the more typical focus on familial interconnection to include professional care contexts, care by strangers and care for and about animals. Finally, the collection draws on contributions from academics working in Europe and Australia, across law, anthropology, gender studies, politics, psychology and sociology. By highlighting the points of connection and tension between these diverse international and disciplinary perspectives, this book outlines a new and nuanced approach to care, exploring contemporary understandings of care across law, the social sciences and humanities.

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Social Justice is a new, theoretically engaged, interdisciplinary series exploring the changing values, politics and institutional forms through which claims for equality, democracy and liberation are expressed, manifested and fought over in the contemporary world. The series addresses a range of contexts from transnational political fora, to nation-state and regional controversies, to small-scale social experiments. At its heart is a concern, and inter-disciplinary engagement with, the present and future politics of power, as constituted through territory, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, economics, ecology and culture.

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ReValuing Care in Theory, Law and Policy

Cycles and Connections

Edited by Rosie Harding, Ruth Fletcher and Chris Beasley
We dedicate this book to those who have cared for, with and about us, as well as exemplifying the value of caring for others. Our dedication is especially to Ann, Graham, Laura and Peter, Bev and Vic, and Carol Bacchi.
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The editors of this volume wish to acknowledge the financial support of the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council which funded the establishment of the ReValuing Care Network, and hence provided the institutional basis for developing an international research network. The AHRC funding generated a workshop at Keele University, UK, in 2012 and a workshop at the University of the Adelaide, South Australia, in 2013. We also acknowledge the participatory and financial support of Queen Mary University of London, which hosted a further workshop in 2014 developing some of the chapters published here. The ReValuing Care workshops were highly productive and, so far, have resulted in the publication of two edited volumes, including this one, many individual publications, keynote addresses and presentations in several countries.

We also wish to acknowledge the support we have received from the universities named above, as well as the University of Birmingham, who continue to support the ReValuing Care Network website. The network would not have been possible without the essential involvement of two research centres that originally combined forces to produce the ReValuing Care Network and its subsequent activities and publications, the Centre for Law, Gender and Sexuality (Universities of Keele, Westminster and Kent, UK) and the Fay Gale Centre for Research on Gender (University of Adelaide, South Australia). These two centres provided a highly active and engaged combined research grouping which drew upon their memberships and their broader research communities located in a range of other universities across the globe. While many of the centre members have directly contributed to this volume, the participation and intellectual contribution of other members should also be noted here. In Australia, participants from the Fay Gale Centre included Carol Bacchi, Emily Cock, Pam Papadelos, Victoria Skinner and Anna Szorenvi. In the UK participants from the Centre for Law, Gender and Sexuality included Donatella Alessandrini, Marie Fox, Jane Krishnadas, Ambreena Manji, Harriet Samuels, Michael Thomson and Sorcha Ui Chonnachtaigh. The ReValuing Care Network was supported by an advisory panel of Ann Stewart, Anthony Smith, Louise Rogers and Maria Drakopoulou, whose advice and support was
invaluable throughout the ReValuing Care Network activities. Thanks also to Tracey Harrison and Sue Westwood for administrative and research assistance.

There is no doubt that our acknowledgements merely state in the baldest terms the creative and nourishing benefits of a caring research comradeship, a collectivity of companionability, mutual respect and support, and intellectual challenge. The ReValuing Care Network, which produced this volume and more, was indeed itself a practice of revaluing care.
Care is central to life, and yet is all too often undervalued, taken for granted and hidden from view. The ReValuing Care network identified care as a central problematic, a focus of feminist debate for many years, and set about recuperating and developing anew aspects of that debate. This collection of original essays is the product of conversations, debates and discussions that took place at and through a series of ReValuing Care network workshops. In this book, we seek to explore the different dimensions of care that shape social, legal and political relations, looking back through feminist literatures and experiences, and forward to alternative visions of how care can be valued, imagined and accomplished.

