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## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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# Affects of policy design: The case of young carers in the Care Act 2014 and the Children and Families Act 2014

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**Abstract**

This article presents an analysis of policies on young carers in England, considering both the design but also the lived experience of policy subjects. Drawing on affect theory we can increase understanding of the reach of these policies into family life and the nature of English policy-making focussed on this group. This analytic framework presents the opportunity to draw on the use of affect theory developed in other disciplines but less so in the discipline of social policy. The article argues, firstly, that normative messages through policy design are conveyed to families through affects. Secondly, it argues that hierarchies of subject positions established within policy design are reaching and impacting on young carers and their families through affective pressures. This article demonstrates that affect theory contributes to the analysis of social policies on young carers and also illuminates the impacts of policies in the context of limited formal implementation.

**KEYWORDS**

affect, care work, disability, family, young carers

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

This article explores the current state of policies in England that address children's unpaid care work in family relationships. These policies are intended to prevent or intervene in the instances of children undertaking care work that

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have a negative impact on wellbeing. The available evidence suggests that the reach and impact of these policies in terms of those aims is limited across the population of children identified as young carers (Children's Commissioner, 2016; Vizard, Burchardt, Obolenskaya, Shutes, & Battaglini, 2018). The aim of the article is to develop a framework to investigate the disconnection in this particular case between policy aims and the lived experience of the policy. To develop this framework, the article draws on affect theory and defines affect as the bodily sensations that locate us in the social world. It argues that by examining the affects of policy subject hierarchies, the interpretation of norms and policy knowledge production through ethnographic data on care and family life, we can better understand the construction and consequences of policies for young carers. Drawing on affect theory we can increase understanding of the reach of these policies into family life and the nature of English policy-making focussed on this group. This presents the opportunity to draw on the use of affect theory developed in other disciplines but less so in the discipline of social policy (Newman, 2012).

The policies to be discussed are the culmination of several decades in which children's unpaid care work gained increasingly formalised recognition through the conceptualisation of their role as young carers. Thereafter young carers have become established as subjects of policy-making and greater attention has been paid to their situation and prospects. Compared with children not classified as such, young carers face disadvantage in terms of poverty rates (Vizard et al., 2018), educational progression (Sempik & Becker, 2013, 2014b; Children's Society, 2013), physical and mental health (Alexander, 2016), interaction with the labour market as young adults (Becker & Becker, 2008; Sempik & Becker, 2014a) and access to opportunities for leisure and social activities (Sempik & Becker, 2013). Two pieces of legislation, the Care Act 2014 and the Children and Families Act 2014 included sections on the rights of young carers and the duties for local governments to act to address their needs. There is little evidence from research exploring whether families' allocation of care work to children has changed as a result or if any changes are contributing to more positive experiences for children and their families indicating a disconnection between policy aims and the lived experience of the policy. This is explored through an affect theory-informed approach and the analysis of data from an ethnographic study focussing on the family life of young carers and the organisation of care in their homes.

Affect theory initiates useful discussions about the connections between the creation of policy knowledge, policy-making, implementation and the lived experience of policy subjectivities. An introduction to affect theory is provided in this article, along with a review of literature which shows existing application of ideas about emotions, feelings, inter-personal connections and affect. The article analyses affective links between policy-making and lived experience despite questions about the limitations of policy implementation and reach.

## 2 | POLICIES ON YOUNG CARERS IN ENGLAND

Policies on young carers have progressed towards greater levels of ambition and have brought together disparate pieces of legislation and policy-making. In 2014 two pieces of English legislation<sup>1</sup> gave young carers simpler and stronger rights to identification, assessment of need and provision of support, based on their status as providing unpaid care for a family member or planning to do so. The Children and Families Act 2014 amended the Children's Act 1989 to incorporate young carers as more substantial beneficiaries of this framework of child protection and social care provision. Alongside the Children and Families Act 2014, the Care Act 2014 updated social care legislation, expanding the rights of carers, including young carers and young adult carers. The approach to young carers in these pieces of legislation was designed to connect to one another in terms of provision for this group and it compares favourably to previous legislation for this group. Alongside a clearer recognition of young carers as a group needing measures in place to address their needs, the national legislation created obligations for local authorities to act in a number of ways that increased their level of responsibility for this group. For example, as of 2015 Local Authorities are required to identify young carers and assess their needs. They were also given the power to provide services to family members with care needs where this can be used as a measure to act on the findings of a young carer's needs assessment. The legislation goes beyond mere recognition of young carers as a distinct group to, in

