TOWARDS A RADICAL ETHICS OF CARE

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ABSTRACT: This article offers a new form of ethics premised in Foucault's con-cept of the Care of the Self. Using examples from youth work and radical AIDS activism the authors challenge us to rethink what ethical practice should entail.

Key words: ethics, activism, youth work

Neoliberal achievement-worthiness is built on risk preparedness, hardness, competition, robustness, and therefore on a subject model that is mascu-linely connoted. Wild capitalism and wild manliness represent in neoliberal thought a pairing that promises success. Anything that disturbs the mas-culinist model of neoliberalism is a thorn in the eye of this thought. From this follows the rejection of social responsibility and social-contractual regulation of economic behavior in favor of the removal of the economy from society, that is, from the reach of social obligation. From this results the dismantling of the welfare state, which from the neoliberal perspec-tive mollycoddles and only serves to make "the public hand immediately stick the largest possible band-aid onto each little booboo, no matter how small." From this results the denigration of reproductive fields of work like nursing, care, health, childcare, education, with the consequence that social spending in these areas suffers under a permanent attempt to economize. From this comes sharpened exclusion mechanisms aimed against all those social groups and regions of the world that are not up to the "Ramboization of the Economy" (Schachtner referencing Kreisky, 2006 p. 4).

In the harsh and competitive world delineated in the above quote, there is an embedded set of values that drives both behavior towards others and what Fou-cault (1983) has called, the practices of the self. The world of neoliberalism is our contemporary global world built on the values of capitalist enterprise, which is to say the value of profit or monetary exchange. Deleuze (1995) has argued that in this world everything is for sale and the market becomes the social mechanism for shaping our own sense of value. The argument proposed in our opening quote is that this set of values has direct consequences upon the delivery of social services. In a world in which the economy becomes the final arbiter of success, other types of value are denigrated and marginalized. For us, this becomes problematic as we are interested in caring for others as a practice that calls for a different set of values than those premised in "preparedness, hardness, competition, robustness." Instead

we will propose, in this paper, an alternate kind of value that seeks to care for life because it is life and worthy of value in and of itself.

To make this argument, we will begin by challenging conventional notions within the field of youth work including, morality, the individual, liberty, free will, agency, and politics. We will suggest that an ethics based in moral codes is inadequate to the demands of our current global situation. Drawing on our previous project constructing what we have called radical youth work, we will call for a new kind of ethics premised in the care of the self as a practice of interrogating the ways in which we unwittingly support systems of domination and control in our daily lived practices. We will propose that in order to care for the young people we encounter, we must learn new practices of caring for ourselves. We will argue that these practices of self-care are political and have subversive possibilities within neoliberal global capitalism. Using examples from our own work we will make a case for a mutuality of care as ethical practice. We will draw on Tronto's (Williams, 2001) work on interdependent care for a framework for such an ethics and finally turn to the practices of the radical AIDS activist organization Act-Up to suggest new organizing principles for group living premised in an ethics of care.

While the field of youth work has always been an arena where care was a central concern, (as evidenced by the usage of child and youth care as a descriptor of the field) it seems to us that in thinking about caring, we sometimes forget that our work is situated within a much larger field of politics and world events. As Sercombe (1998) so wisely points out in his essay on ethics in youth work, relations between young people and adults always involve power. However, in our thinking about care and ethics we seem to act as though the insular world of the agency, the school, the group home or even the street can be imagined as a behavioral arena free of the politics and power relations delineated in our opening quote.[1] The ethics of our profession (Banks 1999, Mattingly, 1995) often prescribes the relations between the youth worker and the young person as though that relationship could be extracted and singled out from its broader political and social context. We tend to focus on the professional ethics of practice (Mattingly and Stuart, 2002), the agency ethics of policy and procedure (McCullough and Tett, 1999), the sexual politics of predation or exploitation, or the microethics of where to set boundaries (Mattingly, 1995). In this we seldom engage our ethics within the framework of the how children and youth are being shaped by the brutal values of late-stage capitalism with its competitive and ruthless imperative to determine the success of our young people by their ability to make money.