Previous feminist research on care has cohered around three key themes: the need to value caring and domestic labour in law and society; the utility of a feminist ‘ethics of care’; and latterly, the limitations of care as a normative and conceptual framework. Early feminist work on the concept of care focused on the problems with non-recognition of women’s unpaid domestic care work (Barrett and McIntosh 1982; Delphy 1984). This has since expanded to address care as an aspect of everyday life within and without kinship domains through such concepts as social reproduction (Bakker 2007; Bakker and Silvey 2008; Fudge 2014), affective equality (Lynch et al. 2009; Grummell et al. 2009), and care chains (Stewart 2007; 2011; Hochschild 2000). Similarly, the ethics of care has been routinely drawn upon to explain how relationships motivate choice and action in the social world (Sevenhuijsen 2003; Tronto 1993; Barnes 2012). At the same time as relational subjectivity is becoming a mainstream concept (Nedelsky 2011), some have questioned whether an ethic of care can resolve the crisis of subjectivity for feminism (Drakopoulou 2000).

More recently, critical considerations of care have cohered around questions of how to interrogate the asymmetry of care (Beasley and Bacchi 2007; Cooper 2007). Some efforts to value care-receipt have engaged with ideas about vulnerability (MacKenzie et al. 2013; Fineman and Grear 2013) and capability (Sen 1989; 1993; Nussbaum 2011; Fox and Thomson 2013) in normalising and valuing the experience of being cared-for, as well as other kinds of engagement with care. ReValuing Care as a network of scholars, and as an intellectual and political idea,
is situated in these efforts to value the diversity, fluidity and publicity of care, while wanting to resist thinking in terms of universal understandings of care (Menon 2002; Mol 2008).

The key research questions that formed the basis of the ReValuing Care network activities, and which now form the intellectual foundations of this edited collection, were concerned with how creative, cross-disciplinary collaborations can advance knowledge of the ways that care is imagined, valued, resourced, supported and regulated. The network also sought to interrogate what the creative methodological approaches and critical theoretical engagements of law, gender and sexuality scholarship contribute to, and draw from, improved understandings of the value of care in society. In the fourteen substantive chapters that follow, this book address these questions in four key ways. First, the contributions expand contemporary theoretical understandings of the value of care by reflecting upon established conceptual approaches (such as the ethics of care) and developing new ways of using and understanding this concept. Second, the chapters draw on a wide range of methods, from doctrinal scholarship through ethnographic, empirical and biographical research methodologies. Third, the book moves beyond the usual subjects of care research, by expanding the analysis beyond the more typical focus on familial interconnection to include professional care contexts, care by strangers and care for and about animals. Finally, the text draws on contributions from academics working in Europe and Australia, across law, anthropology, gender studies, politics, psychology and sociology. By highlighting the points of connection and tension between these diverse international and disciplinary perspectives, this collection outlines a new and nuanced approach to care, exploring contemporary understandings of care across the social sciences and humanities. In ReValuing Care, we take a broad approach to care and include the diverse range of theoretical perspectives involved in understanding embodied experiences of responsiveness and affect, both in relation to caring for and caring about different people, practices and places. Keeping the definition of care open in this way generates the capacity for creative interdisciplinary and cross-sector exchange.

**ReValuing care: cycles and connections**

Given the great deal of feminist literature that already addresses aspects of care, both empirically and conceptually, we wanted to begin this collection with a justification for why we feel that care remains an important site for feminist research and theorising. There are three key drivers that underpin our commitment to ReValuing Care in theory, law and policy, which are reflected in, through and across the contributions to the collection. We are interested in uncovering and understanding the new moments of regulation and recognition of care across social interconnections that are shaped by legal, social and political responses to care needs and care provision. We also seek to think conceptually about the values that underpin the term care, as a practice and as a description of social (inter)connections. Finally, we propose that considering cycles of care can provide a new conceptual language
for understanding, valuing and operationalising care for the future. For us, ‘cycles of care’ captures how subjects move between and among instances of care-receiving and care-giving over time and space as they generate and value connection with one another through embodied experiences and rights claims.

