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The Story of the Pink Cat: How Care Experienced People Navigate Inheritance

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1. Introduction

Most people would be fairly confident to answer the question: *what does inheritance mean?* They would likely answer that it involves 'passing something on' between family members. This would be understood as the distribution of assets: money, property, titles, important heirlooms or objects. In many respects, this is correct. Along with such tangible inheritance, people might also acknowledge more intangible forms of inheritance, such as genetic and cultural inheritances. But when asked: *what does inheritance mean to you?* some may struggle with relating this directly to their own experiences. This could be because they have not inherited anything in the shared understanding of passing on or receiving something. Inheritance is bound up with our heritage, our identities, our families and kinship. Whilst inheritance may be both tangible and intangible, *family* seems to be at the centre of current understandings of it. But, what if you are estranged from family? How does inheritance play out then?

Care experience is the preferred term used to describe people who spent some or all of their childhoods in the care of a Local Authority, whether that be foster care, children's homes, residential care or kinship care. As Monk suggests, for 'those whose lives have been lived outside of traditional familial norms' - such as those with care experience, as we argue in this chapter – 'inheritance takes on an added significance, partly because their lives are invisible in intestacy laws, which remain firmly rooted in blood and marital status'.[1] Families with care experience are largely missing from inheritance research and narratives, yet care xperienced families have been engaging in inheritance practices for centuries. We know from the Foundling Token exhibition, that between 'the 1740s and 1760s, mothers leaving their babies at the Foundling Hospital would also leave a small object as a means of identification. The hope was that they would one day be able to reclaim their child'.[2] This ritual was a way of 'doing' and 'displaying' family, of sharing love and creating connection between mother

[1] Monk (2014) 24.
[2] See the Foundling Museums Token exhibition: https://foundlingmuseum.org.uk/our-art-and-objects/foundling-collections/tokens/

and child. Inheritance for care experienced people is firmly rooted to the journey of finding out who they are.

This chapter sets out to interrogate the practice(s) of inheritance from the viewpoint of families with care experience, with the aim of instigating further research and for inheritance to be acknowledged in policy. Drawing on sociological theories of 'family practices'[3] this chapter will first discuss what is known about inheritance and care experience. It will then discuss the novel ways inheritance is practiced within care experienced families, to show the ways that such families are (un)made and remade. Using our own examples as a care experienced person (Rosie) and the daughter of a care experienced mother (Delyth), we consider what is inherited, such as stories and identities through storytelling and the possession and creation of material objects of significance. In fact, the title of this chapter comes from Rosie's Pink Cat, a story that Rosie shares later in this chapter which exemplifies the creativity of inheritance for care experienced families. We wanted to explore the ways that other care experienced people negotiate inheritance, so we reached out to ask others about their inheritance practices. Through the medium of Twitter and Facebook, we asked[4] the care experienced community and our friends to share with us what inheritance means to them. What we have found is that care experienced people have actively had to fight unjust systems to get access to parts of their inheritance that have been hidden from them, lost or are simply the unknowns and absences that remain. Access to one's care file is a well-known example of care experienced people trying to know their inheritance. A care file is a record that is kept by the Local Authority or agency who is in charge of the care of a child. Although the contents of a person's file vary, this file usually contains information about the child's time in care (a record of the past) and also any information about the young person's family and their reasons for going into care. As adults, many care experienced people request access to their care files in order to find out information about their lives. Edwards has noted that the Care Leavers Association (CLA)[5] in the UK […] has found that adults who try to retrieve their files experience a number of problems, including: their files being lost or damaged, files

[3] Morgan (2004) and (2011).

[4] In order to collate the views of other care experienced people and families, we put out a question through our individual Twitter and Facebook accounts. We asked, for those followers who are happy to share 'what does inheritance look like to you?' We had several responses to our posts and we gained consent and permission to share these stories and experiences in this chapter from those who chose to share their views with us.

[5] The CLA is a UK wider organisation run by care experienced people aimed at improving the lives of care leavers of all ages and they are are continuously fighting for the right for all care leavers to be able to access their memories.

with numerous redactions (suggesting that memories are still being managed by the institution); failures to respond to requests; people being told 'you can't have your file because it will damage you' and others being asked 'why you would even want the information' as though to suggest 'one should get over it'.[6] Therefore, we argue that inheritance has also become a site of activism for care experienced people, who campaign for fairer and socially just access to the care files that contain information about their life. Ultimately, we conclude by arguing that inheritance, in all its forms, needs to be a right for care experienced people.