Much of the work we have engaged in our previous writing, on what we have called radical youth work (Skott-Myhre et al. 2004; Skott-Myhre and Gretzinger 2006; Skott-Myhre 2004, 2005, 2006, 2008) makes an attempt to situate the relations of children, youth and child and youth care worker within the broader field of conflict and struggle often delineated as politics. We have defined radical youth

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1 See Stacy et. al. (2005), Mizen, P. (1999), Jeffs T. and Smith, M. (1999), and Sercombe, H. for notable exceptions in the literature

work as adult and youth working together for common political purpose. To do this, we have proposed that adults would need to deconstruct their own social privilege and meet young people as persons free of the developmental stigma of adolescence. This deconstruction would allow for a growing recognition of mutual political interest and common struggle.

In a sense, this writing extends that process in considering ethics to be an essentially politically engaged site of contestation and struggle. In another sense, this writing will also propose, as Foucault has suggested, that power and politics are always generated from the micropolitical level that occurs between singular bodies as they collide and produce the world[2]. At the level of the micro-political, we propose that ethics must be engaged as both a radically singular project of self-care and at the same time a project of bodies together that extends that care beyond the self. Such an ethics of care is then a reflective process in which the care of the self is deeply bound to the care of the other and the care of the other can only be accomplished through a careful shaping of the self. This echoes other youth work literature such as Krueger (2007, 1997) Fewster (1990), and Nakkula and Ravich who consistently delineate the importance of mutuality and care in their work. This is what we are referring to with what we are calling a radical ethics of care.

Ethics has been classically concerned with the ways we might be able to discern how our actions could possibly promote the good or give force to the bad. Much of this discourse has been framed around issues of morality built upon abstract notions of ideal goodness dispensed through sovereign authority such as God, the church or the state. We have little or no interest in ethics as morality in this sense.[3] Instead we are interested in an ethics similar to that proposed by Spinoza (2000) in his book *Ethics*, wherein he suggests that the good can be defined as that which allows for the greatest force of action. For Spinoza, power is defined as the ability to act and action is the way in which the dynamic force of creation which he calls God extends and defines itself. For Spinoza then, evil is comprised of those acts that engage what he calls the "sad passions" or those affects that restrict or retrain the body's ability to act. In this sense, ethics for Spinoza is fundamentally concerned with the issue of liberty or the ability to act.

Spinoza's liberty, however, is not the simple ability to assert the rights of the individual subject within a modern democratic state. Nor is it the ability to have voice and free speech. Indeed, Spinoza did not think that liberty had very much to do with free will as we imagine it today. He thought that free will was not even a concept worthy of consideration when speaking of liberty. This was because he saw free will associated with the emerging idea in his time of the modern individual and he saw the modern concept of the individual as an inadequate idea that was a distraction from the actual state of freedom.

Here we break away from the literature of our colleagues in youth work whose thinking is still premised in ideas from the European Enlightenment such as the

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2 See Sercombe (1998) for a nuanced discussion of this in child and youth care practice
3 See Skott-Myhre 2006 for a more complete explanation of the problematics of morality for child and youth care

importance of individual agency. Many of our colleagues see our work as helping young people to define themselves as individuals capable of asserting themselves in the world. They place considerable importance on the development a coherent identity and set of practices developmentally ascribed to the mature actualized adult. They may even hold as an important ethical concern, the political development of a democratic citizen who responsibly participates in the practices of representative democracy. Further, they may well support a range of practice within the field designed to produce young people as moral subjects with a clearly defined sense of social order. Our intentions are far more radical than that.

To understand this a little more clearly, we will turn to Foucault and his thinking on the relationship between the care of the self and freedom. Sybylla (2001) points out that Foucault's "intuition is concerned with freedom which provides the fundamental basis of his ethics" (p. 68). However, like Spinoza, Foucault's definition of freedom and its relation to ethics is complex. For him, the difficulty with freedom and ethics begins with the problem of ethics as a code of conduct. "Ethics . . . involves a considered choice over one's conduct, an exertion of power over oneself" (Sybylla 2001 p. 74). This exertion of power over oneself is, of course, an exercise of discipline which seems at first glance to be somewhat contradictory when it comes to the practices of liberty.

However, liberty as action is quite complicated. We commonly think of freedom or liberty as being an act of free will; the ability to act of our own accord independent of outside discipline. In his writings, Foucault (1994) denies this full liberation of the self as a possibility. He argues that the self is constructed through an array of societal disciplines and that everything we think, believe and articulate is a product of a long process of struggle for power. In short, the self that would assert itself through free will is not at all free but is both the subject and product of social discipline.

