

# Ethics-of-Care in Collaborative Art Practices

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## Abstract

The rise of participatory Social Practice art (SPA) engagements highlights the need to redefine ethical, caring relationships in artistic co-creations. Simultaneously, the Ethics of Care (EoC) concept has been increasingly incorporated into SPA collaborative community art, museum practices, and art education to encourage dialogue on its application in these spaces. The EoC framework articulates the relationship between care and ethics, emphasizing the “voice” by including marginalized perspectives. It serves as a model that values interpersonal ethics, showcasing diverse skills and capacities in addressing moral concerns. This paper re-presents key findings from my dissertation research on the EoC among six leading SPA practitioners.

The multi-case study explored the origins, practices, and conditions surrounding EoC, examining participants’ identities, roles, and the guiding principles that shape their worldviews. The cross-case analysis highlighted findings that include manifestations of EoC, such as acknowledging discomfort, boundaries, and reciprocity. While these components are present in all human interactions, this study advocates for leveraging these findings as indicators of

EoC within collaborative arts engagements. Ultimately, the re-presentation of the findings in this paper aims to expand the understanding of EoC and carry implications for art educators by cultivating EoC strategies for learners within diverse SPA environments.

## Introduction

This paper re-presents the salient results of my dissertation study focused on Ethics of Care (EoC) in collaborative art practices within Social Practice Art (SPA). EoC is defined as an ethic grounded in voice and relationships. It refers to promoting relational care based on contextual decision-making and attention to emotional, physical, and social needs (Gilligan, 1982; Sander-Staudt, 2016). The exploration of EoC in my dissertation study prompted reflection on my professional practice and positionality. As a second-generation Holocaust survivor, my experience of intergenerational memories of scarcity and the challenges of immigration have deeply impacted my sense of ‘otherness.’ These experiences profoundly shaped my understanding of care, which became deeply intertwined with my curatorial practice. They have influenced my multi-faceted roles as a curatorial leader and, at times, co-creator, guiding how I approach care and ethics in community engagement and how I define my EoC in collaborative art practices.

This reflection led me to investigate how other SPA curators and art practitioners shape their professional commitments. Specifically, this paper examines the key research question exploring what insights can an interview study of SPA practitioners reveal about life trajectories tracing the origins, practices, and conditions of caring (Aldouby-Efracim, 2024).

In this paper, I include a background to the problem and a literature review to contextualize EoC in the arts. My theoretical framework uses the feminist-informed EoC theory coupled with two concepts relating to SPA: Relational Aesthetics (RA) and Dialogical Aesthetics (DA). These concepts highlight the significance of interpersonal relationships and collaborative processes in artistic creation. I include a section on the dissertation methodology followed by the findings and discussion. These sections re-present the key threads revealed in the data: Ethics, Care, and EoC and center on the salient findings: discomfort, boundaries, reciprocity, and relationality. These findings aim to expand the definition of the EoC and to elucidate how it is manifested in the practice of the participants. The discussion highlights strategies for applying EoC as a

pedagogical tool in art education. The conclusion offers recommendations for future studies.

## Background to the Problem

The term “social turn” (Bishop, 2006, p. 178) refers to a renewed focus on socially engaged art (SEA) or alternatively Social Practice Art (SPA) that is collaborative, often participatory and uses people as the medium or material of the work. Per Flemington (2018), SPA integrates art into the social, political, and cultural contexts of communities, activating spaces from neighborhoods to classrooms to foster interaction, debate, and collaboration. While Bourriaud (2002) highlights “Relational Aesthetics” (p.43), focusing on art's capacity to foster interhuman encounters in shared spaces, Bishop (2012) challenges this approach, arguing that the emphasis on well-meaning intentions in SPA risks undermining its critical aesthetic potential. Others, such as Helguera (2011) and Finkelpearl (2013) advocate for socially engaged practices that prioritize community impact and cooperation, and Kalin (2018) critiques that art education's use of SPA risks prioritizing civic utility over transformative change, reinforcing the neoliberal status quo and depoliticizing its potential for meaningful change.

SPA curators and creatives work in diverse environments shaped by the shifting dynamics of multiethnic, tech-savvy, and post-humanist societies (Braidotti, 2018). In these contexts, there is a need to navigate the tension between artistic integrity and social justice. This is particularly relevant given the complexities of engaging with SPA in nomadic and hybrid communities (Braidotti, 2018) while promoting ecological sustainability (Lippard, 1995, 2014). Furthermore, understanding the interplay of power between individuals and collectives is, therefore, key to collaborations among artists, participants, and communities. These dynamics influence SPA by shaping its dialogue and methodologies (Helguera, 2011; Kester, 2011; Lacy, 1995).