2. Inheritance as a 'family practice'

Monk argues that 'inheritance, broadly understood, has long been the crux and almost the raison d'être of conventional, albeit subtly shifting, familial practices'[7] and has largely been examined through a legal lens of the processes surrounding death and the constructing and enacting of wills.[8] Sociologist David Morgan contends that a 'family practice' is a way of understanding families as what people *do* rather than as a static structure.[9] Seeing family as a practice allows us to foreground the mundane routines and habits through which we make sense of and produce and reproduce family as a set of relationships (bathing our children, making and eating dinner, celebrating Christmas are examples of such practices). To be an effective family practice, 'the actions which constitute family practices need to be linked in a sufficiently clear way with the 'wider systems of meaning' […] to enable them to be fully understood as such'. [10] Furthermore, 'an important part of the nurturing and development of relationships so that their 'family-like' qualities are positively established' is through 'displaying' as well as 'doing' family.[11] This means individuals conveying to each other and for others that their practices and 'actions do constitute 'doing family things' thereby' confirming 'that these relationships are 'family' relationships'.[12]

[6] Edwards (2017) 186.
[7] Monk (2014) 240.
[8] Monk (2016 (168).
[9] Morgan (2004 and 2011).
[10] Finch 67.
[11] Finch (2007) 80.
[12] ibid 67

Inheritance is part of this way of 'doing', 'making' and 'displaying' family. However, we have to be careful in our discussion of 'family' given the shifting meaning of what 'family' means.[13] If we accept inheritance as a 'family practice' we need to understand what family means for care experienced people and how family practice is displayed. When doing research for this chapter, we found clear and plentiful information about the rights of children who were adopted but inheritance rights for people not adopted is less straightforward.[14] For example, we found no information for adults whose care experience was in foster care or children's homes. Adoption is an inheritance topic because it is an experience embedded in what is widely understood and accepted as the 'family', whereas other experiences of care are are found to be peripheral in scholarly literature on inheritance. As Boddy[15] notes the concept of family is troubling for care experienced people. First, because it is a lived experience that traverses non-normative practices (such as having a birth and foster family that you spend time with) and normative practices (such as attending weddings or celebrating important holidays), family is something that is 'negotiated and practiced across time and in multiple (and changing) care contexts'.[16] Second, despite recognition of the shift from family to personal life, 'family' is also something that is constructed through the language used within children's social services and therefore 'remains an important concept for policy'.[17] For example, children have 'contact'[18] with or are 'reunified' with their families. This discourse around what and who constitutes as 'family' in social policy fails to account for 'the complex temporality of "family" for young people who have been in care'.[19]

In what follows, we recognise that 'family practices' are experienced very differently for children, young people, and their birth and care families. We also recognise that there needs to be further work on understanding this topic and we hope that this chapter, with its focus on inheritance as family practice, can help advance this area of research. As a 'family practice', inheritance can be a way of showing or displaying care, but it can also be a way to cut off,

[13] Smart (2007).
[14] For example the Inheritance Act was updated in 2014 to identify what 'child of the family' means and this implies that people who have been treated as a child of the family, without formally being adopted could (emphasis on could) be eligible to claim inheritance. But we were unable to find further information on this.
[15] Boddy (2019).
[16] ibid 2239.
[17] ibid 2241.
[18] Yoeli, H.; Edwards, D.; Diaz, C.; Ridley, L.; Williams, D.; Robson, M. And Young, J (2021) Family Time experiences of care experienced children and young people during the Covid-19 pandemic: A rapid scoping review [online] https://static1.squarespace.com/static/571e40539f72665367f6d2bc/t/60a3d02464e66350b0038775/1621348406263/BC-TT-LitReview-Outlined-May21.pdf
[19] Boddy (2019) 2239.

punish or abandon family members. It can bring families together or destroy families[20]. But what is missing from these socio-legal and academic discussions of inheritance and family is care experience. In the following section, we begin to explore what is known about inheritance and care experience.

3. What is known about Inheritance and Care Experience?

> When children enter the care system, many children lose their kin identity, receive a collective identity (children in care) and are identified by different labels given by professionals (reflecting the legal jargon) or by society (often reflecting stereotypes about them).[21]

In 2022 there were over 100,000 children living in care in the UK.[22] This is an all-time high.[23] Children are separated from their families for a variety of reasons including ill health of parents, loss of parent/s, neglect, or seeking asylum. Children may live with foster carers, in children's homes, in secure units, or in kinship care; and a minority of care experienced children will go on to be adopted and will obtain a new legal identity. When a child enters the care system they immediately experience the loss of family, identity, inheritance and each time they are moved, there is more loss and then a fundamental and final loss after adoption. For some, the law is used to violently (un)make families. The *Mohamed Hasan v. Norway* (2018 ECHR 27496/15) case is an example where a mother, whose children were taken into foster care because of domestic violence perpetrated by her ex-husband, had her parental rights forcibly removed when both of her children were adopted by their foster carers without her consent. This way of (un)making families happens in family courts all over the UK[24] and globally where mothers are victim-blamed and children are compulsorily adopted or the abused mother loses custody.[25]

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[20] In our small research project, we found examples of adoptive parents threatening disinheritance when their adopted children expressed the wish to legally change their surname.
[21] Neagu and Sebba (2019) 2.
[22] Gov.uk (2022), Department for Health (2022), Scottish Government (2022) and Welsh Government (2022).
[23] Thomas (2018).
[24] See Katz (2022) and Yoeli, H. and Edwards, D (2022, February 8) Contactless Time: No-touch rules hit vulnerable children and birth families where it hurt [Online] *The Sociological Review Magazine* https://doi.org/10.51428/tsr.qcam932
[25] Khaw et al (2021).

