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EMBODIMENT, CARE AND PRACTICE IN A COMMUNITY KITCHEN

1. INTRODUCTION

How can feminist theories of care ethics combine with social action to respond to unfolding social and environmental crises through bringing about transformative change? This question has long been posed by ecofeminism and, in this article, we demonstrate how embodied practices shift care expressed at the level of the personal into a wider political domain in line with the imperatives of ecofeminist care ethics. We argue that embodied, caring experiences can provide the moral resources for action to challenge the status quo and develop new ways of being in and with the world (Gibson Graham, 2011).

Ecofeminist activism and philosophy has a relatively long history – rising to prominence during the 1980s and 90s before becoming embattled by accusations of essentialism (see Sturgeon, 1997 for detailed discussions of the ‘rise and fall’ of ecofeminism). More recently, ecofeminism’s core messages, that the subordination of nature, women and other groups are interrelated and that environmental and social justice are interlinked (Plumwood, 1993), are again being discussed and developed in scholarly and activist circles.¹ Indeed, *Gender, Work & Organization* has led the way in introducing ecofeminist concepts into studies of organization. Ecofeminists have called for moral languages and practices to challenge the values of individualism, competition and accumulation that currently mark the logics of social and economic relations (eg Kheel, 2008). Leading ecofeminist social theorist, Mary Mellor, has described how these logics have

¹ For example, in management and organization studies, three consecutive streams have been organized at the Gender, Work and Organization conference, a special issue of *Gender, Work and Organization* was produced in 2018, new work has been published, such as Phillips and Rumens (eds) 2016. The 2016 meeting of the Academy of Management included a stream on ‘Gendering CSR and sustainability’ to which ecofeminists contributed. Leading ecofeminist activists have been involved in social movements such as Occupy advising on non-violent direct action and non-hierarchical organization.

impacted on ‘the lives and work of women, the dispossession of peoples from their land and livelihood, the destruction of natural habitat and the general degradation of the environment’ (Mellor, 1997, p. 52). Others have begun to seek out spaces and practices where the efforts of activist-oriented organizations challenge and subvert the status quo (eg Scott-Cato & Hillier, 2010).

In this paper, we present empirical data gathered in an emergency food provisioning organization in the United Kingdom which strives for social and environmental justice. From this, we draw on and contribute to the literature on care as a social and political practice by developing ecofeminist ethics of care (Plumwood, 1993; Warren, 2000) to include an embodied dimension which speaks to shared vulnerabilities. Such an ethics connects individual and general flourishing and recognizes the importance of relatedness and context. Following Hamington, we see care as “a complex weaving of imaginative processes with embodied practices” (Hamington, 2004, p. 5) residing in a capacity for feeling pain at the distress of others and responding imaginatively. Visceral experiences of loss, anger and sadness enable the development of empathy: the response to an Other that combines embodied and other forms of knowledge with emotion to enable us to understand the situation of the other, while also respecting difference. Knowledge of distant others is felt as embodied and can inform and motivate action to support, for example, orang-utans threatened by palm oil cultivation, the plight of refugees fleeing war or the circumstances of bonded labourers (Phillips, 2019).

It is notable that care ethics have been largely ignored by management and organization scholars (Rhodes & Wray-Bliss, 2012), perhaps reflecting concerns around early essentialist constructs of care. Possibly for similar reasons, the ways in which the embodied dimensions of care relate to a potentially transformative politics have barely been explored in the wider literature on feminist care ethics. A long history, in the West at least, of presenting

the body as associated with femininity and an unworthy materiality has meant that re-inserting the body into concepts of care critiqued in the past as essentialist could have been regarded as a risky strategy. Although attention has been paid to the body and bodywork, and the politics of same in relation to health and social care (eg, Nakano Glenn, 2000; 2010; Twigg, 2006), it has not often been specifically related to care ethics. Hamington and Miller (2006) note that transformative theories of care ethics (eg Tronto, 1993) have remained largely theoretical and rarely applied empirically to institutional and social contexts. This study will seek to fill that gap. As background and context, we also refer to the work of political geographers such as Cloke, May, and Williams (2017) and Gibson Graham (2006) working with the concept of ‘reading for difference rather than dominance’ (Gibson Graham, 2006, p. xxxi). This approach demonstrates how the reproduction of neoliberal subjectivity is not an inevitable outcome of activities such as emergency food provisioning.

The paper unfolds as follows. First, to provide context, we briefly review literatures relating to emergency food provisioning. We draw attention to the debates between those who regard such provisioning as a sticking plaster that supports neoliberal agendas and those who argue for a more nuanced view. Second, we offer an outline of the main principles of feminist care ethics, which regard personhood as relational and emphasize the importance of context. We focus on ecofeminist care ethics, foregrounding the imperative for transformative action that moves between particular and systemic issues. It is within the context of ecofeminist care that we present the element of embodiment as a spur to political action. After outlining our methodology, we set out our empirical findings and analysis. These are structured to demonstrate and discuss how embodiment informs the development of relationships and how it can disrupt preconceptions such that wider learning is prompted. Finally, we argue that the embodied elements of care are entwined with activist practice.

2. THE CONTEXT: EMERGENCY FOOD PROVISIONING

The context of this inquiry is a community kitchen based in the south of the United Kingdom that reclaims food waste from supermarkets and local food suppliers that would otherwise be consigned to landfill. The kitchen transforms it into community meals to provide emergency assistance for those experiencing poverty and social isolation alongside the environmental aim of reducing food waste. Volunteers host a weekly community meal, pop-up restaurants, and run a series of educational activities outside the kitchen that focus on social and environmental justice issues around food.²

There is an emerging field of research on emergency food provisioning (see Cloke et al., 2017 for an overview). Much of this literature has criticized the increasing dependence on charities to provide welfare services, arguing that this erodes the responsibilities of the state (Fyfe & Milligan, 2003). It points to the appropriation of, for example, food banks into neoliberal state agendas which individualize the problem of hunger and promote charitable donations as the solution (Riches, 2011). Others point out how such food provisioning is classed and positions service users as passive recipients of care, thus perpetuating dominant power relations (Poppendieck, 1994), while the use of donated food from multinational supermarkets deflects attention away from market practices that create excessive waste (Riches, 2011). Overall, emergency food provisioning is often seen as depoliticizing hunger and inhibiting questioning food insecurity as a humanitarian crisis.

² Hunger due to poverty is a growing problem in the U.K. The Trussell Trust, an organization supporting roughly two thirds of all emergency food bank provision, reports that their network distributed 1.6 million food bank parcels between April 2018 and March 2019, a 19 per cent increase on the previous year, and an increase of 73 per cent over the previous 5 years (for more information on U.K. foodbanks see Trussell Trust at <https://www.trusselltrust.org/>). The community kitchen is not a food bank (although its services are complementary) and, unlike many foodbanks, does not require those in crisis to be referred by a care professional such as a health visitor or social worker. Indeed, anyone, whether in crisis or not, can attend the community meal.