theory, initiate actions that bring children as young carers to the attention of authorities in a bid to incorporate them into repertoires of service provision. It also stipulates a duty for local authorities to stop or prevent children participating in a young carer role that has a negative impact on their wellbeing.

This approach builds on the positive account of young carer service provision (Cheesbrough, Harding, Webster, Taylor, & Aldridge, 2017), incorporating this approach into a local authority-funded national service and encouraging its expansion. For those children that are connected to local provision there is evidence of positive experiences of engaging with those services although not uniformly. Some local services, usually run by voluntary sector organisations, are reported to be valued by young carers and their families (Butler & Astbury, 2006; Cheesbrough et al., 2017; Sempik & Becker, 2013). These services give families recognition, facilitate access to leisure activities and advocate on their behalf for access to financial and practical help associated with social care. Early indications are that the new policy framework builds on and embeds these networks of support services in local government provision.

However, there are indications that these positive reports may obscure unequal experiences of benefitting from this provision. A study of LGBTQ young adult carers found that they showed worse outcomes than other young people or non-LGBTQ young adult carers (Traynor, 2016), suggesting that services would need to be designed to respond to higher levels of mental health needs amongst LGBTQ young adult carers. Research from earlier phases of young carer policy implementation commented on the impact of inequalities on young carers and these remain unaddressed. For example, one study found that working class and Black and minority ethnic families do not feel that the specialist young carers' organisations serve them well or recognise their circumstances (Jones, Jeyasingham, & Rajasooriya, 2002). Research with disabled parents and critiques of the young carer service design from a disability rights perspective points to the ways that these services can undermine disabled people's parental role (Keith & Morris, 1995; Olsen & Clarke, 2003; Prilleltensky, 2004). In summary, there is a mixed picture of experiences of young carers' services. While they are valued by many young carers and their families, there are indications that incorporating research on young people with caring roles from different circumstances, backgrounds and identities would give a more mixed picture of the provision for young carers.

There is very limited research on whether young carers as a whole or particular groups of young carers are now in the position of being less likely to have their wellbeing affected by their caring role or to be the recipients of local authority action in line with the legal duties in the Care Act 2014 and the Children and Families Act 2014 (Aldridge, 2018; Joseph, Sempik, Leu, & Becker, 2019).

Policies on young carers are for the most part associated with programmes and initiatives to raise awareness of the presence of this group, which can be read as part of the politics of policy and category setting (Béland & Schlager, 2019; Schneider & Ingram, 2019). Public policies on young carers aim to contribute to greater awareness of young carers so that people are responsive to this group in more constructive ways. There are specific initiatives, such as identification guides for local authorities to classify young carers in line with the Children and Families Act 2014, intended to improve the approaches that local government uses to find instances of children involved in unpaid care (Carers Trust & NatCen, 2019). Government statements echo the messages from researchers and campaigners that young carers should be better understood and more frequently recognised as carers, for example, in the ministerial statements in support of awareness-raising activities in 2017 (Mowat, 2017).

A few studies indicate that the more interventionist provision for young carers, beyond awareness raising, is reaching only a small number of the intended population. The evidence for positive impact is not strong. Children in England who are young carers are unlikely to be receiving services that significantly alter their care activities (Cheesbrough et al., 2017; Children's Commissioner, 2016). Their family members with care needs, likewise, will be unlikely to receive sufficient publicly provided care (Brimblecombe, Pickard, King, & Knapp, 2017; Burchardt, Jones, & Obolenskaya, 2018) and their families are increasingly exposed to poverty through worsening welfare provision (Vizard et al., 2018). From the evidence available it does not appear that these social policies are showing themselves to be effective in preventing and reducing instances of young caring in the current welfare and public service context.