## SPA and Art Education

Indeed, SPA has transformative potential for its participants, encouraging critical reflection and activism in educational settings (Bass & Sholette, 2018; Schlemmer, 2010). Specifically, by exploring affective engagement for social equity, SPA has the potential to explore deep emotional connections that drive

participants toward collective action and social justice (Amsler, 2011). This framing aligns with Helguera's (2011) emphasis on dialogical and participatory practices, creating collaborative spaces where art becomes a vehicle for societal transformation. Furthermore, it offers to disrupt hierarchical structures and promotes real-world engagement in art education (Lawton, 2017; Dewhurst, 2014). However, this approach can also bring ethical complexities, particularly in how artists impact communities. For instance, Thomas Hirschhorn's *Gramsci Monument* (2013) created in partnership with the Dia Art Foundation, was a temporary art structure in Forest Houses, a public housing complex in the Bronx, NY, included a community center, library, theater, internet café, and daily educational workshops that aimed to foster engagement and provide a space for learning and discussion. Dedicated to Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, the work was initially celebrated for encouraging community interaction. However, its abrupt conclusion left residents disillusioned, illustrating the risks of SPA projects that lack accountability and sustainability (Johnson, 2013; Kimball, 2015). This example highlights the ethical challenges inherent in SPA.

Art educators face the challenge of preparing students to balance artistic freedom with social responsibility. They aim to foster critical reflection on cultural, social, and personal contexts, guiding students to consider power dynamics and promote inclusivity, empathy, and social justice (Leavy, 2015; Desai, 2017; Powell, 2019; Sharma, 2020). Consequently, like SPA artists tasked with ethics-guided approaches that prioritize the community's well-being (Bolt, 2016; Möntmann, 2013), art educators also must navigate ethical collaborations fostering accountability (Addison & Burgess, 2016; Raykov & Vella, 2021).

## Literature Review

The growing prevalence of the EoC in community and participatory art, museum practices, and art education has sparked discussions on its definitions and manifestations in artistic practices and education (e.g., Bae-Dimitriadis, 2024; Denmead, 2024; Staikidis, 2024; Varuti, 2023). In today's politicized and polarized social environment (Braidotti, 2018), there is an urgent need to implement EoC in learning, creation, and collaborative art spaces.

### Ethics

Since the late 1950s, artists and institutions have focused on engaging communities and addressing social issues through art. By integrating social

justice themes and fostering creative placemaking, artists, and educators contribute to awareness and community impact while scholars continue to explore ethical standards within aesthetic practices (e.g., Bourriaud, 2002; Bishop, 2006; Kaveh, 2022). The following decades saw art's increasing role in fostering inclusivity, activism, and ethical responsibility (Bishop, 2012; Finkelpearl, 2013), and demands for diversifying cultural production have prompted a reevaluation of art's societal role (Felshin, 1995). Kester (2006) and Bishop (2006) debated ethics in SPA, with Kester emphasizing ethics-centered collaboration and Bishop arguing that this focus can dilute art's critical and aesthetic power, advocating instead for conflict to challenge authority. This debate remains pivotal in balancing ethics and arts with Jackson (2011), who highlights the importance of negotiating ethical considerations without compromising artistic innovation. Relatedly, Foster (2015) underscores the necessity of maintaining aesthetic rigor alongside ethical responsibility. Recent scholarship has advanced this discourse, emphasizing public art's social impact (Finkelpearl, 2020), decolonial approaches (Butler and Hahn, 2021), ethical AI (Jones, 2021), etc. All advocate for ethical practices that prioritize sustainability, privacy, and social equity in art.

### Why Care?

In his seminal work on care, Mayeroff (1971) defines care as a relational process that nurtures growth and development for individuals, ideas, and communities. Aligned with EoC framework, this approach highlights care as essential to growth across life areas, defining it as relational practices that also foster mutual recognition, protection, empowerment, and community (Gordon et al., 1996). Thus, care, as a concept and a phenomenon, serves as a flexible moral framework for evaluating discourse practices in diverse settings (Sander-Staudt, 2016). This flexibility requires clear guidelines in community art and educational settings, with care as a moral framework to navigate human interactions and complexities in collaborative art projects (Hartelova, 2016, Millner & Coombs, 2021).

### EoC

EoC, conceptualized by Gilligan (1982) in her seminal book *In a Different Voice*, reframes ethical considerations by centering care as a primary moral dimension, challenging the predominance of justice-based, male-centric moral theories. Gilligan (1982, 2011) positioned EoC as a transformative voice in moral and psychological theory, blending self with relationships and reason with emotion. Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984) emphasized a gendered difference in moral

perspective, prioritizing relationships and care without the need for judgment (Nelson, 1992). Further, Tronto and Fisher (1990) expanded EoC by defining care as actions to maintain and “repair our world”—our bodies, environments, and relationships—highlighting our inherent interdependence (Tronto, 1993, p.103) and classified four phases of caring: about, of, giving, and receiving (p. 106). Subsequent scholars such as Held (2006), Noddings (2002), and Ruddick (1989) have advanced a female-centered ethical framework that positions EoC as an alternative to traditional moral philosophies, underscoring its applicability to global issues and personal relationships. This approach, inherently feminist, challenges gender-based power disparities by promoting traditionally "feminine" virtues like empathy as essential for moral insight and advocating care as a universal moral value, thus erasing the private-public divide (Sander-Staudt, 2018).