Although these studies provide valuable insight into the neoliberalization of welfare “they can too often lead to self-fulfilling, overly-formulaic and potentially uncritical analysis; foodbanks, and other such spaces of care, become accepted as inextricably mired in the neoliberal politics of their context, and no possible good can be seen in them” (Cloke et al., 2017, p. 706). Drawing on work of feminist political geographers Gibson Graham, a number of scholars are advocating instead for a more nuanced reading of such practices. This involves reading for difference (Gibson Graham, 2006), namely: “seeing beyond mere incorporation in neoliberal subject-formation and tracing the possibilities for an in-common politics of encounter to emerge in different settings, and to sponsor important opportunities for the formation of ethical and political citizenship” (Cloke et al., 2017, p. 705). While being cautious not to romanticize foodbanks and other services, researchers have drawn attention to the “messy middle ground” (May & Cloke, 2014) that lies between regarding them as incorporating subjectivities, practices and ethics into neoliberal rationalities or, conversely, being sites of subversion.

In this vein, Williams, Cloke, May and Goodwin demonstrate how acting as a volunteer can “disrupt received views on poverty” and politicize understandings of emergency food provisioning (2016, p. 2303). We will return to the importance of disruption later in the paper. Cloke et al. highlight how embodied and visceral engagements with those experiencing poverty can act as powerful forces of connection and that “such a process has been found to be surprisingly political, both in the illumination of the emotions and materialities of poor lives and in holding a mirror up to the nature of middle class life-styles and postures” (Cloke et al., 2017, p. 720). They underscore the capacity for such activities to foster political engagement and critical analysis of broader social structures and systems. Taking an approach that focuses on affective relations, Keevers and Sykes (2016) also illustrate how community practices involving food can create understandings across

differences, such that diverse people can act in solidarity and work together in an ethos of collaboration and respect.

3. THE ETHICS OF CARE

An ethics of care is grounded in an understanding of human interaction such that people are constantly enmeshed in relationships rather than maximizing self-interest. While there are differences in how care is defined, Hamington stresses its embodied dimension:

Care denotes an approach to personal and social morality that shifts ethical considerations to context, relationships and affective knowledge in a manner that can be fully understood only if care's embodied dimension is recognized. (Hamington, 2004, p. 3)

This is thus an ethics that emphasizes the importance of making contextually grounded judgements taking account of the relationships and institutions in which caring is positioned. Distinct from "traditional" ethical concepts which posit the self as disembodied in a moral order based on universality, rationality and impartiality, care ethics values emotional responses arising from empathy and shared concern (Held, 2006).

Early constructs of care (eg Gilligan, 1982) were widely critiqued for essentialist tendencies as, in some cases (eg Noddings, 1984), it was argued that women were oriented to care because of the loving and emotional bonds developed through maternal experience. For critics, this ignored the cultural specificities of "mothering" and more generally reaffirmed "a dichotomy between those who care and those cared for" (Beasley & Baachi, 2005, p. 59).

The ethics of care has since developed as a *feminist* rather than *feminine* understanding of human interaction (Borgerson, 2007) and has moved away from an emphasis on male/female binaries (Ungerson, 2000).

Although care ethics are often interpreted as responding to the needs of interdependent individuals, they have also been invoked persuasively as a means of imagining a future better world (Sevenhuijsen, 1998; Tronto, 1995). Tronto insists that care should not be regarded as an abstract philosophical question but instead as an important social practice which provides the basis for radical thinking. She outlines how dominant social values create “moral boundaries” that exclude care and silence the voices of marginalized groups. By relegating issues that impact on such groups to the private sphere, where they become personal rather than public concerns, by demarcating a separation between morality and an objective and rational politics, and by presenting moral decision-making as distant and disinterested, the existing structures of power and privilege are maintained (Tronto, 1993). For Tronto, the breaking down of such boundaries is essential if moralities based in caring relatedness are to inform transformative action in social, political and economic arenas.

However, care ethicists themselves (eg Sevenhuijsen, 1998) warn that care is inherently political and not necessarily normatively desirable. Critiques include claims that it constitutes some individuals or groups as dependent, and others as beneficent or altruistic, and glosses over the possibilities for exploitation and idealization, both positive and negative, of care relationships (eg Hughes, McKie, Hopkins & Watson, 2005). Nakano Glenn (2000) raises important issues regarding the relegation of caring to those drawn from disadvantaged groups such as women and people of colour such that it contributes to their marginalization and exploitation. Bowden points out that care work such as nursing, “is encumbered with much of the social apparatus that operates to undermine both the value of women’s practices in general and the social possibilities of their practitioners” (1997:104). In other words, the gendered social order shapes the status and value of care work, with sites of care becoming places where gender is produced and reproduced. Care is thus gendered, raced, and classed. It

has also been pointed out that institutional and state violence is justified by a rhetoric of care that, for Narayan (1995, p. 135), can function “ideologically to justify or conceal relationships of power and domination”.

Having outlined the general principles of feminist care ethics, we now turn to ecofeminist versions, which extend those principles to pursuing the interconnected goals of social and environmental justice through linking the general and the particular. We also point to the limited work that has appeared on the embodied dimensions of care as a platform for further development.

4. ECOFEMINISM AND CARE ETHICS: RELATEDNESS, EMBODIMENT AND ACTION

4.1 Ecofeminism and ecofeminist care ethics

Ecofeminism encompasses a breadth of approaches and views (Phillips & Rumens, 2016).

However, a commitment to the core values of care and justice for both human and nonhuman life, and support for a transformative agenda to radically restructure social and political institutions, is shared. The ecofeminist imperative is therefore to consider how to create societies focused on human and nonhuman flourishing which it strives to achieve through the development of theory and through activism (Sturgeon, 1997).

The systemic injustices which ecofeminism aims to challenge are, it is argued, grounded in patriarchal logic (Plumwood, 1993), expressed through sets of interrelated and hierarchical dualisms such as masculine/feminine, mind/body or human/nature. These support constructions of authentic masculinities as coterminous with humanity and superior to and separate from the natural, physical or biological realm. Women, nature and all else that do not conform are othered as less than human or as non-human to confirm and justify their

subordination. A failure to recognize the connections between these subordinations “results in inadequate feminisms, environmentalism and environmental philosophies” (Warren, 1996, p. x).