There is also scope to contextualise this account of policy design by commenting on implementation, taking place during local provision retrenchment and the intensification of austerity. These services are embedded in and

strongly connected to children's services, adult social care and youth services which are heavily impacted by austerity. The young people identified as young carers are intimately connected to family members facing reduced social security payments and sharing the experience of poor housing (Ryan, 2019; Vizard et al., 2018). This is significant when the delivery of services has been intensified in relation to other areas of policy-making but there is an indication of little action in relation to provision for young carers. Theorising this connection or disconnection between policy-design and the lived experience of young carers and their family calls for an approach that can interpret and interrogate the significance of a kind of passive policy-making with hard-to-grasp impacts.

### 3 | AFFECT THEORY

Affect theory is a wide-ranging and growing field that advocates attention to affects. Using affect theory we can explore the operations of emotions, feelings and their interactions, challenging a tendency to overlook these experiences and their significance. Relevant to this article, these features may be otherwise overlooked in our analysis of policy (Anderson, 2017; Newman, 2017). The use of affect theory is often allied to a critique of the privileging of cognitive function over attention to emotional life (Anderson, 2013; Barbalet, 1998). This realm of study takes inspiration from poststructuralism, the linguistic turn, feminist and queer studies (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010). It 'brings the dramatic and the everyday back into social analysis' (Wetherell, 2012, p. 2) urging us to recognise the intensity of feeling that exists in social interactions (Stewart, 2007).

By using the term affect, this article is referring to the bodily sensations that locate us in the social world, or, as Wetherall defines it, 'embodied meaning-making' (2012, p. 4). Affects are our reactions to the people, objects and the environment. They are the expressions that communicate one person's presence, and the mode of that presence, to someone else through emotions, feelings and moods (Markwica, 2018). Different types of affect have their own histories and are distinct ways that people live with culturally informed contact (Anderson, 2014; Blackman, 2012; Sedgwick, 2003). However, the inequalities and power relations that are recognised in the analysis of our emotional lives (Ahmed, 2014) are not consistently represented in work in the area of affect theory. It has been criticised for universalising tendencies, which disregard the operation of these inequalities and the historical specificity of such experiences (Tolia-Kelly, 2006). Its expansiveness is a powerful and radical element of its application but can risk imprecision and frustrate our efforts to define it methodologically (Anderson, 2013; Newman, 2012).

Affect theory is nevertheless useful for the way it poses new and insightful questions into the operation of policies. As a broader category than emotions, a focus on affect can encourage us to analyse the indirect relations that are formed through policy design, implementation and lived experiences, for example, between the bureaucrat and the young carer distanced by geography, time and lived experience. It offers new perspectives on the ways that policies can be imagined, drafted and have an impact on people's lives through 'embodied meaning-making', when efforts at implementation are weak or not effective. It addresses the power of policies in a world of non-implementation and action at a distance. Emotions are part of this picture but are not as well placed to guide an analysis of this landscape of policy relations.

This article draws on affect theory in order to interpret and interrogate the connection between policy design and the lived experience of young carers and their families in the UK. The implementation gap, suggested by the evidence of lack of delivery of this policy, is explored through the analysis of data from an ethnographic study of families being impacted by the policy. Affect theory informs an approach for understanding policy design and lived experience across what appears to be an implementation gap.

### 4 | RECOGNITION OF AFFECT IN SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH

While there has been limited engagement with affect theory in the discipline of social policy, other areas of the social sciences have developed the analysis of affect and theorised the appearance and reception of emotions in the social

world (Newman, 2012). There is an opportunity to draw together these strands of affect-informed work in social policy to recognise and build on this developing area of theorisation and analysis.