### *Ethics of Care and the Arts*

These EoC scholars provided the theoretical framework for this study, integrated with concepts such as RA, which sees art as interactive, centering on human relationships and social contexts (Bouriaud, 2002), and DA, which emphasizes dialogue, interaction, and idea exchange as central to art creation and experience (Kester, 2011). Thus, RA and DA closely align with the EoC by emphasizing empathy, mutual respect, and ethical responsibility (Staudt–Sanders, 2018).

Specifically relevant to my curatorial practice and research are studies on Intersectional Care supported by scholars to highlight Caring Curating Praxis (CCP) that centers empathy, responsibility, and connection across the curatorial process. CCP goes beyond traditional curation by fostering intellectually and emotionally engaging, ethically grounded spaces that incorporate community input and diverse perspectives, challenging conventional practices (e.g., Tronto 2013; Hartelova, 2016; Horne et al., 2014; Příhodová, 2020; Reagan, 2017; Reckitt, 2016; Wittman, 2012).

Indeed, my study reinforces existing SPA literature by placing cultural practices and participatory arts at the intersection of performative methodologies, process-based approaches such as performance art, and collaborative practices like community arts (Birchall, 2017; Bishop, 2013; Finkelpearl, 2013; Kester, 2005; Lacy, 2017). Specifically, Kaprow's *Happenings* (Lacy, 2017) and Shusterman's (2008, 2013) framework of Somaesthetics highlights how SPA performance artists explore the presence and sensory experiences to deeply engage audiences through somatic practices to enhance

meaning-making (Shusterman, 2013). Kimerer's (2013) work informs on the integration of Indigenous knowledge in relation to embodied practices is instructive for SPA. Together, these approaches amplify underrepresented voices, such as those of incarcerated women and survivors of domestic violence, demonstrating the transformative potential of art (Aldouby-Efrain, 2024). To address varied definitions of EoC (Jackson, 2011; Helguera, 2011; Millner & Coombs, 2022), this study aimed to broaden understanding by integrating the perspectives and expressions of participants.

## Methods

This qualitative interview case study is explorative, descriptive, and interpretive in nature. To understand how care manifests within artistic and creative practices, the study employed both single and multi-case approaches, complemented by cross-case thematic analysis. This methodology provides an in-depth examination of real-world issues, allowing for the identification of recurring themes and patterns (Yin, 2009; Zach, 2006). Additionally, incorporating narrative inquiry and the portraiture method (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) enriched the study by foregrounding personal stories, enabling multi-level triangulation.

### Participants

The six participants, henceforth the *Creatives*, diverse in age, gender, culture, and region, provided a global perspective on SPA. Selected for their notable collaborative work with marginalized groups, they represent a range of artistic activities across sites, including greenhouses, parks, and classrooms. The selection was based on their care-focused approach to collaborative SPA, aimed at exploring relationships within diverse settings. Notably, they all shared backgrounds in art education to varying degrees. Table 1 offers a summary of each of the *Creatives*' profiles, emphasizing their backgrounds, artistic focuses, notable projects, roles, and guiding ethics, along with the themes shaping their approach (Aldouby-Efrain, 2024, p. 158).

Recap of Single-Case Participant Profiles

Participant	Cultural Context and Influences	Emphasis in Practice	Key Project	Ethical Considerations and Values	Throughline in Practice
SLR	Dominican cultural context; paternal care vs. machismo	Process over outcome Somaesthetics; environment as care expression	* <i>RX organization</i> * <i>Gun violent project</i> * <i>Visitor as performer</i> * <i>Incarceration project</i>	Accountability, participant's self-value, meaningful connections	Somatics and process-based community approach
ISO	Asia Minor cultural context; aunt's activism; political injustices	Ethics in projects; responsibility, intent vs. impact	* <i>Historical Prison</i> * <i>COVID project</i> *Educational roles	Emotional growth of students; safe environment; ethics of engagement	Ongoing support; reflections on emotions and discomfort
AG	Egalitarian upbringing; communal "spiritual fathers"	Resilience through art and nature; collaborations; ecological awareness	* <i>Venice Biennale</i> * <i>Greenhouse Hub</i>	Shared leadership; creativity activation; sustainability; interplay of power dynamics	Community resilience and autonomy
KL	Nigerian culture; community of color celebration; joy; racial reckoning	Inclusivity with control; financial, mental, emotional support	*NW's home project *SP's film series *Arts Organization leadership	Gendered emotional labor; responsive change in rhythm with the community	Utilizing cultural context to inform trust building; emotional intelligence
SUL	Social justice values; curiosity about others' multiculturalism	Aesthetic control; curation of representation	* <i>Incarcerated Women</i> * <i>Latin American Memorial project</i> *Retrospective	Artistic integrity; personal rules around aesthetics; navigating boundaries	Aesthetic-driven worldview
CEC	Middle-class, Brazilian background; international exhibitions and residencies	Material and oral histories as care; active listening and inclusivity	* <i>Crochet Dance project</i> with Mexican women * <i>Magnolia Sculpture</i> *Educational apprenticeships	Collaboration with craftspeople, musicians as well as collaborative participant engagement	Care through active listening and inclusivity in projects