**Legal, social and political responses to care needs and care provision**

Recent years have seen the emergence of the carer as a political and legal subject (see Stewart, Chapter 10). In spite of critical and comparative work which has highlighted the diverse locations of care-giving, too often care-giving is treated as almost entirely privatised within the family, undertaken by women and socially constructed as women’s responsibility. The twenty-first century explosion in the regulatory domains surrounding both informal care (care provided by friends and family members) and paid care-giving has intensified public scrutiny of care, if unevenly. For example, the introduction of legal recognition and rights for carers in particular national settings has taken place incrementally over the last half century, partly in response to activism through the carers’ movement (see Carers UK 2015), and partly as a response to changing patterns of family life, health and social care provision, and population demographics. Lengthening average life expectancies, workplace gains for women resulting from feminist activism, and the long-term effects of equal pay, maternity leave and anti-discrimination legislation, alongside the changing economic contexts of relational lives, mean that the heterosexual, biological, nuclear family as the normative ideal of privatised care-giving has lost whatever explanatory force it had. Rather, care is given and received in and through multiple, diverse situations where overlapping modes of private, informal and professional care-giving interact and interconnect (see for instance, Dimova *et al.* 2015).

Perhaps as a result of these changing social contexts, the provision of care has become a matter that no longer resides within the nuclear family (if it ever did) but instead has become the focus of a great deal of political and legal attention. These regulatory responses to the shifting care contexts in turn require rejoinders from critical, feminist perspectives to uncover the complex and shifting effects of such changes to care law and policy, which are taken up by contributions in this collection. The contemporary regulatory moment takes a multiplicity of forms, including: increasing rights claims, like those that arise from the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (see Harding, Chapter 8), or those made possible through public dialogue on the appropriate legal recognition of care (see Smith, Chapter 11); or the reprivatisation of responsibility for care into different spaces, like the development of ‘voluntary’ community care-giving frameworks (see Baim-Lance, Chapter 3); or the use of regulatory tools to move ‘public’ care provision for the homeless into ‘private’ spaces (see Hunter, Chapter 4); or the uneven application of equality and anti-discrimination provision, like the limitations of the response of the European Court of Human Rights (see Margaria, Chapter 9) or in formal care spaces (see Westwood, Chapter 14).
As we finalised this collection, a particular example of the shifting legal and political value given to care and carers hit the British news headlines. The UK Government announced in January 2016 that the rules on the controversial benefit cap would be changed to exempt anyone in receipt of Carer’s Allowance. This followed a High Court verdict in November 2015 that the inclusion of carers in receipt of Carer’s Allowance in the benefit cap was unjustifiably discriminatory on the basis of disability, because it did not recognise the impact on disabled people who rely on family carers to support them. This policy was founded in ideologically conservative attempts to reduce the provision of welfare and to ‘encourage’ individuals to move into the paid labour force. During debates on the introduction of the benefit cap, the then Minister of State for the Department of Work and Pensions, Chris Grayling, said,

[t]he reality is that the cap is all about influencing behaviour; it is not about creating hardship. If we succeed in influencing behaviour, the number of cases affected by the cap will be cut to a minimum. However, we will only influence behaviour if we have a simple rule which people can understand, and not one hedged about with numerous exemptions that only welfare rights experts can follow. The simple message to every citizen of this country as they enter adult life is that there is a limit to the amount of financial support that the state will provide to people if they fall on hard times, and therefore they need to adapt their circumstances to reflect that reality.

House of Commons Hansard, 17 May 2011, Col 944

This challenge to the benefit cap for carers, and the subsequent political response to it, provides an insight into why care and caring remains vitally important to feminist theoretical work, and why the conceptual tools created to respond to the privatised nature of care may not be sufficient to respond to governmental regulation of care in the future. As ideologically conservative governments, not only in the UK, but also in Australia, Canada, the US and elsewhere, seek to contract the welfare state, in service of ideological commitments to ‘austerity’, small state liberalism and ‘the market’, it is vital that critical scholars take the opportunity to reflect on why and how these regulatory moments occur. In doing so, feminist strategies and rationales for revaluing care may help us to articulate effective opposition, not only to the re-privatisation of caring responsibilities to within the nuclear family (see Cossman 2002), but also to the governmental ‘nudges’, however subtle (or not) they may be, to simultaneously push those with caring responsibilities back into paid work. Concerns such as these, the emergent social, legal and political valuing of care and carers, and the implications of the ways care is valued, are taken up throughout this collection.