The first strand of attention to affect is in research exploring the use of social categories. In policy-making, the categories of people under consideration shape the way we understand the possibilities for a project of social change, encouraging or silencing affects in that historical context (Steedman, 1990). Particular policy subjects, such as children, have a symbolic status and operate as affective categories, in ways that are constructed differently at particular historical moments (Olsen, 2000; Redmond, 2010). When exploring affects through research we may also find that the categorisation of people shapes the research endeavour (Danneris & Herup Nielsen, 2018; White, 2017) or are constrained by working within the mode of text (Tolia-Kelly, 2006). Affects are something we may seek to capture for analysis but also shape the terms of analysis itself.

Social policy research recognises the ways that people are grouped and formalised in policy categories. For example, they can be seen as having different affects as deserving or undeserving. Different types of bodies are afforded different emotional responses (Ahmed, 2014; Berlant, 1997) so a subject's affects on the person designing or implementing policies are different depending on the ways that categories are constructed and applied. In the social policy literature this has been studied as a politicisation of categories (Béland & Schlager, 2019) and the psychosocial dimension of policies (Froggett, 2002; Hoggett & Thompson, 2012). There is interest in that way that the 'emotional and symbolic impacts' of categories appears in policy-making (Schneider & Ingram, 2019, p. 229).

A second strand in which we find greater recognition of affect is the literature on the lived experience of being a policy subject. For example, the literature explores embodied meaning-making such as loss and anxiety (McKee, Soaita, & Hoolachan, 2019), shame (Garthwaite, 2016; Gibson, 2015) and hope (Jupp, 2017). In exploring people's experiences as the recipients of policy delivery and policy-design we can develop more systematic attention to affect in particular contexts (McIntosh & Wright, 2018). The expressions of policy-making, its implementation and people's lived encounters with the outcomes of that process may be found in data that represents feelings and embodied meaning-making.

The affects of categorisation and the affects of the lived experience of policy subjects are considered in the analysis presented in this article. Together they allow connections to be drawn between policy-design and the ways it is experienced in the case of young carers and their families in England.

## 5 | METHODOLOGY

To analyse the role of affect on policies relating to young carers, this article draws on a qualitative study into the ways that policies impacted on the family life of young carers, forged by an affective connection between policy design and lived experience. The study was designed to explore the way that the 'private' space of the family home was being reached by policies that intended to alter domestic care arrangements in order to address concerns amongst advocacy groups and policy-makers in national and local government that children's participation in unpaid care work had a negative impact on their wellbeing and was being left unresolved. The study used an ethnographic approach and gathered qualitative data in researcher fieldnotes and participants' drawings. This provided rich data that could represent family life and its shifts over time, as experienced by young carers and their families.

The small sample of families enabled the study to collect in-depth longitudinal data, sacrificing breadth and generalisability for the intensity required to achieve the necessary quality of ethnographic data. The ethnographic methodology was particularly suitable for the study of the complexity and change represented by family life (Gabb, 2008; Hall, 2019). One researcher carried out fieldwork for 9 months, with repeated visits to family homes to participate in conversations, family activities and to learn about the ways that care was organised and sustained. The families provided the basis for studying care practices and their shaping by policies in the West Midlands region in England. Five families participated in the full study and were available for 46 visits in total. They represented a mix of social locations, providing a rich picture of the different ways that young carers and their families lived through categories of social difference. Each of the families included at least one child who accessed services as a young

carer, and was contacted with the assistance of a local young carers project that knew the child and the family. Data were analysed in response to empirical questions about care organisation within each family and the nature of policy presence. In addition, themes were developed to build a picture of the intersectionality of family life for young carers across the participating families. The analysis presented here draws out elements from across those themes to explore the ways that affects are part of the picture of policy presence.

The research design incorporated several elements intended to reflect ethical concerns. Volunteering regularly at young carers youth clubs was undertaken to share information about the project, giving children information in advance. This was an approach informed by Lareau (2011) intended to support children's informed engagement with the question of whether to join the study. Each family participated in discussions with the researcher to set the boundaries of the study and express their preferences for how the data collection would be conducted. The research methods were adapted as the study progressed, particularly to increase the influence of children on the research process, for example, with trips out of the house to get meals or for the family to undertake leisure activities such as cycle rides. Participants chose pseudonyms and some details have been removed to increase anonymity.