For example, the very categories of self that we commonly deploy in our descriptions of ourselves are not simply neutral descriptions of the truth, but complicated negotiations between various possibilities of description. In this regard, youth and adult as categories of self description are highly charged political constructs that include power struggles over work, sexuality, intellectual and emotional capacities, social roles and responsibilities that are unstable and under constant revision within modern and post-modern society. The outcomes of these struggles define our "selves" in terms of who we think we are (male/female, gay/straight, worker/student, etc.) and what we think we can do (drink, drive, vote, work, etc.).

Foucault (1975) has argued that apparently benign institutions such as schools and social service agencies that purport to simply support the social good are in fact disciplinary agents of the dominant power structures in society. Further, he suggests that these institutions disseminate and reinforce dominant sets of descriptions that are inscribed into our identities through the very language given to us to describe the world in schools, homes, churches, workplaces and through the dominant disciplines such as psychology, sociology and anthropology that claim to accurately represent the world of the social. In this sense, the categories of youth and adult are highly charged political arenas of societal discipline in which

our very definitions of ourselves are pre-determined to the benefit of the domi-
nant regimes of power[4]. Why then, would Foucault suggest that we need further
discipline to seek an ethics of freedom? It would seem at first glance that the
problem is discipline itself; that we need to be freed from discipline rather than to
seek further discipline.

To make sense of this, it is useful to understand that Foucault does not see
power as exercised from above simply as a sovereign rule of the dominant, but in-
stead sees power as an ongoing struggle at all levels of society over how the world
will be produced. In this sense, freedom cannot be separated from this struggle and
there is no absolute utopian liberation from the effects of power. Ethics in this sense,
as it is related to freedom, becomes a practice of uncovering and understanding the
ways in which we have been shaped by dominant discourse, so that we might chal-
lenge that discourse in ourselves. In other words for Foucault freedom is involved
with "acting upon one's habitual and socially acquired modes of thought and action"
(Sybylla, 2001, p. 74).

In one youth work agency that we were involved with, the staff met once a
week to attempt to have a conversation in which we challenged our own assump-
tions about our social identities. This conversation, which we called "de-coloniz-
ing our conversation" was extremely contentious among the staff with some staff
welcoming the opportunity to investigate their own positionality and other staff
finding it extremely intrusive into what they perceived as a private space separate
from work, in essence, their personal identity and history. The conversation was also
controversial in that it excluded any conversation about the youth in the facility and
focused only on our own perceptions of ourselves. One of the questions that we
asked ourselves was how our interactions with youth made visible our own posi-
tion in terms of class, race, identity and privilege. We attempted to explore how our
position was related to the ways in which we responded to the youth and our se-
lections of clinical interventions; did these interventions mask our own privilege or
discomfort with certain sets of power relations? In other words how might we begin
to explore and deconstruct our own practices of power so that we might investigate
our common sense assumptions about how we as adults and youth workers are
supposed to act?

Such acting upon oneself or self-discipline is quite distinct from what Foucault
calls the microfascisms of the self (1983), wherein we replicate and extend the dom-
inant discursive disciplines in our practices of our selves. This would be, for example,
when we insist on our dominant identity formations as adult, white, male, hetero-
sexual or conversely when we insist on defining the other through their dominantly
defined subaltern status as youth, female, black, and gay or any combination of
the above. An ethics of care for the self in this regard cannot be separated from the
self-practices which engage the world of the other. There is. in fact, no possibility of
a self without an other. All practices of the self, therefore, are always practices that
produce the other in some kind of way. As Sybylla (2001) points out,

4 Similar disciplines can be found in the arenas of gender, sexuality, class etc.

So, this is what Foucault means when he says that 'the care for self takes moral precedence in the measure that the relationship to self takes onto-logical precedence.' It is the initial and deliberate action upon one's own actions that makes possible the creation of an ethical relation to others. In other words, as Foucault says, it is through the relation to the self that the individual becomes 'a moral subject of his own actions', and is able to choose what ideals to live by. If ethics means having authority over one's own actions, it follows that others must be allowed the same freedom to act upon their actions, unless we wish to deny them ethical subjectivity (p. 74).

In our work this is a central dynamic in which we, as child and youth care workers, struggle against the common perception that our practice and technique spring out of a utilitarian pragmatics focused on acting upon the other. In acting on the other we often assume a certain separation from our own subject position. In other words, we act as though who we are outside the agency and even inside the agency in our relations with other staff, can be radically separated from our clinical interactions with young people.