Theoretical engagements with care and connection

Our concern in this collection is not solely on the practice of care, but also on taking forward conceptual insights into how care can be conceptually and theoretically
re-valued. The feminist ethic of care literature has been hugely influential in recent decades both in challenging the privatisation of care in to the domestic sphere and in shaping legal and political responses to care. Attention to conceptual analyses and debates about the value of care within this volume owes much to this feminist legacy. Perspectives regarding the value of care, which draw broadly upon the feminist ethic of care, are nevertheless diverse.

A number of the contributions employ the language of care: to interrogate the legal requirements regarding care provision that includes questions of capacity (see Harding, Chapter 8); to investigate the legal identities of carers (see Stewart, Chapter 10; Margaria, Chapter 9); or to examine the character, the social and the individual impact of caring and connection (see Peel, Chapter 13; Hunter, Chapter 4; Baim-Lance, Chapter 3). In other words, the content of care reveals its social significance and is theorised as a means to exploring its value. Other contributors approach this in different ways. Some demonstrate new conceptions of and locations for care, thereby extending the meaning of the terminology and providing innovations in theoretical understandings of it. For instance, contributors note that care may also be employed: to encompass intersectional frameworks such as age, gender and sexuality (see Westwood, Chapter 14); to include relationships beyond the human (see Carr, Chapter 7); and to refer to modes of social activism and support (see Fletcher, Chapter 2; Baker et al., Chapter 5). Other contributors however question the very basis of theoretical frameworks employed in the literature on care and undertake a critique of well-established terminologies, like family (see Bartholomaeus and Riggs, Chapter 12), or even the language of care itself as a means to conceptualise the value of social connection (see Beasley, Chapter 15).

Alternative conceptual lexicons are offered up in this collection as ways to help navigate the complex normative and regulatory frames that shape the experience of care. Some contributors (Harding, Chapter 8; Smith, Chapter 11) use the language of relationality, following Jennifer Nedelsky (2011), who argues for a re-visioning of autonomy as it is figured in legal and political ideas to take account of the inevitability and necessity of relationships as ways of constructing and supporting autonomy. Others use relationality (Baim-Lance, Chapter 3; Carr, Chapter 7) but also find value for thinking through care in Jane Bennett’s (2010) concept of ‘vibrant matter’, where humans and non-humans are linked together in ‘confederations’, understood somewhat like Deleuze’s ‘assemblages’, to create and shape possibilities and outcomes. Reflexive practice is drawn upon (Baker et al., Chapter 5; Watson, Chapter 6) to demonstrate the interconnections of research and researcher, the ways that caring about and for others permeate not only the research topic but also the choices we make and the ways that we do research as critical and feminist scholars, and as activists. The place of strangers, figured in both an interpersonal and a legal sense, in supporting and facilitating access to care is also raised in these contributions, whether in relation to abortion care (Fletcher, Chapter 2), supporting and feeding homeless people (Hunter, Chapter 4), or the multiple changes that the experience of caring for a parent with dementia bring to family relationships (Peel, Chapter 13). By bringing these varied conceptual approaches together in this collection we hope to draw attention to the
multifaceted ways that care and caring can be valued. By pushing care scholarship beyond the usual spaces, topics and contexts we seek to expand the conceptual (and empirical) possibilities of care in critical, feminist, social justice scholarship.

**Cycles of care**

Finally, we offer cycles of care as a way of framing our collective contribution to these debates and literatures. Care cycles might be thought of as building on the ways that attentiveness calls unevenly on timespace, energy and knowledge. Attentiveness is a key aspect of the logic of care, requiring sensitivity and flexibility in watching out and relating wisely to surroundings (Mol 2008, p. 32). When considering care, in a sense we are investigating ways that attentiveness makes ‘social flesh’ as it moves with people and things through time and space to provide a hug, or wipe up the mess (Beasley and Bacchi 2012). Like legal embodiment (Fletcher et al. 2008), cycles work through subjects, relationships, matter and symbols when they make social flesh. Nevertheless, the conceptualisation of cycles of care takes us beyond legal embodiment as an analytical framework for generating questions about these fleshy connections, and instead embodies the critical tools for understanding how care works. Through the empirical and conceptual contributions in this collection, we examine the actual processes by which care is done. In this way we throw more light on how care makes timespace ‘take on flesh’, to paraphrase Valverde (2015, pp. 9–10; see also Kotiswaran 2015).