The use of participant observation and visual ethnography in the study of young carers is a distinctive feature of the empirical data, providing a complex set of perspectives that are verbal and analytical but also relational, sensory and affective. It is a method well suited to providing data on affects (Gibson, 2015; Newman, 2012). The data is presented as fieldnotes, providing additional context to participants' words and actions and reflecting on the role of the researcher in the production of the data. This included sight on the shifting arrangements of care, the re-negotiations of these arrangements and the referencing of policies as prompts for accessing support or restraining the use of family resources. The research created a record of one-to-one conversations, small family groups sharing some time and the moments when the whole family came together.

Existing research on young carers does not routinely give extensive insight into the processes, relationships and experiences of people in families. There are some exceptions (Aeyelts, Marshall, Grant, & Young, 2016; Becker, Aldridge, & Dearden, 1998; Jones et al., 2002; Meltzer, 2017) but the literature is dominated by individualised account of the young carer experience, detached from the institutional or domestic context in which this identity is reproduced. The lack of research on family experiences coincides with the development of policies that intensify the involvement of public bodies in family life.

## 6 | FINDINGS ON THE NORMATIVE MESSAGES OF POLICY DESIGN

The ethnographic study found that material or practical interventions were limited in the impact on children's care role but there were other ways in policies were significant for young carers and their families. Intensive research with families found affective impacts of policies on understandings of care and on beliefs about who should carry out care work. A theme running through the discussions about normative messages of care was about disabled motherhood and the assertion of a caring identity. An initial example comes from the family of XD, who lived with his mother. His mother, Tizzy, had experienced mental illness and had been supported by social services. Fieldnotes recorded Tizzy's memory of that intervention.

### Fieldnotes 16/7/18

She explained that 'people do not understand your situation. They want you to take your child to school and you are not able. They say you are neglecting your child but that is not your wish. Social services were coming in. They want to check. They want to see if you have enough food. They want to see if you are caring. All those threats. If you are not doing A B C D your child will be taken away. Then who will help you get by? You are not well yourself. It turned out to be good because they saw that taking XD away would not be in the best interests. They have seen that you are trying your best.

You just need some support. That is where [the young carers service] come in. Also counselling. There was counselling with XD alone at school and other counselling too.'

Tizzy saw clearly how much she needed her son's help and expressed relief that the reaction from social services had been to support them as a family rather than split them apart. The interactions impressed upon Tizzy that the norms of childhood required changes in the family arrangements, so that XD was more exclusively the recipient of care. The state of their family life at that time was incompatible with the norms of children being shielded from adult responsibilities that are established in the English context and are strongly affective (Bibby & Becker, 2005; O'Dell, Crafter, de Abreu, & Cline, 2010).

Policies do not recognise the importance of this conflicted position for disabled parents but are, at the same time, intensifying the ways it is experienced. The norms of parenthood are marginal to policy discussions on young carers. There is a lack of consideration for the potential for parenthood that can be normatively understood as compatible with receiving care from a child. The policies are not associated with measures to resolve the position of parents who receive care from their child. For example, it is ambiguous whether parents in England have a right to refuse interventions from local authorities that are delivered to their children as young carers under the Children and Families Act 2014. The policies continue in a tradition of developing the position of young carers so that there is a redefinition of care as an area of work in which children should be accepted as participants on certain terms and supported within that role. However, the receipt of care work from a child remains socially censored.