Laws which assist in the victim-blaming, punishment and (un)making of certain families who do not adhere to the normative ideology of the family set out by society have existed for centuries. The contentious relationship between care experience and inheritance in England can be traced to laws created to criminalise illegitimacy in the 1660s. Those deemed 'illegitimates' were used alongside orphan and foundling characters in novels, plays and poetry to explore social mobility, property inheritance and familial bonds of blood and affection[26]. From the eighteenth century onwards, many children in the UK and Ireland became care experienced because of their illegitimate status.[27] Discussing her historical research Gibson states that:

> [b]efore the English civil war, most unmarried parents were prosecuted for sex outside marriage by the church courts, but when the courts resumed in 1660, prosecutions declined considerably. Throughout this period illegitimacy was primarily regulated by the Old Poor Law; parish officials identified poor unmarried parents, forced mothers to name the father of their child and forced fathers to pay maintenance. All this changed under the 1834 New Poor Law, which shifted responsibility solely onto mothers and made it much more difficult to claim paternal maintenance.[28]

For illegitmate children, the rights to inheritance were severly limited[29], yet stigmatising illegitimacy throughout the nineteenth century was a way to control behaviour, particularly women's behaviour[30] and creating secrecy 'on this scale can cause considerable trauma, which can be inherited down the generations'[31]. It wasn't until the Family Law Reform Act 1987 that legal distinctions between legitimate and illegitmate children were removed.

The position of care experienced people in relation to inheritance law has not improved with the passage of time. Foster children are still considered 'strangers in law' in relation to foster parents, but not birth parents. Under the rules of intestacy, adopted children are recognised,

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[26] Gibson (2018) 24.
[27] Edwards (2017).
[28] Gibson, K (2022) Illegitimacy, Family and Stigma in England, 1660-1834 [online] https://notchesblog.com/2022/09/22/illegitimacy-family-and-stigma-in-england-1660-1834/
[29] Ibid and also see Edwards 2012.
[30] Women were sent away from their homes to give birth in secret in Mother and Baby Homes. Many of the women were coherced into giving up their babies for adoption. However, the babies of mothers with Mental Health diagnosis often weren't put up for adoption due to 'bad blood'. It was the same for babies of colour, they couldn't be put up for adoption due to racism. This was why some children, such as the author Paolo Hewitt, author Phil Frampton, Rosie and many others found themselves hidden away in the care system.
[31] ibid.

foster children are not, suggesting that the law can only comprehend one family for all purposes, failing to recognise the complexity of circumstances in which families are 'done' and 'displayed'. As we move through time, we can see that the 'system' of 'care', aided by the law in some cases, acts as a gatekeeper to inheritance for care experienced people and manages all forms of their tangible and intangible inheritance (from knowing their heritage, their name, story and even monetary rights and objects). As an institution it alters their inheritance, lies about it and as we show in the following section can be accused of holding things back.

4. Hidden Inheritance: What's been held back?

When a child is taken into the 'care system', they are immediately displaced from everything that they have known and who they ought to be. For instance, many children in care have had their birth names changed, part of their family history stolen. This is generally the case for those who are adopted but also sometimes the case for those in foster care. For example, in his memoir, *My Name Is Why*, Lemn Sissay tells the story of what happened to him as a baby in the 1960s and how he was renamed by a social worker who used his own name: Norman![32] 'Mr Goldthorpe was adamant that my name would be Norman'. The foster parents wanted to call me Mark from the Gospel of Mark, and their last name was Greenwood. My name is Norman Mark Greenwood… I am Norman Sissay in the files.'[33] Further, when Lemn was seventeen he was given information from his care files, including a birth certificate which showed his real name as well as letters from his mother that had been withheld.[34] There are many instances of items withheld from children in care such as birthday cards from birth parents and yet it is likely that a child in care would, on their birthday of all days, think of their family regardless of the circumstances and wonder if they were remembered.

In writing about *The Last Foundling*[35], an autobiography by Tom H. Mackenzie, who grew up in the Foundling Hospital in the late 1930s and 40s, Dee Michell explains that at around the age of 20, Tom set out to find his mother, Jean Upon meeting Jean (who, consequently had to adopt Tom as she had given up her parental rights when she had handed over 'Derek' (the name she had given him) as a baby to the Foundling Hospital), Tom discovered that his

[32] Sissay (2019).
[33] ibid 11.
[34] ibid.
[35] Mackenzie (2014).

maternal grandmother had sent him gifts for every birthday and Christmas, gifts he never received while in the Foundling Hospital as well as £2000 for his 21st birthday.[36]

Like Lemn and Tom, as an adult, Rosie accessed her care files and found several letters and photographs that had been held back. One particularly poignant one was from a foster mother who, on hearing Rosie was back in care, wanted to re-foster her – the photographs were Rosie as aged three and four. Prior to the ubiquity of mobile phones, it is well known that many children in care often did not have pictures of themselves as babies. Some years later, an aunt also wrote and offered to foster her. But Rosie never received these letters or photographs and we have to ask *why*? Why did social services make those decisions to keep the letters and precious photos, not share the information, and leave Rosie where she was, removing the chance for her to experience family life? The hidden inheritances of money, letters and information impacts *lived* childhood. Why didn't Lemn, Tom and Rosie receive what was rightfully theirs?