As a result, we have a great deal of training that focuses on understanding the psychology and sociology of young people, as well as technological instruction about evidence based approaches that "work." In this, we seem to assume that we become a blank slate in the old psychoanalytic sense of a projective screen upon which young people project their lives and struggles; that we are a neutral and in-herently helpful instrument of care limited only by our lack of appropriate interpre-tation or technology. In keeping with this logic, we receive very little in the way of training in self-care outside of workshops designed to "prevent burnout" or help us to "de-stress." Such work does not in any way begin to engage the kind of self-care that requires "the initial and deliberate action upon one's own actions" that Foucault suggests is basic to any ethical interaction with another.

In Foucault and for us, ethics becomes integrally involved with the care of the self and the care of the self becomes fully involved with the care of the other. In-deed, if the care of the self, as delineated by Foucault has to do with the capacity for active self-reflection and such reflection includes the ability to unpack and reorder the lines of discourse out which our very identity has been comprised, then this is not a task that can be accomplished in solitude. If the ontological premise of the self or its very beingness or existence is premised on the capacity for the self to act on its own actions, then the self must be able to stand back from its own production. This requires an external relationship of the self to itself which can only be provided through the relationship with the other.

This is a relatively familiar idea in feminist therapy (Enns, 1993)) where the no-tions of interconnectedness and mutual accountability are critical elements of the work. Indeed in my (Kathy's) work that explores the transmission of feminine power between generations of subaltern (defined here as subject to forces of domination) women as it impacts my work as a feminist therapist working with young women,

I found that I could not examine my own social position by myself. It was necessary for me to talk with the other women in my family so that I could begin to see myself through them. That does mean, however, that through my work I can come to know other women, only that through other women I can come to know myself.

As Spinoza (2000) points out in the *Ethics*, we can never know the state of the bodies which we encounter–that is closed off to us. Each encounter, however, informs us about the state of our own being through our response to that encounter. Does each encounter engender greater capacity to creatively produce ourselves or does it induce the sad passions which restrain us and bind us into passivity and hopelessness? The tendency is to imagine that our response is premised in the actual nature of the other body. In fact, according to Spinoza, it tells us only about the state of our self.

This is particularly pertinent in the field of child and youth care where our entire profession is premised on the encounter between bodies and where we often imagine that our response to the child, fellow worker, supervisor, teacher or parent tells us something about *them*. If Spinoza is correct, an ethics of radical care would begin with the premise that each encounter informs us about the ways in which we are constructed. Such an ethics then proposes a practice of care that begins with,

> 'a shift of one's attention'– that we bring our thought to bear on our actions in order actively to choose them, rather than blindly obeying the beliefs and practices of our era, or seeking the truths within oneself. In this way, we become the ethical subjects of our conduct. (Sybylla, 2001, p. 76)

This brings a whole new dimension to the concept of therapeutic transparency. Often we think of being transparent to our clients as being a risky business in which we must be careful about sustaining our boundaries and not sharing too much of ourselves. In sustaining such bounded transparency, we would argue that we run the risk of actually constructing a pseudotransparency in which self-revelation is produced as an uneven power dynamic. In such a dynamic, the young person shares in order to change themselves, but the worker also shares in order to change the young person. This a point also made by Krueger (1997) in his proposal that we use ourselves as agents of transformation in allowing the work to transform us as well as the young people we engage. In the new view of transparency that we are proposing, both parties share of themselves for the goal of mutual transformation.

To do this we need the feedback of the encounter. We need the collisions with other bodies that can open the door out of the bounded space of self-absorption and the narcissism of certainty regarding who we are and of what we are capable. In this, we also become free of the carceral relation of the self-other through which we create a realm of certainty about the other that binds them into certain ways and practices of being through the fixity of our own gaze of judgment. In other words, to free ourselves of the involuntary acceptance of the "beliefs and practices of our era" we must free the other from the imposition of just such beliefs and practices imposed by us.

We are reminded of the first time I (Kathy) entered a runaway shelter in the inner city of a large American city. Entering the shelter, I was secure in the idea that although I had never worked in an urban setting before, my response to these young people would be free of racism and class because I was a fair and good person. However, my first encounter with a black male street youth wearing what I read as gangster clothing produced an involuntary reaction of abject fear. In order to free myself of this fear I had to first free the young man of my beliefs and practices of racism.