Expressions of the conflicted and powerful feelings of disabled parents in the face of assumptions about their relationship to care are conveyed in participants' representation of family relationships. This contests the dismissal of disabled parenthood (Olsen & Clarke, 2003) and speaks to the need to counter messages that undermine parental status in the presence of an association between disability and caring relationships with children. Another mother that took part in the study shared her feelings about her characterisation as a mother in response to a question about the way she allocated space in her home. Marie, a mother of two boys who were both classified as young carers made clear how strongly she felt the responsibilities of motherhood even though it was difficult at times to look after her own health or manage the domestic work. She normally spoke lightly and made a joke about the struggles of providing for her sons but in response to a question about whether she got fed up with her sons' toys spilling across the rooms of the house she said, firmly, *"I never forget that I am a mum first,"* but also said sometimes [she] wants *"to feel like she is also herself"*. (Fieldnotes 26/4/18). Marie asserted the primacy of her parental role, despite the challenges of representing this alongside her children's involvement in care and domestic work.

While Marie's family did not receive services that gave them choices about the ways they organised care work and the extent of children's involvement, she, like other disabled mothers, was aware of the expectations that these forms of care should be changing. Young carers and disabled family members are placed in the position of embodying tensions in cultural understandings of child, parent, disabled person and carer. These problematic subject positions were found in studies that took place before policies offered a response to the group labelled as young carers. Those early studies on young carers identified feelings of invisibility and exclusion (Jenkins & Wingate, 1994). However, the policy arrangements have created systems that scrutinise care practices in new ways. Alongside elements of policies that activate social agencies in order to change the ways that children are involved in care, there have been efforts to alleviate young carers experience of inhabiting problematic subject positions through the project of awareness raising, for example, annual Young Carers Awareness Day organised in England. This focusses on children rather than their parents or siblings to be the focus of such initiatives, obscuring the relationships involved and the collective experience of care. This analysis finds that subjects of policies feel the impact of policy designs affectively, in part through the communication of normative ideas. Interactions with teachers, social workers, young carers project workers and others convey norms about children's relationship to care work and the affects associated with going against those norms. It challenges the invisibility of subject positions in policy design, in this case, disabled parents.

Current policies on young carers are engaged in a process of shifting norms about carer status and the different ways a carer will be presented and responding to if they are an adult, a young adult or a child (aged between 17 and



4 as specified in the Children and Families Act 2014). In 2013 the written statement to Parliament by Michael Gove, then the Secretary of State for Education, stated that legislative change was necessary to address concerns about young carers because while the local government had shown an interest in adopting the proposed approach, 'change has been slow' (Gove, 2013). There has been progress in embedding young carers in the cultural understanding of the figure of the carer (O'Dell et al., 2010). Children and young adults are established as a sub-category of the carer population, for example, in England, in the Carers Action Plan 2018–2020. The policy category of carer formalises a relationship between those involved in particular care practices and the state, which is moderating, restricting or supporting these relationships (Barnes, 2001). Embedding young carers in policy instruments has institutionalised knowledge of children as carers across a range of policy-making settings (Bibby & Becker, 2005). However, the incompleteness of policies, delivered in the context of austerity and service rationing means that studying the impact of these policies requires different ways of conceptualising the link between policy design and the lived experience.

Unlike the shifts in defining the relationship between carer status and childhood, other potential projects for shifting norms have been less favoured. So, policies do not consider ways to establish parents as legitimate beneficiaries of children's care labour (Alber, 2003; Olsen, 1996). Also left unchanged is the attitude towards care as a low-status practice that people do not choose, therefore being something done by those with no choice. This reflects the characterisation of care work as a feminised activity or one associated with Black or racialised bodies (Fog Olwig, 2018; Yeandle, Chou, Fine, Larkin, & Milne, 2017). While policies are unclear in their ability to achieve the more material changes that they explicitly aim for, family members continue to care for one another and negotiate these normative contradictions. Children can continue to be identified with the category of carer, although this triggers assessment and potentially offers of services. Meanwhile care recipients are stigmatised, questioned for whether they are transgressing expectations of their role by receiving care, and being a young carer can be experienced as a difficult label.