We have both heard it said in practice that holding back information is usually founded on the argument that it is done so in 'the best interests of the child', which is one of the pillars of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Witholding information about their family or life story, presents no risk of harming or re-traumatising children. Yet Articles 7 and 8 enshrine the 'importance of children's identity[37], in which every child has the right to a name, nationality, the right to know his or her parents and to preserve these inherent elements of identity'.[38] This practice is both adhering to and contradictory to the UNCRC. Although the UNCRC was ratified after Lemn, Tom and Rosie's experience, children, young people and adults wanting to access their files in the UK are still being denied access to information about who they are[39].

Withholding of information means care experienced people often have significant gaps in their stories and unanswered questions about their lives.[40] It is not just that the system of care

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[36] Michell, D (2022) 'Tom Mackenzie - the Foundling Who Exceeded Expectations' [online] http://drdee-drdeethinkingoutloud.blogspot.com/2022/02/tom-mackenzie-foundling-who-exceeded.html

[37] Unicef (n.d). Summary of the UNCRC [online] https://www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2017/01/Summary-of-the-UNCRC.pdf

[38] Neagu and Sebba (2019) 1.

[39] See the Care Leavers Association website for further information https://www.careleavers.com/what-we-do/access-to-records/

[40] Access has been made more difficult especially in today's 'suing' climate where Local Authorities who were responsible for children could remove reports/letters which deem them liable.

is guilty of stealing or hiding inheritance; withholding life history in this way is also withholding part of their heritage and their identity. Whether it is institutions, absent parents or social services doing the withholding, it affects the child's sense of self. Care experienced artist Yusuf McCormack[41] explores the visible and invisible elements of his heritage to help him to come to terms with his childhood experiences and to forge pathways for those silenced by the inheritance of care. *In Marks of an Unwanted Rainbow*, he says: 'Identity is something we all cling onto and hold dear to ourselves. It starts with your name, your ethnicity, your culture and evolves and grows with you becoming part of you [but] children coming into care usually have only their name that belongs to them so to remove that too is to strip away every aspect of who they are. The child is no longer whole'.[42]

As far as we know, there has been no other research or publication that explores inheritance from the perspective of care experienced people. There is extensive literature about the right to know about your identity[43]. But understanding these rights and this experience within the broader concept of inheritance and also *asking* care experienced people themselves what inheritance means to them is important. This is something we now explore in the remainder of this chapter.

5. Asking Care Experienced People about Inheritance

When we initially asked our care experienced friends what inheritance looked like some of those that responded wondered whether what we were asking was a "joke" because it is a known fact that care experienced people do not inherit. This demonstrates our earlier point that inheritance can be understood as a familial practice. This response made us curious and so we put out a call on social media (Twitter and Facebook) to ask the wider community of care experienced people to share their views, experiences and meanings of inheritance:

> Rosie Canning and I are working on a presentation about Care Experience and Inheritance. If you are #cep and happy to share, what does inheritance look like to you? Is it about stories or objects? As the daughter of #cep I got narrative inheritance.
>
> Call for responses Tweet from Delyth

[41] Yusuf McCormack (25/1/1963-16/1/2021).
[42] McCormack (2022) 173.
[43] Willis (2009) and Shotton (2010).

We received several responses to our call out and we made three significant findings. First, in terms of intangible forms of inheritance, it was common for people to have absences in their stories. Secondly, we discovered that tangible forms of inheritance can be a way for care experienced people to start their own traditions of 'passing things on'. Finally, we found that inheritance, is accepted as an intergenerational practice, albeit an ambiguous one.

5.1 Missing Histories: Being the Detectives of One's Own Life Story

> When you grow up in a family your parents keep mementos of your childhood. When you meet as a family, with parents and brothers and sisters, you tell and retell what happened, where you went, what you did, and what you felt. Each one has their own perspective, and memory is not always consistent or faithful, but this is part of how you understand where you came from and who you are.[44]

Stories and storytelling are vital to our sense of identity, of knowing who we are, of belonging, and are passed down through the generations. But what if you don't know your family story? As discussed in the previous section, when inheritance is held back, it can create gaps and absences for care experienced people. Above is an excerpt from Anne Harrison's memoir. She was told that her care files had been destroyed in a fire which meant she had no record of her time in care or family history. In January 2016, she received a telephone call from Warwickshire Police. They were making inquiries into allegations of misconduct made by people who were once children in a residential care home. A police officer visited and asked Anne about her time in the children's home. After the policeman left, Anne said: 'What surprised me was how much he knew about my own childhood.'[45] Like many care experienced people wanting to know their story, Anne made a subject access request to Warwickshire County Council to ask what information they had about her. After a few weeks she received a reply and a file consisting of 600 pages documenting her life from the moment she came to the notice of authorities as a baby in 1957 to the day she left the system as a young adult. Many of the 600 pages were illegible, redacted or blank pages. Redactions are usually made because of references to 'third parties'. The social care files constitute an important piece of Anne's heritage, her life story as well as her narrative