Cycles build on this understanding of the theoretical significance of actual processes of fleshy connection, by capturing the dynamics of care as it starts, stops, turns back on itself, and thickens or thins out in the process. Both organic and thing-like, we select cycles out from the association with ordinary terms, like lifecycles and bicycles, and give it new life. By being attentive to the ordinary, everyday, micro interactions that shape and are shaped by regulatory forces (Harding 2011), cycles help us to focus on the ways that care shifts and changes through space and time. As a moving combination of organic and non-organic components, cycles allow for movement backwards, to grasp a memorable photograph, while moving forwards as living somewhere new becomes the best care option. Cycles allow for sideways moves if working a solution around the problem, rather than tackling it directly, provides a better way to care. And cycles twist and turn as evaluations of how care is working, for example, happen along the way rather than at the end. Like networks, assemblages and confederations, care cycles move through and around matter in their multi-dimensionality. However, cycles feel and remember unevenly as they move hesitantly through timespace and draw the flesh out of what might otherwise be understood as nodes, actants or vibrant matter.

Care moves people and things in another way, of course, as it energises and wears. Lightening the load that comes with ordinary efforts to make life better can be exhausting or uplifting, depending on circumstances and conditions. The kind of attentiveness that misses its mark in some way may end up being wearing,
even though in another time and place that miss might have been energising as a warm responsiveness filled the gap. Gunaratnam (2013, p. 43–56) captures these tensions well in her discussion of Maxine’s experience of hypersensitivity as she refuses to allow carers to bathe her. For Gunaratnam (2013), Maxine and her carers alike recognise the way that histories of racism can have such an impact on how a dying body cares for itself through a range of responses from paranoia to twinkles. Cycles then also bring in the complex, nested relationalities that shape our experiences of care-giving and care-receiving.

Third, care cycles as knowledge grows, contracts or stands still as we learn more about how particular techniques of care do or provide care. Scholars of knowledge networks have taught us how expertise is developed through interaction and adaption (Cloatre 2013). Knowledge crosses professional and jurisdictional boundaries as those in need of drugs or treatment find out how access works. In the process, methods of knowing become more about experimentation along the way, and less about application or implementation of pre-existing knowledge and understanding. Care cycles as knowledge of the interactions between people and things become embedded in the apparatuses and techniques of care. Thinking about information and knowledge as an aspect of care cycles allows for a deeper appreciation of the diverse ways in which stories and objects carry care information. The chapters in this collection tell us about the many different ways in which care does care, as it builds relationality, watches for calls for assistance or withdrawal, and gets on with the business of looking after bodies. Methods of doing care critically, like networked methods of knowledge generation, can show a similar commitment to the unevenness of care, to the care labour of those who have gone before and to the care-ful imaginations of those around us.

As editors we offer cycles of care as a deliberately tentative frame, which learns from the contributory chapters as it considers steps for building a care-ful critique of existing approaches. We do not propose cycles as a theoretical framework which is applied and developed by each of the chapters to this volume. Neither do we propose it as an approach which transcends, or is better than, previous approaches to care. Rather, with cycles we want to signal a dialogic and open (Valverde 2015) engagement with that which has gone before, with that which is contained herein, and with that which is yet to come. In doing so we aim to build on a well-established legacy of critical race feminism (e.g. Harris 1990), which asks for tentative categories. Harris cautions we cannot escape theoretical categories, but we ought to use them in a way which presumes partial knowledge. Alongside Mol (2002), we want to find a way to avoid the multi-perspectivism which leaves the object singular and alone. Research into care misses too much if it treats care as something that is already known. For us, cycles of care capture the multi-dimensionality, diversity and movement of care, while acknowledging that care will take particular shapes, speeds and paces. Care practices ‘hang together somehow’ as cycles move, pick some people and things up, and leave others down.
About the book

The fourteen contributions that follow are not organised into parts or sections, because the ways that concepts, locations and experiences of care run through these chapters defy such easy categorisation. We could have arranged the chapters by focusing on the types of care labour discussed (kinship care, elder care, health care, social care) or the scholarly approach taken (conceptual, doctrinal, empirical), or thematically by focusing on particular concepts or ideas (relationality, spatiality, rights). Instead, these contributions are loosely grouped to provide a narrative journey through the multiple ways that care is valued and revalued, practiced and provided, made public and hidden. In approaching the contributions to the collection in the order we have chosen, we hope that our readers will gain a sense of the various conversations and connections that emerged from discussions across and between the ReValuing Care network activities.