## 7 | FINDINGS ON SUBJECT HIERARCHIES

The second application of affect theory in the analysis of the ethnographic data is to consider the hierarchical relationship between subject positions. An example of the way that this process reached families comes from Sapphire's family. Sapphire and her mother, father, brother and sister participated in the study for 9 months. They understood Sapphire to be a young carer, assisting her disabled father and also playing a part in the support for her siblings who each struggled with school. Her sister, Jane, had special needs in school, having a period of severe ill health a few years before, which affected her mobility and made learning in the school environment difficult. Sapphire's brother, Luke, who was autistic, felt ostracised at school and longed to be able to head out on his bike. He suffered through school terms and celebrated exuberantly when the holidays arrived. The family struggled to meet their financial needs. They were facing a reduction in Personalised Independent Payment that had been a significant source of income, received as a welfare payment allocated to Sapphire's father because of his disability.

The family accessed a support service for Sapphire because of her young carer status. They showed awareness of the significance of this status for Sapphire herself and as a way of giving shape to their understanding of the care arrangements. However, the young carers service did not provide scope for the family to reduce Sapphire's role as a young carer, nor did other services contribute towards such a change. Instead the result of the young carers provision for this family, as for all the other families studied, was a heightened recognition of care as seen through the young carer lens without the provision that suggested ways that this problematised care arrangement could or should change.

The family distinguished between Sapphire as a young carer and other family members, her siblings and her father, as care recipients. This distinction was echoed by their relationship to support services. There were no services that they were in contact with addressing the role of Sapphire's siblings, Jane and Luke, in providing care. The environment around Sapphire's family polarised the roles of carers and disabled family members and this was the framework in which the family understood that they should operate in order to access some kind of support.

Sapphire, the child labelled a young carer in this family, sought to make sense of the world with frequent reference to the labels and categories that differentiated between people, for example, she frequently commented on whether a peer's behaviour was typical of a girl or was like that expected of a boy. With her siblings she understood them as gendered but also as explicable through their disabilities, which her older sister, Jane, contested. Both Jane and Luke expressed the idea of themselves as being disabled at some points within family conversations but Jane was troubled when her siblings referred to her in those terms.

#### Fieldnotes 4/6/18

'Jane said that she "used to be disabled." Luke said that she "still" is disabled. Sapphire said that the wheelchair is still in the garage but she does not use it.'

The contestation over these categories, centred on the rejection of disability, rather than about Sapphire's status as a young carer. The activities of care were less frequently mentioned, although they were observed and relied upon. The children showed caution about taking on the label of being disabled, indicating that it posed more problems for the bearer of that identity.

The disagreements between these siblings about the label of being disabled showed that something important was at stake. They accepted the idea of their sister as a young carer. For example, in the first meeting with the family, Luke explained that he was motivated to join in the research because he wanted to support young carers like his sister, Sapphire. However, Jane and Luke were uncertain about or resistant to the implication that they were the disabled relatives that she was a carer to. In school and at home their status as being disabled or having special needs were associated with feelings of isolation, rejection and frustration. Disability carried affective consequences and in the negotiations of domestic identity they tested out the potential to reject it. The labels from the education system, from the support services for young carers, from health professionals and social workers, although they were limited in the extent to which they provided practical or financial support, were impactful in the ways they suggested labels for family members. These siblings had a sense that to label someone as disabled or as a carer had different affective consequences and were reluctant to take on that label of disability because of its connotations, while being a young carer was for them seen as more favourable. They perceived a hierarchy in these two categories, so in their conversations there is a representation of the affect of social policies in family life.

In policies on young carers, disability is a category used to explain the need for care in contexts such as these and seen to disrupt expected patterns of care to the extent that this establishes the need for the young carer role. Disability has been understood in these discussions often through a frame of dependence (Keith & Morris, 1995; Olsen, 1996). This is given particular force by the association with young carers that 'shoulder' the needs of family members (Frank, Tatum, & Tucker, 1999). Sapphire's status as a young carer was acknowledged and a consensus was established, unlike with the family's debates about disability. These topics had different affective qualities, so the disability conversation prompted antagonism and resentment while discussions about young carers were more harmonious. Outside of the families' conversations, public sector workers or organisations commissioned by government had labelled Sapphire as a young carer. This associated her with a specialist service which the family valued. Sapphire, her brother Luke, and her parents praised the young carers services and spoke of the ways it benefitted her and them. Sapphire herself was celebrated within and outside of her family for her contribution to their collective project of care and support. However, within the family the affective consequences of having a young carer, explained by the care needs emanating from disability, were unresolved even if in practice nothing was expected to change. Sapphire's sister, Jane, was shown wanting to reject this association and its consequences for the ways she was seen, but her siblings called on her to reconcile herself to it. The categories of disabled person and carer are embedded in legislative and policy instruments, given them institutional and rhetorical status beyond policy settings (Cooper, 1998). The family were compelled to understand some members as disabled, despite the discomfort this caused.