Turning now to the ecofeminist development of care ethics, ecofeminist philosopher Val Plumwood argues that humanity suffers a “crisis of rationality, morality and imagination” (2002, p. 98) and she points to:

...the familiar view of reason and emotion as sharply separated and opposed, and of ‘desire,’ caring, and love as merely ‘personal’ and ‘particular’ as opposed to the universality and impartiality of [rational] understanding (Plumwood, 1991, p. 5).

To meet such a crisis, ecofeminism has sought to place the moral significance of care centre stage. This is because humans and most other life forms both give and require care at some point so that care underpins life in a world delineated as a web of relationships (Tronto 1993). As a holistic philosophy that emphasizes respect for the inherent value of individual beings, the totality of ecological processes and the relationships that sustain life (Kheel, 2008), it is thus appropriate that ecofeminism has drawn on care-based moralities. For Warren (2000), care is essential to ethical motivation and practice and is underpinned by a focus on:

... values typically unnoticed, underplayed, or misrepresented in traditional ethics (eg values of care, love, friendship, and appropriate trust). (Warren, 2000, p. 100)

While ecofeminist care ethics recognise interconnection, as Plumwood (2006, p. 142) makes clear, this is not part of a “drive for mastery and control of the other but a balance of mutual transformation and negotiation”. This is based in a respect for the independence and difference of the other.

The intertwined connections between the flourishing of the particular, including the self, with the flourishing of the general, is particularly important to ecofeminist care ethics (Curtin, 1991; Plumwood, 1993; Warren, 2000). To care about and understand the particular

environmental, social and economic struggles of humans, and other life forms, we must recognize and have some level of understanding of those issues as features of contemporary socio-economic and political structures. To care about and understand such structural features, we have to be aware how they play out in particular lives and experiences. The movement between the general and particular informs political action and resistance so that:

Within the care framework, political issues can make sense and connect to each other.

Under these conditions, political involvement increases dramatically (Tronto, 1993, p. 177)

Macgregor (2006) reports that involvement in local social and environmental campaigns often leads to a questioning of forms and systems of power and participation in issues beyond the local neighbourhood. It also resonates with the research reported above (eg Cloke et al., 2017) where the context is emergency food provisioning. For Curtin (1991), caring can be in context while also being expanded such that, for example, care for a particular forest threatened by logging can mean coming to care about forests in general as part of an ecofeminist political agenda. Milligan and Wiles (2010) also note that caring *for* (personal, embodied acts of particular care) and caring *about* (more generalized aspects of being caring) interact; for example, caring for and caring about distant others can be combined through participation in a campaign by writing letters or taking part in protests.

4.2 The embodied dimensions of care

Embodiment encompasses visceral and fleshy experiences; those that are perceptible by the body and through which we experience our physical manifestation in the world. It is on these that we focus to further develop an account of care that links to action³. Thus, embodiment in

³ The concept of embodiment has received increasing interest in organisation studies and specifically in this journal. It has been explored through a range of perspectives such as phenomenology (eg Yates, Riach & Johansson, 2018), the shaping of senses by social relations of power (Swan & Flowers, 2018) and a conceptualisation as 'being intimate with others' which draws on Diprose's notion of corporeal generosity (Lee,

the context of this article is defined as the emotional and physical elements of caring; the visceral sensations and emotions experienced through our bodies as we foster relationships and social connections.

For Hamington (2004) viscerally experienced emotions combine with a caring imagination to motivate action (see also Kheel, 2008). This results in a form of knowing that extends beyond the rational and involves engagements which value that which “cannot be fully articulated according to the demands of objectivity ... knowledge guided by and responsive to the physical environment in which it is practiced” (Glazebrook, 2005, p. 80). Such embodied, situated knowledge can be gained from direct experience of “concrete others” (Benhabib, 1992, p. 164), which facilitates our understanding of at least some of the other’s needs. Moreover, acts of empathetic imagination combined with embodied knowledge allow a move from the personal and known to the wider world and to the unknown. We can extend care to those with whom we have no direct personal relationship, and who are in circumstances that perhaps we have not experienced ourselves but who are part of the web of interconnections in which we are situated. For example, those experiencing food poverty, or ecosystems (which, of course, include humans) affected by severe weather events (Hamington, 2004). We encounter the other directly and indirectly, say through social media, news reports or the growing body of art engaging with environmental issues (Gayá & Phillips, 2015). This stimulates embodied feeling and caring imagination so that we hear and respond to the plight of distant others. In this way, the embodied dimensions of care, together with the imagination, work to overcome the limitations of individual experience, and reach out to the Other over time, space and difference (Hamington, 2004). Thus care relationships can be embodied, or in other words, “feel” socially or emotionally close even though those

2018). This is a considerable and varied field of work and there is no space in the paper to do it justice. We therefore leave our account of embodiment as simply describing, as per Hamington (2004), the practices that the body performs and the viscerally experienced emotions that these generate.

involved are geographically distant. We acknowledge here the critiques made regarding empathy as a way of connecting across difference. Carolyn Pedwell (2014), for example, notes how when those in a privileged position claim empathy with others, the voices of the other can be silenced, and oppressive power relations entrenched, as such claims often involve projection, appropriation, and the fixing in place of the less privileged party as the object of empathy. We return to this in our findings and analysis.

There are very few studies of ecofeminist care ethics that are empirically grounded (for an exception see Moore, 2015). However, they are necessary if we are to deepen our understanding of the ways in which feminist, care-based moralities can inform activism to meet the social and ecological challenges with which we are faced. After outlining the methods that inform the research strategy, the paper turns to three elements of the embodied dimensions of care that can be illustrated from one organization committed to transformative change: as a means of building relatedness and connectedness through physical proximity, connected to embodied, disruptive learning that builds care as a social and political practice. This then extends beyond the immediate to wider issues such as poverty, environmental degradation and climate change. Our contribution therefore moves to help fill the current lacuna within organization studies in particular with regard to an ethics of care. As importantly, it provides empirical justification for paying attention to the embodied dimensions of care within an ecofeminist framework that foregrounds activism.

5. METHODS

We draw on reflective semi-structured interview data, observation and iterative cycles of reflection that formed part of a participatory action research (PAR) project instigated by Alice Willatt. Before turning to the specific details of the project, we briefly outline the research philosophy underpinning PAR. This is a methodology which identifies the

individual in relation to others as part of a wider community (Gustavesen, 2001). It “expresses itself as a form of ethics, the first principle of which is the interconnectedness of human life, respect for others, dignity, concern for the welfare of others and solidarity, as well as an abiding concern for ecological matters” (Lincoln, 2001:127). It thus connects directly to feminist care ethics (Brydon-Miller, 2009) and resonates with the central preoccupations of this inquiry. Building and strengthening community and relationships through collaboration, interdependence and trust is central to the positioning of PAR in relation to the generation and application of knowledge (Senge & Scharmer, 2006).