[44] Harrison (2020) xi.
[45] ibid 15.

inheritance. As she says 'I have a right to know my heritage on both sides, my father's as well as my mother's…'[46] She remembered that towards the end of her time in care she attended a case conference, which is where they discuss the child in care. It was at this meeting that she was shown a file and her father's name was pointed out. At that time there was no legislation on data protection and her files would not have been subject to redactions. Being misinformed that her files had been destroyed meant she had lost her entitlement to know his name. Anne appealed to Warwick County Council for a fuller version of her files and particularly the name of her father. She also appealed to the Information Commissioner. She received one more document which stated, 'her father is a Nigerian male nurse'.[47] Anne's experience reflects the extent to which the 'care system' holds back inheritance for care experienced people. But Anne's story also shows the way that care experienced people have to search for clues of their inheritance.

Like Anne, participants who responded to our social media requests also shared that their narrative inheritance consists of gaps:

> Would have been nice to have stories of family and history
>
> Response from Twitter

> I don't have much of a narrative because there's no one left to tell stories
>
> Response from Twitter

These gaps, like Anne's, lead care experienced adults to become the *detectives* of their own inheritance searching for clues amongst the documents in their files to piece together the stories of their lives. Rosie also explains this really well:

> I have been a lover of Agatha Christie novels since I was a teenager. This could partly be because I could and loved to work out who had dunnit! Back then I didn't even know it was the most unlikely person – there were clues if you knew how to spot them. I was a child of extremes, at times insular and withdrawn lost in my books and own world and at other times, fully engaged, vocal – very vocal at times. I spent much of my childhood

[46] ibid 132.
[47] Harrison, Anne. Care Experience & Culture Book Club Event
"A conversation with Australian writer, Susan Francis, and UK writer, Anne Harrison, about their memoirs." YouTube, uploaded by Care Experience and Culture, 9 April 2022, https://youtu.be/Q4lBKlp7PHg

> mining information from those around me. This could be from social workers or members of staff talking about me behind closed doors, or my family whenever I saw them. I would listen to stories about Ireland, family and heritage. The insular child becoming hypervigilant, that budding detective listening out for clues. I would go so far as to say I grew an outer ear! Whenever I visited 'family' out popped the ear whilst in my mind I'd be scribbling conversations and clues. Whenever I learnt something new about my mum or family, I was so excited. I would carry the secret home adding to an imaginary family tree that I was part of. The more I knew about myself, the more I belonged, the more I had an inherited culture.
>
> What do you do when you don't know who you are, where you come from, your heritage, your family stories? Figuring out who I am and where I come from has become a lifelong project.[48]

Like Rosie and others in our research, inheritance is a lifelong project. One participant in our research noted how finding out parts of their family story from official documents enabled them to identify a connection and an inheritance from parents that they never knew:

> No property or money that makes a difference. But a sentence about my father working in the circus on the adoption papers, my mother dancing on ice. So many things fell into place when I discovered a creative inheritance. Using it well is ongoing.
>
> Response from Twitter

In the 1960s and early 1970s, when Rosie was in care, it was rare that anybody spoke to a child and explained what was happening in their lives or even why they were suddenly having to live with strangers. Today, some children engage in life story work and have a life story book[49] which in itself is an object of both inheritance and narrative inheritance that can be kept and one day possibly passed on to family. This supports Rosie's understanding that finding out who you are 'is a lifelong project'. And as another respondent stated,

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[48]Canning, R. 2023. 'Hiraeth – finding a fictional home: the representation of care experience in contemporary literature.' Unpublished doctoral thesis. University of Southampton. Southampton.

[49] 'Life story work is the process of helping children separated from their birth families to remember and make sense of their early lives. Children who have been through the care system often experience changes in social workers, carers and homes. Therefore this work, which usually includes making a Life Story Book and Memory Box, allows care experienced children and young people access to their heritage and past that may otherwise be missing, lost or forgotten' (Watson, Latter and Bellew 2015; Gibson and Edwards 2015, p. 17).

> […] growing up we did build a life story box filled with objects, photos, letters – memories. In the absence of a narrative this box is so valuable to me and is something I want to continue with my kids
>
> Response from Twitter

Although life story work is well established for adoption, it is not standard practice for those in foster care or children's homes. Under the Children and Adoption Act 2002, all local authorities have a statutory obligation to support the life story work of children in their care 'because it is regarded as a means for helping children feel a sense of well-being'.[50] Significantly, as our participant above notes, the tangible as well as the intangible benefits of life story work are important, a subject to which we now turn to.