To begin the collection, Ruth Fletcher (Chapter 2) offers an account of the negotiation of strangeness as an aspect of feminist activist care in the context of abortion travel and support networks between Ireland and the UK. Drawing on close readings of two interviews with past coordinators of ESCORT, a Liverpool-based abortion support group catering for Irish women, Fletcher interrogates the different work that ‘strangeness’ does in the context of abortion travel. She argues that negotiating strangeness is a key dimension of the timespace of abortion travel, though not always a negative element. Conceptually it bridges the displacement and ‘out-of-place-ness’ of the experience of abortion travel through the provision of home-like resources, with support and facilitation in strange places generating care and connection. In Chapter 3, Abigail Baim-Lance takes us on an ethnographic journey to South Africa to explore the ways that home and community volunteers support people living with (and dying from) HIV/AIDS. Baim-Lance explores the potentialities and limitations of community care projects set up through charitable funding, but which carry on without financial resources. She demonstrates the ways that care-givers and care-receivers work together with the things of care (medications, hospitals, clinics, traditional beliefs and remedies) to care with as an alternative to caring for, and to taking care of, to argue not only for better resources, but also for better support for the creative, relational responses that are generated by need.

In Chapter 4, we travel back to the UK to explore the ways that charitable, community provision of care for homeless people is constrained and controlled by spatial regulation. Caroline Hunter tells the story, through a reading of consultation documents and responses, of an attempt to ban the serving of food to homeless people outdoors in Westminster. Her analysis explores the complex interconnections of local authorities, charitable giving and constructions of nuisance that shape the ways outdoor city landscapes become the subject of particular regulatory practices that sit on the margins of formal law. The approach engages with Blomley’s (2012) concept of police, which draws on particular rationalities of shaping and preventing negative behaviours. In Hunter’s contribution, she demonstrates
how the threat of a bye-law was enough to police the provision of care to homeless people through soup kitchens and other outdoor food provision services, moving the provision indoors, to private locations.

In Chapter 5, Jenny Baker, Margaret Allen and Maureen Dyer offer a story of their own journeys, and those of others they interviewed, towards social activism in the Australian context. They consider the pain of the injuries of class, race and gender in terms of bell hooks’ view that attending to this pain enables the development of resistance and wanting to produce social change. In this context, social activism is reconceived as a form of care, in that social activism involves caring about how society is structured, about how it impacts upon people and about how to ensure that new generations do not suffer the same injuries. Their reflections on their journeys into and through academia, and the ways that their social caring shaped their experience across different vectors of their professional and personal lives, remind us all that how we engage in and with our research requires attentiveness and care. Lester Watson, in Chapter 6, maintains this reflexive focus, offering us another way in which care shapes methodological concerns. He offers an operationalisation of care, informing a research method to engage with and address the methodological challenges of research with young carers. Instead of constructing young carers as victims, as he argues has often been the case in research into the experiences of caring whilst young, he argues that the use of a collaborative research methodology allows attentiveness to the self-constructions of young carers, and injects positivity and engagement into the research process in a way that is responsive to the complex interrelationships between researcher and researched.