The aims of the research project were co-designed with participants (referred to as co-researchers) from the outset and focused on the community kitchen’s membership of a charity that addresses issues of food poverty and food waste nationwide. The research aimed to open reflection and learning on the differences that existed between the working practices and ethico-political commitments of the community kitchen and those of the national charity (see Willatt, 2018, for a detailed discussion of the action research process, ethics and outcomes).

In keeping with the principle of democratic participation, the PAR process involved iterative cycles of individual and collaborative group analysis of interview data (Willatt, 2018). The research did not set out to explore the embodied dimensions of the practices and relationships forged in the community kitchen, but this theme emerged during the data analysis and was discussed among the co-researcher team who reported that it helped them better understand their day-to-day practices. Following the completion of the research, and with the consent of co-researchers, the interview data was further co-analysed by both authors, the process of which we outline below. The paper draws from semi-structured interviews (ranging from between 30 minutes to two and a half hours), conducted with 23 key stakeholders (12 men and 11 women ranging from early 20s to late 50s). After the

preliminary analysis, secondary, reflective interviews were conducted with 4 of the participants who had a long-standing role in the community kitchen (3 or more years). The participants comprised 4 project co-ordinators who had held responsibility for the overall organization of the kitchen, 10 self-identified as volunteers, 4 identified involvement as both a volunteer and guest, 3 identified themselves as regular guests, one participant worked for the community centre where the community kitchen was located and one worked for the central charity. However, these roles were not fixed and, for some participants, changed over time in accordance with their weekly routines and needs. Furthermore, participants involved in the ethical reflection outlined below emphasized the importance of breaking down the guest/volunteer binary to create an inclusive space, therefore, although we use these terms, they are neither fixed nor mutually exclusive. While we do not claim that this study is an ethnography, one of the authors spent many hours volunteering in the community kitchen and the field notes from those observations were also an important source of insight.

Following Rowley's (2012) approach to conducting semi-structured interviews, the questions focused broadly on the following areas: a) understanding how participants make sense of community kitchen activities and practices b) their experience of meeting and relating with other stakeholders in and around the community kitchen and c) the significance of the community kitchen in their own lives, the local community and wider society. As noted above, the wider research project from which these data were drawn was not designed to seek out experiences of embodied care, rather this theme emerged during the preliminary analysis and subsequent coding of the data. Thus participants were not knowingly trying to fit their responses to a research agenda, nor to retrospectively justify or account for their practices. We recognize the limitations of interview methods in researching embodied experiences which are notoriously slippery and variable and thus difficult to capture through a discursive framework. However, despite this, much research on the body or embodiment

has used this method (Brown, Cromby, Harper, Johnson & Reavey, 2011). This led us to an approach based on abductive reasoning, which “begins with a puzzle, a surprise, or a tension, and then seeks to explicate it by identifying the conditions that would make that puzzle less perplexing” (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 27). An abductive approach is employed when a phenomena emerges in the data of which the researcher/s struggle to make sense using existing theoretical ideas and concepts (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The puzzle that emerged in this context was the embodied dimension of participants’ experiences and practices of care, which was not accounted for by much of the existing care theory. Specifically, how proximate encounters with others, coupled with embodied experiences with food waste, stimulated important learning that shaped the practice of care and its political dimension. We therefore engaged in an iterative-recursive movement (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012) between the empirical phenomena of embodied experience and theorizations of care to develop new sense-making.

6. ANALYSIS

The interviews were recorded, transcribed and anonymized by Alice Willatt. Template analysis was then used for thematically organizing and analyzing the data. This is a style of thematic analysis which enables a focus on multiple interpretations of phenomena by accommodating different perspectives and drawing on rich textual description (King, 2012). Template analysis provides guidance, as opposed to prescriptive rules, on how to develop conceptual themes, cluster these themes into broader groupings and connect them to wider master themes. This suited our research as we were not aiming to build a replicable analytical framework but rather to develop sense checking.

Alice conducted the first level of analysis from which she developed an initial template formulated around the preliminary coding of the interviews. This template broadly

focused on clusters of themes, one of which was “embodied kitchen experiences”. The coding, themes and template were sense-checked by Mary Phillips and were discussed and further developed by us collaboratively. Both authors then worked on a secondary analysis of the data, which incorporated further data from the four additional reflective interviews and from observations recorded in field notes. The initial template was again revised and the theme of embodied experience was expanded to include a subset of four themes; “embodied experiences”, “embodied relationship and interconnection”, “embodied learning” and “understanding the political through the body”. The authors individually analyzed data that drew on the role of the body before engaging in further collaborative analysis. We moved iteratively between the data and analysis to come to understand care as an inherently embodied practice, with the body playing a central role in movements between learning and action.

7. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

A process of Structured Ethical Reflection (SER), informed the research strategy. In this collaborative approach to ethical reflection, Alice Willatt and a core group of community kitchen volunteers came together to identify and discuss salient ethical issues that might arise through the ongoing research process (Brydon-Miller, Rector Aranda & Stevens, 2015). These included; the need for openness and transparency in relation to the researcher’s interpretation and use of research data, respect for the privacy and confidentiality of community kitchen guests and ensuring the research and knowledge produced supports the community kitchen’s social and environmental justice goals. In addition, as participants included some who were socially vulnerable and marginalized (Benoit, Jansson, Millar & Phillips, 2005), the researcher sought guidance from community kitchen members before approaching potential participants. She attended sessions on mental health training before and

during the research and followed established ethical protocols for researching with vulnerable participants (Liamputtong, 2007). The SER process provided a contextual and relational process of ethical reflection that enabled us to embody and live out an ethic of care through our own research practice.

A significant tension that was surfaced through the inquiry process related to issues of participation and voice. The inquiry privileged the voices of the largely white, able-bodied, middle-class volunteers. The early decision-making process from which the primary focus and aim of the inquiry arose was in part responsible for this, as it interrogated relationships between the charity and the kitchen. This arguably limited the scope for participation of guests, many of whom are already subject to social marginalisation and exclusion. This is problematic because, as Tronto points out, “almost all discussions of care start from the perspective of care giver, not care receiver” (2006:15). This underlines the inherently political nature of care and the imbalances in power relationships that can result. The analysis does include the voices of interviewees whose engagements in the community kitchen arose in connection to their experiences of food poverty, mental and physical health, homelessness and addiction. However, these voices are in the minority, with the co-researchers largely reflecting the white middle-class demographic of volunteers.

8. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The paper will now explore how ecofeminist care-based moralities can illuminate and be informed by activist practice in a community kitchen. In so doing we will focus on three key interconnected areas of analysis. First, we illustrate how embodiment is an inherent part of caring relationships, identifying practices which build and nourish interconnection. We point towards the social justice approach behind these embodied practices, whilst also highlighting tensions surrounding the classed and raced structures within the volunteer body. Secondly,

drawing on Hamington's (2015) work, we demonstrate how physically proximate and caring relationships stimulate embodied forms of learning that potentially disrupt settled views of the world. Combining Hamington's focus on the ways in which care is embodied with an ecofeminist concern to move between the general and the particular, we show how such disruption leads to critical analysis of the ways in which local contexts of need are in part created and sustained by broader socio-political structures. Finally, in the third section, we show how this produces political action in two areas. First, the community kitchen organized a series of food waste restaurants, pushing an agenda of challenging systemic causes of food waste. Second, participants were motivated to undertake direct action. In this way, we draw direct connections between embodiment, caring practice and political activism.

It is important to acknowledge the political beliefs held by volunteers prior to their involvement in the community kitchen. Approximately one third of participants were already engaged in social and environmental justice issues, such as campaigns against government austerity measures and climate change marches. Others held pre-existing concerns but these had not resulted in concrete action. Some were motivated to join because they wanted to meet new people and get to know new areas of the city. This paper draws on experiences from all groups, exploring how embodied engagements deepened existing understandings, and, in some cases led to direct political action.

8.1 Care, embodiment and relatedness

To understand how care is connected to proximate, embodied practice we begin by demonstrating the ways in which participants emphasized intersubjective experiences within the community kitchen. The role of the body in facilitating interconnection emerged frequently in interviews with volunteers who adopt a range of practices to foster an inclusive

environment and break down boundaries between guests and volunteers. These come together as a complex interweaving of space, place and the body (Milligan & Wiles, 2010).

On arrival, guests are greeted by a volunteer who invites them to sit at a table laid out restaurant-style with a tablecloth, set places for each guest, and sometimes flowers acquired on the surplus food collections. Before the meal, volunteers serve guests tea, coffee and soft drinks. The menu is written up on a board and hung by the large kitchen hatch, which is intentionally left open to create a fluid feeling between the kitchen and meal area. Guests and volunteers mingle around the hatch, chatting about the types of food that were picked up on the morning collections, the daily menu and the inviting smells coming from the kitchen. The meal itself, shared by guests and volunteers, was often spoken about in terms of its ability to bring people physically close through sitting down together and the shared act of eating.

...there was sort of a deep-rooted sense that the meal should be enjoyed together and

that was really the glue that bound the whole thing together. (Phillip, volunteer)

Phillip emphasises the importance of everyone, guests and volunteers, sharing the meal together to dissolve spatial boundaries that risk reinforcing a hierarchical separation between them. The physical act of eating in one communal shared space is the “glue that bound the whole thing together”. We thus see how care is enacted spatially through the significance of the material layout of the community kitchen, combined with the bodily proximity created through coming together to eat, itself an inherently bodily practice.

Guests spoke about the significance of meeting, relating and connecting with others during the community meal. These activities resulted in visceral experiences of interconnection, which itself resonated as a form of care. When asked to describe their experiences of the community kitchen, guests often began by emphasizing that meals provide much more than meeting material needs. Tom began attending as a guest and then signed up to be a member of the volunteer kitchen team. He says he relies on the meal and the

additional donated surplus food that guests can take away, particularly at times of financial hardship, but the significance of interconnection is also important:

It's not just 'I'm here, be grateful', it's 'you are human beings and you're part of something', ... it's talking to people and making them welcome ... taking care of them, it's not just taking care of your food needs, it's also about humanizing people. ...I think there is a very strong ethic. (Tom)

Tom foregrounds his sense of being welcomed and “being part of something” beyond attending to his physical needs, and through the interview spoke about the inclusive approach of the cooking team, identifying how, unlike in other areas of his life, his physical disabilities had not been a barrier to inclusion. Therefore, his participation enables bodily nourishment, but he also experiences physical inclusion in embodied activities of preparing the community meal, which in turn leads to relational interconnection. Stan, a regular guest, also pointed to affirmative experiences of inclusion that built relationships based on respect.

There is so much interest in people's lives, beyond one label in these places ... And it's great that people from the community kitchen, the volunteers, interact with the guests and they come and they play chess and then there is a learning, there is a beneficial learning process on both sides... it's not just, oh yeah, we are helping you because you are down and out. (Stan)

Stan recognises how guests and volunteers form respectful relations, where guests are more than clients or service users; they are people “beyond one label”. This highlights a commitment to moving away from emergency food provisioning in which interactions focus primarily on meeting physical needs. He emphasises the importance of “a beneficial learning process on both sides”, suggesting a reciprocal openness in meeting and learning about the other (Benhabib, 1992). The sharing of food and other activities such as playing chess

together, reinforce the idea that the community does more than provide a service, it is a place of interconnection and friendship.

Embodied practices of care designed to create an inclusive environment were also framed as part of a wider social justice approach to emergency provisioning.

We do our best to make the community meal as inclusive as we can because it is a space full of all sorts of people who, for different reasons, have been pushed to the fringes of society, who are so often unfairly excluded, and have experienced different forms of discrimination, because of their religion, race, because they claim benefits, or they are disabled... for all sorts of reasons. (Ria)

Ria recognises that people accessing the community kitchen have often experienced different forms of structural disadvantage, which has led to exclusion, as in the case of Tom above relating to physical disability. Experiences of hunger are framed systemically, in relation to social relations of power, as an outcome of an unjust society in which people are “pushed” to the fringes; metaphorically and physically excluded. The embodied practices that foster proximate relations and create a welcoming environment are thus part of a wider social justice approach to care. However, although an ethic of inclusion was central to their approach, volunteers also recounted instances when inclusion was not possible, such as in the case of individuals who were aggressive or violent. These were a reminder of some of the challenges of creating and sustaining an emergency food provisioning space.

Although embodied practices can go some way in breaking down barriers between carer and cared for, it is important to acknowledge the asymmetrical power imbalances in caring relations. As mentioned previously, a significant proportion of volunteers are white and middle-class. Efforts have been made to diversify the volunteer body which mean that more people from the local community and guests volunteer, but volunteers who occupy

positions of privilege, particularly relating to race and class, are still the majority. Sophie recognises how this risks reaffirming and perpetuating existing relations of power in society:

It feels a bit patronising sometimes because some people [volunteers] come in from the posh neighbourhoods on the other side of town. It can feel a little bit like slumming it with the poor people for an afternoon. You have people coming in from the outside... it's a bit of a disconnect. It's like a double-edged sword because at same time it opens up the perspective of the people who are coming in. (Sophie)

Sophie's sensitivity to difference, in this case class, amongst those giving and receiving care brings questions of power to the fore. She is concerned about a paternalistic approach in which "people from the posh neighbourhoods" see their involvement in the community kitchen as charitable acts which cast guests as dependent and passive recipients. This marks a point of "disconnect", compromising the ethics of inclusion and social justice identified earlier by affirming dominant social relations of power. Following Beasley and Bacchi (2005, 2007) and Pedwell (2014) this serves as a warning against uncritically celebrating care and empathy as a social good, underscoring its potential to leave intact the binary construction of active independent citizens vis-à-vis dependent others. For us, this relates to the messy middle ground (May and Cloke, 2014), specifically the challenges of making sense of care in this context when it is marked by the potential to foster experiences of interconnection, opening up "the perspectives of people ... coming in", inclusion and well-being, while also recognising its capacity to affirm and perpetuate existing social structures. We return to these tensions later in the discussion.