5.2 Objects and their Stories: Entangled Inheritance

> It has been long established that objects can have a special role in infant attachment processes […] These items are thought to represent a symbolic connection with the caregiver which provides the child with a sense of comfort and security.[51]

But what if one does not have a caregiver? For many children, it is not the object per se that is important but the memories, emotions and meanings attached to that object, such that children will reject an identical object, such as a toy, because it is not 'their' toy.[52] The object's value lies in the meaning attributed to it by the child, which makes it irreplaceable. 'Inheritance' generally conjures up images of items passed from one generation to the next and it is precisely these objects, invested with attachment and emotion that are passed on to children and grandchildren. We saw this attachment to objects from childhood in the responses we received:

> I have two 50 yr old books from my childhood: a Superman annual and The Guinness Book of Answers by @GWR Both battered by all the moves and much treasured. One had a fun safe alternate fantasy world, the other showed me there was an interesting real world out there. I'll pass them on.
>
> Response from Twitter

[50] Edwards (2017) 201.
[51] Stevens et al (2019) 215.
[52] Hood and Bloom, (2008).

Additionally, Rosie writes about an important object from her childhood, the star of our chapter, The Pink Cat, in *Hiraeth*, her PhD creative project:

> I was only eight when I first saw the pink cat. She was sitting on a table with her tail wrapped round her flank. Her little head was tilted to the right. One ear pointed straight up as though listening to the sound of the wind sighing through the trees or the beat of a butterfly's wings. The left ear is chipped now, dropped by a friend. The pink cat was never quite the same after that.
>
> Pink stripes shape the contours of her face, a tiny brown blob defines her nose, and her pink tongue has been captured licking her neck contentedly. This action endeared her to me when I first saw her sitting on a table in the garden at Mrs L's house. Mrs L liked to invite the kids from the children's home to help her with small stationery jobs like stamping her address, using an old metal stamp on the back of a pile of envelopes. I loved to run my finger over the embossed letters on the thick, cream-coloured paper. And when the jobs were finished, there was lunch in her beautiful garden followed by races in the afternoon. The pink cat was one of many prizes to be given out at the end of the day. I watched as each of the winners went up to the table to claim their prize. I held my breath and closed my eyes sure that when I opened them the pink cat would be gone. Eventually it was my turn, she was still there and I claimed her. I couldn't wait to take her home and place her on my shelf. The pink cat was mine.[53]

Rosie knew albeit instinctively about the importance of objects from childhood that had emotional significance and memories. She writes:

> I placed the pink cat on the mantlepiece near my bed. As soon as I entered the bedroom, there she would be, all shiny and pink, as if to say hello like a real cat. As I grew older, she became the memory of the children's home cat, Marmalade. Cats made a home and I was sure, the pink china cat came from a beautiful home. Maybe even Mrs L's house who reminded me of Miss Marple. Miss Marple who took girls from St Faith's Orphanage and trained them in housekeeping skills like Mrs L trained me in small stationery jobs.[54]

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[53] Canning, R. 2023. 'Hiraeth – finding a fictional home: the representation of care experience in contemporary literature.' Unpublished doctoral thesis. University of Southampton. Southampton.
[54] Ibid. Canning (2023)

Rosie still has the pink cat! She has become an important heirloom that Rosie will one day pass her on to her children. She's beautiful even with her chipped ear and missing bits of paw. Entangled in the pink cat is a history and a beginning. The cat embodies Rosie's care story and is a journey they have travelled together. It also symbolises a new familial tradition of having and belonging with the aim of 'passing it on'. The Pink Cat allows Rosie to do and display family. In our mini social media research project, we found that other care experienced people engaged in new beginnings when it comes to tangible inheritance practices:

> I learnt to knit. So I could knit my children's children (if they have any) a baby blanket. So they knew they were loved before they were even here.
>
> Response from Twitter

> Me and my sister began a Xmas tradition of each buying 2 of the same decoration and gifting each other one so we have some matching decs on each of our trees.
>
> Response from Twitter

As the first quote above suggests, objects can contain intangible meaning, for example they can signify love, which is a way of doing and displaying family. This resonates with the earlier mentioned 'tokens' that mothers left with their babies when leaving them at the Foundling Hospital in the 1770s. Objects can also represent longevity and a journey.[55] For children in care, objects 'are important for the development of a sense of identity for LAC[56] to provide them with feelings of security, continuity and belonging'.[57] This is further supported by Coram's 'objects in social work' whereby feedback analysed from social workers and practitioners found that the use of objects in conversations enabled social workers and children and young people to better understand their life stories and therefore their needs. As a result, social workers were better able to support children and young people which in turn gave them more stability in their lives.[58]

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[55] Stevens et al (2019) 214–26.

[56] In the UK, LAC is the acronym used to refer to Looked After Children. This is the language used within children's social care. However, a reference point here, even though this article was published in 2021, the researchers use this outdated term, one that looked after children and adults with care experience dislike. See these project websites for further information about language *Conversations for Care* (https://conversationsforcare.wordpress.com/) and *The Care Experience Conference* (https://info822785.wixsite.com/careexpconf) for a detailed discussion of the importance of language.