Our journey through cycles of care continues in Chapter 7 with a contribution from Helen Carr, in which she argues that understanding homeless people and their pets as ‘actants of care’ allows us to revalue care in these often marginalised relationships through shifting our gaze onto the relationality of care. Drawing on a range of published narratives of care by homeless people towards their pets, Carr extends the reach of our collection from interpersonal care and relationships, across species boundaries to provide an account of care between homeless people and their companion animals. Carr focuses on the resources animals provide to enable homeless people to resist instances of cultural misrecognition through their caring assemblages. Keeping with the multiple ways that relationality shapes care and caring, Chapter 8 from Rosie Harding takes up the challenge of exploring the conceptual links between care, relationality and supported decision-making by people with cognitive disabilities. The chapter seeks to use a relational lens to bring into focus a path through the misalignment of the English Mental Capacity Act 2005’s focus on best interest decision-making and the emphasis on supporting cognitively disabled people to make their own decisions under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Exploring two recent Court of Protection decisions, Harding seeks to bring into focus the ways that different relationalities of care (formal and informal, personal and professional) work with social and legal norms to shape the everyday experiences of people with cognitive disabilities.
In Chapter 9 from Alice Margaria we consider the ways that international human rights norms influence care and caring. Margaria offers an analysis of European Human Rights jurisprudence on parental leave. She interrogates the persistence of the male-breadwinner/female-homemaker dualism within European Court of Human Rights jurisprudence, to evaluate the possibilities of using the ECHR as a means of challenging gender stereotypes in parental care-giving. Her conclusion, that there is a renewed eagerness from the European Court of Human Rights to challenge gender role stereotypes in relation to child care, offers a hopeful vision for the continuing emancipatory potential of international human rights instruments.

The next two chapters continue with investigations of formal legal responses to caring. Ann Stewart (Chapter 10) explores the emergence of the carer as a legal subject, and the consequent recasting of care away from altruistic constructions of the naturalness of familial, unpaid care, towards a claim for compensation for losses associated with social and economic exclusion in contemporary society, where everyone is expected to find value through economically productive activity. Olivia Smith (Chapter 11) provides a nuanced analysis of the possibilities and challenges facing the redrafting of the Irish constitution to provide ‘a reasonable level of support’ for carers. Smith demonstrates that rather than focusing on the reconciliation of care with labour market participation, the Convention on the Constitution appeared to re-embed state-supported caring within a privatised domestic sphere, even as it expanded beyond a specifically gendered homemaker/breadwinner dichotomy.

In Chapter 12, we shift from legal regulation of caring towards social experiences of family, kinship and caring. Clare Bartholomaeus and Damien Riggs provide an empirically grounded analysis of the ways ‘family’ is constructed and understood in the context of different approaches to family formation. Their empirical research includes representatives of families formed through adoption, foster care, commercial surrogacy and giving birth following reproductive heterosex. This dataset provides fertile ground for exploring the ways that meanings given to ‘family’ shape what it means to care, to be in an intimate relationship, and how these different meanings are shaped by normative demands that proliferate about what family means and does. In Chapter 13, Elizabeth Peel explores kinship care in a different context, where kinship relations are turned around and care-giver becomes care-recipient, and the previous recipient of care becomes the party providing care. Peel analyses discourse from focus groups and interviews that uncovers the complexities and challenges of caring for a parent with dementia that fracture or reconfigure normative familial relationships. She explores accounts of sibling conflict and collaboration, as well as discourses of parentification and infantalisation, while considering how these caring dynamics are mediated by gender, social class and locus of care (quotidian or remote). Caring for a parent living with dementia can generate particular issues for adult children that trouble notions of how we understand familial roles, responsibilities and ‘duties’.
We stay with concerns around elder care for the final empirical chapter in the collection. In Chapter 14, Sue Westwood interrogates the concerns that older lesbians and gay men have about the ways that care spaces reproduce heteronormativity and heterosexism and heighten affective inequalities. In the provision of personal care in residential settings for older people, the intersection of age, gender and sexuality is crucially important. This chapter investigates the intersectional politics of personal care by focusing upon how older lesbians and gay men experience the heteronormative gaze in residential health care contexts.

We close the collection with a chapter from Chris Beasley (Chapter 15) which reflects back on the literatures and concepts that have been implicated in many of the contributions to the ReValuing Care network and in this book. Beasley interrogates both the potential and limits of care as a feminist response to social developments around individualisation, and the potentially problematic ways that ideas of altruism and charity are embedded in many feminist conceptual approaches to care. In response, she offers ‘social flesh’ as an alternative conceptual means of constructing social interconnection through embodied intimacy to inform scholarship, policy and institutional care.

Notes

1 Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) from 2012–14 [grant number AH/J008516].
3 The benefit cap reduces the total amount that a person can receive in welfare payments to below £350 per week for single adults, or below £500 for couples and single parents with resident children (HM Government 2016).

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