In the next section, we explore how embodied, caring relations with and between those experiencing social and economic exclusion facilitate learning, which in turn guides and informs caring action. We extend the notion of embodied learning through physical interactions with food waste, such as collecting, distributing and cooking surplus food, that

raises awareness of wider social and political contexts – an ecofeminist imperative (Curtin, 1991). We argue that the body plays a central role in producing knowledge that disrupts our settled views of social and environmental issues in a way that motivates action.

8.2 Care, embodiment and learning

Participants described how they had been confronted with particular people, stories and circumstances that challenged and emotionally resonated with them during day-to-day community kitchen activities. For example, participants spoke about feeling pain and distress for individuals who had been adversely affected by recent cuts to welfare, struggled with issues relating to mental health or were claiming asylum in the UK. The emotive and visceral feelings prompted by these encounters produced what Hamington describes as disruptive knowledge; “the kind of information about the other that is compelling and disrupts our lives to the point of motivating emotion and action” (2015, p. 8). These led to framings of hunger not as an individual problem but as a social injustice and public responsibility. We hear this in the following account from Sarah who describes how volunteers and guests often eat together:

... when it comes to kind of sharing the meal with people, it's definitely a really good ice breaker... by having a plate of food in front of you it means you're kind of, immediately sharing something, you've got something in common; it just puts everyone on a level playing field. Even if you're not necessarily sure what to chat about, you can just chat about the food and whether you like it and whether it's a bit too spicy. I guess it's because eating is something that we all need to do, it's so basic and like, I think, maybe, its beauty is in the fact that it is very basic. It's not something that people should need to choose to do. Some people do have to choose whether to

feed themselves or their children, which shouldn't ever happen. But, we all need food to survive. (Sarah)

Sarah has earlier described how everybody collaborates in the processes of eating and cooking – “it's about all mucking in and all sharing” – and she emphasises shared visceral bodily experiences, such as touching and tasting food. Particularly significant is that these physically proximate encounters - the intermingling of bodies to carry out activities in a space marked by care - gives rise to a compassionate caring response. It brings home the fact that “eating is something we all need to do” and yet we live in a society in which people have to “choose to feed themselves or their children”. Although Sarah may not have experienced food poverty herself, being in close relations with those who are stimulates a shared sense of humanity (Porter, 2006). Furthermore, Sarah recognises that the economic disadvantages of the guests results in a higher level of immediate vulnerability than experienced by many of the volunteers; she recognises commonality (a potential vulnerability to hunger), while also respecting difference (that *some* of us have to choose). This is significant to a politicised care practice (Plumwood, 1993; Curtin, 1991) as recognising both commonality and difference highlights hunger as a social moral issue and public responsibility. As Sarah argues, people “shouldn't ever have to choose” whether to feed themselves or their children. Sarah's unconscious bias as to who should lead initiatives was also surfaced and challenged. A group of Pakistani women from a local community group volunteered and wanted to cook traditional dishes:

I thought that was really important, but they were coming in with lots and lots of ideas and I could feel a little bit of reservation, thinking ‘but we do it like this’ (laughs). Then I had to check myself. ... We have to make sure we represent different parts of the community in what we do and how we do it, and in the food we make and eat. (Sarah)

Participants thus recognised that relations were asymmetrical but physical proximity and the sense that some aspects of their lives could be shared, even if partially and fleetingly, gave a base on which to build understanding and respect for the other. This resonates with Keevers and Sykes (2016) who, in their study of food practices in a community organization, found that ‘connecting across the friction of differences’ (p. 1659) did not erase or exclude such differences, but provided common ground on which to build community and support. In the kitchen, it also built motivation to act against systemic injustice.

Building further on Hamington’s notion of disruptive knowledge, we suggest that bodily interactions with food waste in the kitchen motivates questioning the intersection of social and environmental justice issues. We argue that embodied engagements with food waste facilitate further inquiry that invokes and amplifies critical analysis of *how* broader socio-economic structures and relations of power shape and determine local contexts of need.

We illustrate this with a quote from Phillip, a community kitchen co-ordinator. Phillip was quite explicit that his initial motivations for volunteering were not political but instead he wanted to connect to the local community. However, the embodied activities he engaged in stimulated politicized understandings of the community kitchen’s practices and objectives.

The project has so many benefits ... the main one was tackling the atrocious levels of food waste that take place in society and it's all rooted in the idea of free market capitalism, which has meant that everything has a price and it's common for things to be completely overproduced in order to just meet demand and make profit. The massive quantities of bread and vegetables that we used to pick up every week from the supermarket was pretty outrageous and loading it all on a bike and cycling it across town, you realized how ridiculous it is having people starving and yet there was all this food being binned. (Phillip)

Phillip recalls his responses to the physical activity of loading large amounts of food from supermarkets onto trailers which supported and amplified his cognitive understanding of the amount of edible food being wasted, especially when juxtaposed with the level of and reasons for the needs of those using the kitchen. This demonstrates how embodied learning resonates with Phillip in such a way that disrupts his initial motivation for volunteering and makes social and environmental injustices of pressing concern.

In keeping with the holistic approach of ecofeminist ethics, Phillip's description of the community kitchen also demonstrates how care for the particular and general pre-suppose one another (Warren, 2000). Caring for local contexts of need relating to individual experiences of social disconnection and isolation involves understanding the broader structures that shape and determine these conditions. Equally, caring about those broader structures requires understanding how they resonate in and shape individual lives. Particularly significant is that embodiment amplifies Phillip's understanding of particular contexts of need as connected to wider general socio-political structures. The physical impact of loading large quantities of food waste onto trailers and cycling it across the city underscored powerful realisations about the scale of food waste alongside heightened understanding of social issues resulting from free market capitalism.