Such self care holds the possibility of an ethical radical care. Williams (2001) in this light suggests that,"Care helps us rethink humans as interdependent beings"(p. 477). This interdependency of self-creation and the care of the other holds a central importance in thinking the field of child/youth-adult relations. It is important to realize that each of our encounters with young people comprise an absolute interdependency. We are not there simply to be of assistance to a young person in need; we need that young person just as we need all people to re-shape and free ourselves from ourselves. We need each encounter like an artist needs an object of reflection to produce art. If, as Foucault suggests the re-shaping of the self is a kind of art–perhaps even the art of living well– then we are as interdependent upon the people we encounter as the artist is on the world they see. Young people and adults, as we have mentioned above, are both comprised out the disciplinary beliefs and practices of the dominant society. An ethical practice of freedom would join them together in a process of mutual becoming; a becoming that is creatively much more than each could possibly be alone. What then is crucial to such an encounter?

Williams (2001, p. 477) in citing Tronto suggests that there are four critical elements to an interdependent encounter. The first of these is"attentiveness"which is defined as"noticing the needs of others in the first place."While this has been an extremely important idea in youth work literature (Krueger, 2007), if we take this suggestion in light of the ethics we have been tracing, then noticing the need of the other informs us in two important ways for us. Does the need of the other evoke the capacity for action or a passivity of response? Neither of these two responses is, in and of itself, indicative of who we are but rather how we have been constructed. To the degree that the disciplines and practices of our age have formed our disciplinary selves in such a way that we view certain young people as hopeless or helpless subjects on the basis of who we perceive them to be, then our response will be one of passive resignation or potentially resentment and rejection. Such resentment and rejection is premised in our refusal to acknowledge our own sense of helplessness and induction into the sad passions delineated by Spinoza.

This response holds no useful ethics from our point of view. A useful ethics of care from our position entails the second response to the need of the other. This response perceives such an encounter as holding the potential to inform us of our own needs and our own capacities to fulfill those needs. In this sense when we encounter another's needs we are always encountering our own. Each interdependent encounter holds a double"attentiveness"to the care of the other and the possibility of freedom through the care of the self.

We have all, as child and youth care workers, been challenged by the young person whose ways of behaving and speaking seem to push away or alienate us either through their level of emotional intensity or the apparent lack of accessible meaning. Yet, an ethics of care would require that we be particularly attentive to such young people, not simply out of compassion for their need to be heard, but because our reactivity to them indicates something uncared for in ourselves. In listening to them we hold the possibility of hearing our own voices differently. Krueger (2007, 1997) has made this point in a different register in his work as well. He argues for such just such a mutual production of self-care.

Such double interdependence leads us to Tronto's next level of care, "responsibility" which is defined as "taking the responsibility to care." Again, for us this entails a double responsibility. Each interdependent encounter demands the integrity of self-reflection as an active process of self-creation beyond the limited horizons of common sense and social discipline. The responsibility to care is premised not simply in the compassionate response to the sufferings and struggles of our fellows (although this may be well be cause enough) but to the common suffering and struggle of our mutual bondage within the global slaughterhouse of late stage capitalism. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) point out, if we are to overcome the apparatuses of capture endemic within the machinery of capitalism we must become everyone. This becoming everyone changes the level of responsibility from an abstract set of exchanges in which my caring and compassion for you is hinged on the possible profit of freedom for me, to a truly interdependent assemblage in which my caring for you is literally caring for me as well. In the field of child and youth care then, we must become the children, the youth, the parents, the teachers, our fellows, etc. Through this we can come to recognize that our own practices of liberty are deeply involved within the practices of the youth we engage. For example, in working with young women who struggle with disordered eating, the issues of body image and food are not simply restricted to those who get diagnosed but infest all of our daily practices from how we view bodies, both ourselves and others, to how we discipline our own.

To become everyone as an ethical practice of self-care entails a high degree of competence as a becoming being. Indeed Tronto suggest that "competence" is the third aspect of interdependent care. This takes us back to Foucault's notion of the care of the self as a certain kind of art. Just as the artist must pay great attention to their craft so we must pay careful attention to the art of self production through an ethics of care. To care is to be careful, meticulous, and attentive to detail. It means a certain restraint of response; an ongoing degree of reflection. We find Krueger's (2007) recent account of youth work, in which he reflects on himself as both youth and youth worker exemplary in this sense. Stacy's (2005) ongoing work on youth work accountability also evidences this kind of attentiveness to youth-adult relations.