[57] Watson et al (2020).

[58] Patel et al (2021) 5.

We hope that the key message from the Coram research is shared and widely implemented in children's social services. For too long, the importance of belongings for children in care has been largely underestimated and misunderstood. As the below excerpt from Rosie's PhD novel recounts:

> She must double-check that nothing was left behind. Opening the wardrobe door, she thought of Narnia as she always did. Or else the memory of black bags filled with her belongings: a handmade silky orange tutu worn for a West-End theatre show, a jewellery box made from shells, and her treasure - a geode cut in two revealing its beautiful crystal inside that had come from Broadstairs and which she'd bought with pocket money saved throughout the winter. Last but by no means least (as Aunty D used to say), the painted moth postcards – a Barberry Carpet and beautiful Elephant Hawk – hours they'd taken as she painstakingly copied every tiny detail from the old Butterflies and Moths book. There were other things too some of which she couldn't remember. Worst of all though had been the black and white photograph of Aunty Mabel, her favourite foster mum. She'd moved the black bags from the wardrobe to under the bed, meaning to sort through and forgetting, forgetting.
>
> Uncle Rob, 'but you can call me Rob', told her to tidy the 'rubbish' under her bed otherwise it would be thrown away. And some weeks later, he asked with a nasty glint in his eye, if she'd checked under her bed. Up the stairs she ran and into the bedroom; the black bags were gone. She flew back down and outside to the dustbins, all the while feeling sick because she knew today was the day they were emptied. Perhaps, just perhaps, the bags filled with her memories would still be there.
> Sorry, said Rob. How was he to know it contained photographs. I did warn you though.[59]

This excerpt is based on a true-life event when Rosie was living in a children's home in Muswell Hill:

> The manager decided to chuck out the black bags under my bed […] Now I only have vague memories of what was in those bags, some of which have been forgotten in the mists of time. I remember the irreplaceable black and white photographs of my mother; and I so wish I still had the orange tutu to pass on to my granddaughter. Of course,

[59] Canning (2023).

> nobody knows whether I would still have some or all of those belongings after so many more moves, but the chance to sort or throw or pass on objects, and the stories that went with them is lost.[60]

Sadly, this is often the case for children in care who are constantly moved about, and, in many instances, it is down to an individual social worker to decide what a child will and won't take with them (let's hope they are not still using black bags!). Even in 2022, one social worker recalled how they 'now pack service users' items that are of significance to 'service users' personally e.g. teddy bears, photos etc., rather than purely practical items considered important by the social worker'.[61] There must be instances where a child is involved in this process and of course sometimes, reasons for leaving a home might involve safeguarding issues; people falling out; emergency factors and it is not always possible to take their personal objects of significance. More work needs to be done around this subject. It should not be the responsibility of one person to decide what a child takes when they move, a mandatory policy that takes the child's view into consideration could improve things. Notes about what a child in care arrives with could be another way. A practical use of records rather than negative notes about behaviour. Precious objects should be kept safe, as these could be objects that the child or young person carries through with them on their transition to adulthood. As this section and the following section shows, inheritance in all forms is intergenerational.

5.3 Narrative and Oral Inheritance: Care Experience as intergenerational

Care is a very public story but also a very personal experience. By this we mean that care is part of the UK's national heritage. It is an experience that has always existed, an identity that is publicly known and widely discussed (in the media for example), and 'looking after' children is a practice that has existed for generations. But it is also a subjective experience for individuals that is shared with and passed down through families. The experience of Care is often inherited through stories,[62] along with the gaps and the absences.

[60] ibid.
[61] Patel (2021) 5- 6.
[62] Edwards (2017) and (2012).

In our mini research, we found that this type of inheritance was discussed in two different ways. First, one participant described how, when thinking about their inheritance practices with their own children, their own missing childhood stories are amplified:

> I know with my kids, they love listening to me telling them funny stories of things they did when they were little, I've never had that and even those little things make me feel like I've missed out on knowing the child version of me that was nice or funny. (Our care records don't have these positive or funny stories about our characters)
>
> Response from Facebook

This quote demonstrates the loss of inheritance for care experienced people, but also how oral and narrative inheritance can be a beginning for families and a way that they can make their own family inheritance practice. This participant is able to pass on stories to her children about their childhood that they in turn will pass on. Second, there was awareness that inheritance within care experienced families is complex and not straightforward:

> […] Again, none of the family stories feel like mine to inherit either. My mum would tell loads which would have been passed down but they aren't mine genetically so I wont be passing them to my kids'
>
> Response from Twitter

This participant demonstrates the complexity, especially for adoptees, in inheriting stories that they do not see as their own. In the above response, stories are aligned with 'genetics' and this participant has made the choice not to pass on this inheritance, feeling that it doesn't belong to them or is part of their story. In this respect, family is being 'done', but not 'displayed' through storytelling.[63] We saw this discussion of the ambuiguity of 'passing on' or *not* passing on, experiences of care and belonging in other examples from our research:

> Without being gloomy I think the inheritance from a care experienced parent to their child will be bitter sweet. Loss, family history (not for everyone but in my case it's written in files but they won't feel and experience it), not really understanding their parents experience but on the other hand resilience and a new beginning and maybe some

[63] Finch 2007.