The role of embodied learning in enabling Phillip to connect iteratively the local and general demonstrates a level of critical thinking and analysis in which questions of care, caring responsibilities and caring resources are placed centre stage. In this case local contexts of food waste, social disenfranchisement and marginalization are understood as the result of a government failing to meet its caring responsibilities to citizens and the biophysical environment. Phillip went on to specifically pinpoint the government's failure to enact regulation to limit food waste and provide adequate welfare resources to support vulnerable members of society.

On many occasions, participants reflected on the extent to which the community kitchen normalized and legitimized the lack of action taken by governments and large-scale food retailers. Sarah discusses the tensions surrounding the community kitchen's reliance on food waste from leading national supermarkets:

... we are giving supermarkets an excuse not to do anything, not to reduce their own food waste... we are giving them a way out. People do say that: 'aren't you propping up the system?' My answer is always, yes, for the time being but it still needs to be done otherwise that food is going to get wasted and we are doing educational events so we are trying to create a situation where we don't need to exist anymore. (Sarah)

This illustrates a more nuanced and complex view than the binary position of incorporation within or subversion of neoliberal agendas that has characterized much of the research on emergency food provisioning spaces (Cloke et al., 2017). Instead embodied experiences invoke analysis of these tensions and a questioning of the relations of power in a society underpinned by a market-orientated socio-economic system (Sevenhuijsen, 1998; Tronto, 1993).

8.3 Care, embodiment and political action

Members of the community kitchen spoke about how embodied relational engagements in the community kitchen politicized them and resulted in them taking direct action. Anisha started volunteering at the community kitchen because, like Phillip above, she wanted to make friends and meet people from different parts of the city. She spoke extensively about how her various roles as a food collector, café host and cook had progressively tuned her in to political issues. Particularly salient is that she began to make significant structural connections between the social and environmental forms of injustices, which motivated her to take action.

I started connecting these [social and environmental] issues... as soon as you see with your own eyes in the kitchen, preparing the meal, the amount of food that we are throwing away and then you link that to the amount of people that you meet who come to the meals, who can't afford to eat, and also, how unsustainable we are being with our planet... everything will fracture if we don't have enough resources... the two are interlocked, and we need to deal with it, it makes it feel a lot more pressing, and you start actually campaigning (Anisha).

Anisha developed an understanding of the interrelation between social and ecological injustices and emphasises how her embodied engagements challenged her understandings of the world. This in turn led to a greater sense of urgency. The fractured nature of our social and ecological systems felt “a lot more pressing” to Anisha, to the extent that she was then motivated to take action; she campaigned for the abolition of the bedroom tax and participated in climate change marches. Overall, we see how Anisha's engagement in day-to-day community kitchen activities led to an “expanded understanding of our place in our social and natural environments”, in such a way that stimulates “moral imagination and moral motivation” (Gruen, 2009, p. 26). This was the same for several other participants who spoke about how involvement in the community kitchen sparked on going engagement in food waste advocacy.

Participants involved in political activism prior to joining the community kitchen witnessed how embodied engagements with food waste could stimulate critical analysis and action in those who had not previously been so motivated. Robert founded the community kitchen following several months of close involvement in the Occupy movement. For him, seeing the transformative impact of physical engagements with food waste shaped the approach and organization of their educational events, such as food waste pop-up meals run on the local university campus. These events involved a meal made from food waste

alongside a series of talks from student societies and activist groups on a wide range of issues from refugee rights to food sovereignty. He explains how an embodied approach, in which people physically engaged with food waste through handling, cooking and eating, was central to this process.

We aimed to get people mobilized and organized around food justice... people came and saw that there was enough food to feed one hundred people and that was a fraction of what was in the bins... And, seeing and eating is a big part of understanding an issue, really physically engaging with it, that's an education... You can connect in meetings, events and films but really, sitting down, eating together and being together is how you actually connect with people. They had to watch something that challenged them, it wasn't just let's all sign a petition to save children in Africa, the kind of classic stereotype about let's all be benevolent. It was like real on the ground, there is injustice, we are part of it. (Robert)

This demonstrates the way in which embodied and disruptive forms of learning are used as activist practice to spark discussion and analysis of food waste issues. Robert underscores the importance of sensory experiences with food waste through “seeing”, “eating” and “physically engaging”, identifying the power of embodied engagements to disrupt everyday sense-making. These visceral and embodied experiences combine with interpersonal engagements, and discussion of the systemic nature of the issues, to generate a sense of urgent connection to broader social and environmental injustices. Moreover, he stresses how the mission of the food waste restaurants is action for change, as opposed to an approach where care-receivers are cast as the passive recipients of benevolence. He challenges the notion of care as individual altruistic acts of kindness, on the grounds that this affirms the binary positioning of autonomous caregivers and passive care receivers. Through this approach the latter are cast as “other”, defined solely in terms of their needs, as determined

by the active care giver (Tronto, 2006). Rather, the educational events communicate that there is “real on the ground injustice” at the systemic level, and that “we are part of it”, inculcated in dominant power structures and required to challenge and resist them.

9. DISCUSSION AND CONTRIBUTION: FROM EMBODIMENT AND CARE TO POLITICAL ACTION

Our over-arching aim in this paper is to show how the embodied components of care ethics can stimulate political action. We do this by drawing on the experiences of those involved in a community kitchen committed to delivering social and environmental justice. In this context, we demonstrate how embodied care practices stimulate questioning of structures and social relations of power that can motivate political action. However, we also identify how caring relations in the community kitchen are imbued with power dynamics relating to class and race. It is important not to ignore the gendered relations of power that operate in this social space of care. Towards the end of the research, during an informal chat with a woman volunteer, she referred to an incident when a volunteer was asked to leave due to sexual remarks he made towards woman volunteers in the kitchen. Wharton (2005) reminds us that gender is a multilevel phenomenon. It is enacted, produced and reproduced at the level of the individual – such as through interactions in the kitchen - but also operates independently, across social and organisational structures. Although on the surface there was an equal mix of men and women volunteers who occupied the spread of roles, it is important not to lose sight of how gendered relations of power are produced and reproduced within this space. Indeed, although it is the antithesis of a caring relation, sexual abuse has occurred in places where care is ostensibly practiced – for example, homes for vulnerable members of society such as the elderly, demonstrating how patriarchal power dynamics manifest in social spaces of care.

Our remaining discussion is structured in four parts; each focused on an interconnected aspect of the relationship between embodiment and care. We contribute two important empirical justifications for theory positing interconnections between the embodied dimensions of care and social practice. First, that embodiment is an important element in care relations. Secondly, that embodied learning involving felt emotions and physical experience disrupts our settled preconceptions of “the ways things are”, so that movements between embodied emotions/actions, and “care-ful” imagination and understanding, are iterative and mutually reinforcing. Our third contribution draws attention to the shared vulnerability of bodies, combined with an attentiveness to difference, which has the potential to break down moral boundaries to care. The fourth fleshes out important ecofeminist insights into the connections between specific instances of care and wider political action; namely how the interplay between body and mind, feeling and understanding, leads to interconnections between the specific and the general such that care becomes politicized and acted upon in practice. We finish by reflecting on care as a complex and contradictory practice, recognising how its embodied dimensions can engender direct political action, while also acknowledging how the social interactions that unfold through its practice can perpetuate oppressive power relations.