In the selection of categories that contribute to endeavours to understand, classify and respond to young carers through policy, we can observe the development of an affective pathway. Categories and their iterations convey particular, culturally specific meanings. These do not produce individualised results. Instead we find 'collectivities of affect' (Tolia-Kelly, 2006, p. 215) where groups of people seek to make meaning and to make their sense of the intersecting inequalities impressed upon them. Social policies generate a movement towards affects by the use of subject hierarchies, with young carers given a different feeling from their support systems than disabled children, their siblings. In Sapphire's family there was a different reception to the idea of being labelled the young carer and being labelled as the disabled sibling that received care. People are interpreted through categories of social difference and as a result are not afforded the same emotional resonance (Ahmed, 2014). These different affective positions are relational, made sense of through the back and forth of relationships, with policies playing a part in the relationality of affect. In reverse, the affective lived experiences of policy subjects feed back into the affect of specific categories of people referred to in policy design processes, shaping the way we understand the possibilities for policy (Steedman, 1990). Although it is described here as a two-way process, arguably the heaviest affects are felt by those who made the subjects of policies. For young carers and their families encountering the services shaped by the Care Act 2014 and the Children and Families Act 2014, they are dealing with the affective construction of policies in their relationships, which policies have set in motion through their design and deployment of categories.

## 8 | CONCLUSION

Drawing on an intensive study of a group of families, this article presents findings on the impact of the Children and Families Act 2014 and the Care Act 2014. These pieces of legislation applying to England are not found to be altering the arrangement of care so that children are stopped or prevented from undertaking care in response to public social care provision in these cases. The legislation is still having an impact on families, however, by shaping their emotional lives and the affective significance of care work. The norms of carer status have altered in ways that ease the identification of children as young carers but a corresponding acceptance of disabled parents or disabled siblings as recipients of care is unresolved and troubled the lived experience in families. Thus, affect theory informs an analysis of the way that policies shown to be limited in implementation, are still reaching and shaping the lives of young carers and their families in significant ways. Connected categories are given hierarchical relationships in the abstract but also in the ways they are lived by young carers and their families. Affect theory has informed an analysis of the ways that categories relate to one another in policies but also in family relationships, showing the potential of this form of analysis to increase understandings of relationality in policy impacts. The article concludes that norms and hierarchies of categories are given affective significance, seen as implicit techniques of policy design. This impacts on the lives of policy subjects, calling on them to negotiate hierarchies of policy subjectivities in their family relationships and to grapple with the normative messages that may constrain or condemn them. Meanwhile implementation of intended sources of support stalls in the context of limited service delivery and austerity.

This article demonstrates that affect theory supports an approach that addresses the challenge of theorising and empirically exploring the relationships between policy design and the lived experience of policies. Affects are means by which policies travel and make their presence fully felt. It has been argued that an affect-theory informed approach to policy analysis, connected to some developing interests in this area in the discipline of social policy, can be further extended. As an emerging area of policy debate, affect theory can address the challenges of policy analysis to explore ideas of impact in the context of austerity and limited implementation, opening up new analytic possibilities.

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## ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup> The legislation, the Children and Families Act 2014 and the Care Act 2014, applies to England. Within a few years of their enactment, Wales and Scotland developed legislation that made comparable provisions for young carers and young adult carers. The legislation in Wales and Scotland was, however, connected to wider programme of youth support and health and social care provision.

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