Such practice means a dutiful attention to the materials of our work, which is of course to say, an attentiveness to our selves, the other, and the field of social discourse and description in which we are imbedded and out of which we are produced. It means we must abandon the common ways of knowing entailed in

reaction, moral certainty and the regimes of truth and instead carefully craft our-selves in each moment through the possibilities implied in each encounter with the other; the other whose care is absolutely crucial to our own. This goes well beyond any formula for therapeutic intervention. It requires that we treat each interaction as discrete and idiosyncratic. As such, each interaction demands an attention to the particularities of the moment, the subjects, the context, the affect and language. Jennifer White (2007) traces new possibilities in this direction in her recent work.

This requires the final element of Tronto's suggestions for interdependent care; "responsiveness." To be truly responsive to the other is a very challenging and complex practice. It is more than to be simply reactive. It is also more than to be sympathetic or to engage in some predetermined practice of listening or giving voice. Similar to the ethical practices of attentiveness, responsibility and competence, being responsive entails an interdependence of self care and care for the other. Like the artistry of attentiveness in which we come to realize that we can only see freely when we see ourselves through the impacts of the other, we can only find true responsiveness in joint creative production. To respond is a process of mutuality.

In an ethics of self care as an interdependent practice, it is not a simple ex-change of information as input and output, wherein I attempt to understand what you have told me accurately and then respond genuinely. It is far more tentative and provisional than that. If the engagement with the other, as we have suggested, precludes knowing them in themselves, then we can never respond to them. That is to say, whatever impact they have had on our state of being does not effect an illumination of understanding them any better nor does it produce an understand-ing out of which we can respond to meet their needs. Instead, we would propose that to respond is to seek a joint space of encounter between bodies to which each body contributes.

In this sense, a radical ethic of care calls for the kind of responsiveness found in the improvisations of jazz, hip hop, or blues[5]. Here, the note that each musician offers is met by the note of the responding musician as a proposal of what note might be played next. While there is a structure to such encounters in the general form of the song, the improvisational aspects are always unanticipated and crafted in the moment between musicians as they play. Clearly, they must listen carefully to what is being played, but they do not listen to claim an understanding of the other musician's intention or state of being, rather they listen to find a ground out of which they might find a new way of playing for themselves. Each encounter, each note holds the possibility of creating one's musical self anew. It is just this kind of responsiveness that we are calling for as an ethics of radical care between young people and child and youth care workers.

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5 We are pleased to note that Mark Krueger (2007, 2004) also finds a resonance with jazz and danc. as metaphors for our work

Care becomes a central dynamic for creatively producing ourselves in our practices of freedom. It removes care from the hierarchies of pity for those not as fortunate and places it squarely as an essential practice of self-production. Indeed, a radical ethics of care eschews the linguistics of pity or sympathy for those "poor children" in favor of an activism of inclusion that recognizes our mutual interests and joint suffering as a basis for political action. Given these conditions, we may have much to learn from the activists from ACT UP who worked in the highly contested arena of suffering bodies produced by AIDS.

Levine (2005) points to the role of the affinity group in her discussion of the ways in which political action and care intersected in the ACT UP movement as a group that engages in very visible and provocative actions around the issue of AIDS. She traces this particularly political system of mutual care to the Spanish anarchists of the 1930s. She describes how these groups originally formed around common revolutionary ideals but evolved into "micro-sites of resistance: politically inspired alternative-lifestyle formations existing within dominant culture" (p. 5). We would argue that this shift from an idealistic political alliance in which members had no particular personal relationship, to a living community of experimental social practices and interpersonal care has significant implication for our own group living situations in which young people and adults come together.

Levine traces the development of the affinity group as a system of care within ACT UP as holding particular force because the gay community out of which ACT UP originated already operated on the margins of the dominant society and by necessity had a long history of mutual care and support. Again, we would suggest that the community of young people engaged within child and care practice also sustains itself on the margins of the dominant society. Of course, one can argue that for many of these young people, their marginal status is temporary and based on age. However, for those young people who are female, LGBT, or non-white their marginalized status is considerably more durable. That said, it is not simply the young people in our programs who operate at the edge of the dominant culture, it is our profession itself. As such, we may want to begin to pay much more attention to the hidden histories of struggle, care and support that have always defined our particular and peculiar field of practice.