First, Hamington (2004) has argued that an understanding and recognition of the embodied dimensions of care are essential to realize the potential of care-ful approaches to personal and social morality. Yet, as identified at the beginning of this paper, there has been relatively little empirical exploration that links theory to practice. Our data has indicated that physical proximity is an important factor in encouraging relationship building through in-depth awareness of and respect for the other. Embodied care practices have a visceral impact on individuals such that they prompt further reflection that then motivates action. These range from activities that are directly nurturing, such as cooking and eating, to the physical

sensation of collecting food waste and feeling its weight and bulk; of becoming aware through bodily learning of the extent of such waste. Moreover, attention to embodied aspects of care enables a re-balancing from over-rationalization, which ecofeminists such as Plumwood and others (eg Glazebrook, 2005) have identified as leading to ecological and social crises, to a greater valuation of emotional and embodied interconnection to the human and biophysical world. Although cognitive considerations of moral issues remain important, embodied experience should be given a more central position in building understandings of how care, and motivations to care, emerge.

Second, our data has shown the potential of such embodied experiences to disrupt (Hamington, 2015) pre-conceptions. Indeed, such disruptive learning can prompt consideration of issues that were previously unrecognized and unsettle our equilibrium to the point that we are propelled to take direct action, such as through political campaigning and activism. Although our explanation of how disruptive learning invokes action may appear as a linear process, we suggest it is in fact a complex and iterative movement between visceral experience, embodied response and imaginative and cognitive processes that amplify and support caring courses of action. The accounts given by our participants such as Phillip and Anisha illustrate how disruptive physical sensations, such as hauling food waste across town, lead to greater cognitive understanding of issues which increased motivation to act. Robert also points to how, in the case of the restaurants, the disruptive physicality of eating food waste leads to intellectual discussion that together increase awareness of and possible action against food waste. It is the intersecting and bringing together of disruptive bodily learning with imagination and rational engagement that informs, motivates and guides care taking actions.

Third, this study casts light on the potential for care to engender a shared sense of vulnerability - facilitated through the body and its capacity for sympathetic response in

interacting with others - while also attuning us to difference. The body served as the common denominator (Hamington, 2015) despite differences in the material and socio-economic conditions of community kitchen members such that the relational capacities of the body, its ability to emotionally respond and to give and receive care in different contexts served as a point of commonality. A shared sense of vulnerability, although differing in degree, can be utilized to break down the “moral boundaries” outlined by Tronto (1993) and described earlier in this paper. The need for sustenance is important to all humans and thus seen as an issue of public concern as opposed to private responsibility. It challenges the separation between morality and politics and of reason from emotion.

Thus, finally, we suggest that the characteristics of care as relational, embodied, emotional and disruptive have the potential to combine and intersect to produce a level of engagement that can lead to political action. In this, we concur with care ethicists such as Tronto (1993, 1995) and ecofeminists such as Curtin (1991) that linkages between the particular and general are made through iterative movements between the two. However, we go further to demonstrate how it is embodied experience and learning that disrupts everyday sense making. This allows for local injustices to be understood more broadly as outcomes of an unfair society that prioritize the values of the market over a responsibility for the well-being of people and the biophysical environment. Furthermore, it was through embodied learning that participants were able to connect the local to the general as part of a broader, critical analysis. This included volunteers engaging in a critical analysis of issues of their own positionality and reflecting on the potential of caring relations to reinforce, rather than disrupt dominant power relations. We noted earlier the critiques levelled at empathy as a means of connecting across difference. In the context of the kitchen, empathy was not confined to the level of feeling, but rather led to how Pedwell (2014, p. 118) envisages a re-understanding of empathy as “a critical receptivity to being affected by ways of seeing, being

and feeling that do not simply confirm what we think we already know”. This framing of challenges to our settled understandings resonates with our concept of disruptive learning. These embodied learning practices were central to the community kitchen’s educational activities; the body and its capacity for sensory knowledge was harnessed in a bid to stimulate transformative analysis of and collective action against destructive, market orientated food systems.

While we highlight the potential of embodied care to forge a social justice approach to emergency food provisioning, and engender political action, we also recognise the “messy middle ground” (May & Cloke, 2014). There is possibility for regressive and paternalistic care practices to emerge in relation to the raced, classed and gendered structures within the volunteer body. We see this in the relations of power that unfold, demonstrating how spaces of care can sustain and perpetuate social relations of power that contribute to oppression and domination of minority groups. In light of this, we suggest an understanding of care in this context, not as a universally fixed practice, or inherent social good, but as a complex and contradictory process, which necessitates ethical reflection concerning issues of positionality, power and privilege in caring relations. As Tronto writes, care is “not simply a cerebral concern, or a character trait, but the concern of living active humans engaged in the process of everyday living” (Tronto, 1995:103). We see this as volunteers like Sophie grapple with problematic power relations relating to class, and in the volunteers’ efforts to diversify the volunteer body.

10. CONCLUSION

In the light of these findings we call for further research into the role of disruptive, embodied learning and how it serves to challenge preconceptions and mobilize collective or individual care practices and action across a full spectrum of organizations. Particularly interesting

would be inquiry into how the imaginative dimensions of disruptive learning play out in cases where the other is not physically proximate and the learner is physically distant from the space and place in which injustices unfold. The limitations acknowledged as to the raced and classed aspects of the study signal a potential opening for future projects that engage with care ethics through an explicit focus on the politics of bodies and in the context of social justice organisations. It underscores the need for further understandings of care practices that begin from the perspective of care receivers, enabling the foregrounding of minority voices that are often marginalized and excluded from discussions and decision-making surrounding social provisions and responsibilities to care (Tronto, 2006).

Within ecofeminism, Val Plumwood (1993) argues that an ethical commitment to care is fundamental to building different relationships between humans and with nature in an act of opposition to the instrumentalization of social and economic life. We have argued that embodied experiences promote and arise from caring relations and practices to engage the imagination and the intellect in a way that self-interest and cold rationality cannot, inspiring us to address the social and ecological crises we currently face. The direct and embodied experiences of connectivity to concrete others build relationship and understanding, and through disrupting settled notions, can call forth a wider critique of systems and institutions. As we have demonstrated in this study, these movements between the personal and political can be powerful motivators for action.

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