> stability through positive relationships, a child hood and hopefully some material stability.
>
> Response from Facebook

This participant identifies that for many children of care experienced parents, inheritance can consist of loss and in some respects a distance between parent and child. This distance can lead to families being (un)made through silences.[64] However, in the above quote, this idea of 'a new beginning' comes through, which can be creating something from the start, stability as mentioned here, that can be passed on and carried down generational lines. This is something that Delyth understands as the daughter of a care experienced mother. Her mother does not have any objects of meaning from her childhood that she can pass down but she has shared her story. Delyth has widely written about and discussed how her mother's care experience is the story she has inherited, which has greatly shaped her identity and who she is as an academic.[65] Delyth continues to research, write and teach students about care experience. Her mother's story, her personal/autobiographical inheritance have shifted from something that was very peripheral to something that is now very publicly shared. And we are now seeing more care experience stories becoming public, such as Lemn Sissay's story metioned above as well as the work at the Foundling Museum. Some may argue that this is a way of 'flaunting' an identiy and a family that was once stigmatised[66]. The stories that get told and re-told and inherited within families that have care experience support the view that inheritance is a 'family practice' and displaying our family publically in this way 'confirms the qualitative character of a given relationship, at a particular point in time, as 'family'' for ourselves and others.[67] Storytelling is part of this way of 'doing' and 'making' family, but it is also a way that we do and make our'selves. This is an area of inheritance that needs further exploration within the broader field of inheritance studies.

Conclusion: Inheritance as a Right

In this chapter, we set out to share some initial findings we made from our small social media request asking care experienced people what inheritance means to them. In the first part, we

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[64] McNay (2009) and also see: Edwards, D (2022) Understanding Life Story Work as Family Practice [online] https://creativelifestorywork.com/latest/understanding-life-story-work-as-family-practice/
[65] Edwards (2017) and also see: Edwards, D (2022) Understanding Life Story Work as Family Practice [online] https://creativelifestorywork.com/latest/understanding-life-story-work-as-family-practice/
[66] Michell 2021.
[67] Finch (2007) 80.

explored how inheritance is an established field of research, in socio-legal fields and family studies. We argue that seen as a 'family practice', inheritance can be a way in which family is 'done' and 'displayed' but it can also be a way in which families are violently (un)made. In part two we briefly traced the history of the hostile relationship between care experience and inheritance. Given the strong correlation between illegitimacy and care, exploring laws around illegitimacy and inheritance (specifically monetary and land inheritance) can help us trace why care experienced people are still highly marginalized in inheritance laws today. The chapter then considered how tangible and intangible inheritance is held back by the corporate parent'.[68] Inheritance is to a large extent always shaped by others, for example, intangible inheritances deemed uncomfortable or embarrassing can be kept as secrets within all types of families.[69] But for care experienced people secrecy is a decision made by an unfair system *outside* of the family which for many, when formally requested, refuses to give up the secrets.

A key aim of this chapter however was to elevate the voice of care experienced people. In the final section, we shared findings from our mini research. To really understand how care experienced people feel about and practice inheritance, we need to ask them and their families. Drawing on this research and our own experience as a care experienced person and the daughter of a care experienced mother we made three key findings. First, because of the inheritance that is held back by the 'care system', care experienced people must embark on a life journey of finding out who they are. Second, objects, as symbols of self, other and history, can be a site of inheritance creation and negotiation in the face of absence. Finally, we found that care experience itself is something that is passed on intangibly. Some parents try to protect their children from such inheritance, whilst others share their story of care, which can in turn shape the identities of the next generation.[70]

In conclusion, we want to end the chapter with two messages. First, further research should be focused on inheritance and care experience, and in particular care experienced people

[68] In the UK 'The Children and Social Work Act 2017 says that when a child or young person comes into the care of the local authority, or is under 25 and was looked-after by the authority for at least 13 weeks after their 14th birthday, the authority becomes their corporate parent'. This means taking on parental respnsibilty and acting in the best interests of the child. Local Government Association (2017) Corporate Parenting resource pack [online] https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/15.11%20Corporate%20parenting_v05.pdf

[69] Smart (2011).

[70] Edwards (2012) and (2017)

should be asked about their inheritance practices. Our own stories and those of our participants contain stories of loss, trauma and absence. But we also found inheritance being used as a way to create new beginnings and this warrants further attention in research, law and policy. Finally, the creativity that care experienced people have shown in negotiating unjust systems of inheritance should not overshadow the *rights* that care experienced people should have to their inheritance, whether that is access to their care file and the information it contains to letters or money that was bequeathed them by birth family members. When inheritance is held back, it creates absences in people's narratives and this results in many care experienced people trying to piece together information about their lives 'in unsupported ways that put them at risk of experiencing trauma' and this should *never* be the case for any care experienced person.[71]

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[71] Edwards (2022).

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