Levine discusses how the affinity group arose within ACT UP as a way to create a system of support for individual activists who put themselves at risk on behalf of the larger organization. She specifies not just an intellectual politics of ideas as being the mobilizing force behind the development of the movement but a particular constellation of bodies and affects.

> Imagine ACT UP through the laws of physics, as self-determined gendered and raced celestial bodies orbiting around a combustible source of affective energy, which ACT UP defined as anger. Bodies were activated by anger but magnetized by intellectual, political, erotic and aesthetic attraction. Some individuals formed affinity groups based on specific subjectivities or issues and remained in tight orbit; others were natural satellites revolv-

ing around sick bodies; and still other affinity groups were constituted as quick responders to a provocation: like meteors, they flared up and flamed out. Bodies were in constant movement, reconfiguring and adapting to the evolving political climate as well as the pressing health needs of PWA members. (pp.5-6)

This description of the affinity group as a multiplicity of dynamic practices of political action and care fits well within the framework of a radical ethics of care as we have been delineating it. In particular, we are struck by the implicit acknowledgement of profoundly personal investments in such things as particular subjectivities, political issues, and sick bodies as well as affective investments in anger which led to political practices such as provocations.

Can we even imagine a child and youth care program premised on such a dynamic basis; perhaps a program that acknowledged and centered its practices around the joint affects of anger and suffering experienced by both the young people and the staff? Would it be possible to consider a group living environment for young people and adults in which they were constituted as "self-determined gendered and raced celestial bodies orbiting around a combustible source of affective energy?" Could we even consider the possibility of a system of mutual care that would include "intellectual, political, erotic and aesthetic attraction"?

Levine goes on to describe the role of the affinity group members as being a protective function in which each member's practice is centered around "an extension of the need all the participants have to see that individuals who participate in nonviolent direct action are not isolated, neglected, and overburdened because of their political statement" (p. 7). She goes to note that this function extended beyond the arena of the political to the caregiving required when members became ill with AIDS.

In a radical ethics of care for child and youth care, we would suggest a similar role for our agencies and programs. In such an approach, we would promote practices that assure that our staff and youth are "not isolated, neglected, and overburdened because of their political statement." Of course, for this to be accomplished we would need to understand that not all political statements are made in the public domain of the political system. Indeed, for many of the youth we engage the political is to be found in the micro-resistances of language, sexual expression, fashion, music, and affect.

In a radical ethics of care we would come to understand that our attentiveness, responsibility to care, competence and responsiveness to young people's micro-political actions have deep implications for our own self care. This is particularly true, if we accept Foucault's definition of self care as challenging the common beliefs and practices of our age. In this practice of a radical ethics of care we as workers must somehow come to understand both the radical difference between us and the young people we encounter and our absolute interdependent commonalities. Levine addresses this dilemma in discussing the difficult relation between healthy bodies and sick bodies within the affinity groups of ACT UP.

Healthy activist bodies were configured as prosthetics, fleshly machines to fill the holes indelibly left by infection. But even if a prosthesis is intimately connected with a body so as to assist its function, it can never attain a full union: it will always be alien. This process of prosthetic politics can function only if each body accepts its singularity and then works in a state of what Nancy calls "beings-in-common." For Nancy, acceptance of this state of commonality articulates the "between" that joins the two beings and defines them (even as they define it). The otherness of this voice is always the different voice of community. (p. 10)

As child and youth workers we operate within this politics of the prosthetic. We, in our privileged status as adults, are both absolutely alien to young people and at the same time we share a profoundly similar political agenda. For those of us interested in working within the practices of freedom implied within a radical ethics of care, we must both accept our singular difference and our "being in common." This complex interplay of care of the self as act of "being between that joins two beings and defines them" is precisely the politics of the prosthetic that we engage in our daily practice within agencies, on the street, in our schools or workplaces. However, for us, this is not primarily a prosthetics of healthy and sick bodies (although sick bodies are included). Instead, our prosthetic union is a mutual process of care in which we all joined, youth and adult, as "fleshly machines to fill the holes indelibly left by [the] infection" of isolation, exclusion, brutality, and death that are the hallmarks of the common beliefs and practices of our age. In such a historical moment perhaps there can be no other ethics, for now, that truly matters outside that of care.

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