## Methodology

The interview protocol was informed by my curatorial experience as well as articles, books, presentations, and podcasts by the *Creatives*. I used flexible, non-linear questions to explore and reveal interconnected themes of care, ethics, and EoC in the single and multiple case studies. Data was collected through three to four 45 to 90-minute semi-structured interviews on-site in the participants' professional spaces and via Zoom. The interviews were transcribed and crafted as individual textual portraits to capture each participant's "frames of reference"—values, experiences, and feelings that shape their worldviews (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). The interview instrument was supplemented with field notes and analytical memos, followed by coding and thematic organization (Saldaña, 2021) using Dedoose software.

## Data Analysis

Deductive and inductive approaches were utilized to identify key codes for cross-case thematic analysis. The inductive approach explored what factors or traits evident in the *Creatives'* early experiences helped them succeed in life (e.g., parental involvement and role models). This integrated approach allowed for a nuanced exploration of the findings, effectively linking the *Creatives'* insights with the EoC framework.

In the next section, I briefly discuss the thematic analysis to elaborate on the central threads: ethics, care, and EoC. These threads define the *Creatives'* approaches and inform their professional and personal engagements in SPA.

## Findings

Single-case analysis highlighted how the *Creatives'* early care experiences shaped the guiding principles of their SPA, and cross-case thematic analysis revealed how EoC manifests in their practices. In addition, I summarized each case to transition from the single to the cross-case analysis. These recaps revealed three primary themes that were present in all the single case data and which informed the *Creatives'* conceptualization of EoC in varying degrees: (1) Power dynamics, seen in the impact on the project environment and leadership; (2) Shared values, demonstrated through responsibility and meaning-making; and (3) SPA interactions were understood as vehicles of communication deeply informed by somatic awareness. Jointly, these themes reveal the underlying origins, practices, and conditions of care across the participants' experiences.

The cross-case analysis identified three central threads that were of concern to the *Creatives*—ethics, care, and EoC which I explored through the following **dimensions**: Source, context, manifestations, and guiding principles. Some key findings include boundaries, discomfort, reciprocity, and relationality.

### Ethics

The *Creatives* attributed their ethics to various influences, particularly personal belief systems, with variations in individual perspectives such as their moral compass or personal integrity. Specifically, they reflected on the factors guiding their ethical decision-making during moments of discomfort or conflict. For example, one *Creative* attested that their ethics is "...governed by the ethos and needs of the time.... [Being sensitive to] how ethics operates within a cultural surrounding and how the culture and its changes shape how your ethics change..." (Aldouby-Efraim 2024, p.165). Data revealed that ethical actions often surfaced in challenging moments, shaped by patterns such as the *Creatives'* tasks as leaders, curators, and mediators, and the cultural contexts (e.g., historical prison site or greenhouse art hub), materials, audience, and policies. These moments led to behaviors rooted in the *Creatives'* physical discomfort (e.g., anxiety), empathy for audience vulnerabilities, and reflections on project and personal limitations and responsibilities. Thus, the *Creatives'* ethical decisions and actions were shaped by the conditions in which they were operating: multifaceted roles and the projects' environment. These themes surfaced as salient practices within the Ethics section: setting boundaries and acknowledging discomfort.

### *Boundaries*

The *Creatives* used their projects as platforms to examine the various types of boundaries, including “aesthetics/artistic/innovative, cultural, emotional, ethical, and physical/workplace” (Aldouby-Efrain, 2024, p. 169). The *Creatives* emphasized the importance of boundaries in their collaborative art practices due to overlapping roles (e.g. artist and leader) and complex project settings (e.g., prison, greenhouse), which increased vulnerability and tension. To maintain respectful interactions and artistic integrity, they established relational boundaries as guidelines, sometimes limiting project scope, as in one case where a *Creative* restricted the exhibit to the prison site to balance her artistic integrity and participants’ priorities.

Setting boundaries highlights the complex interplay between behavior, interaction, and communication in collaborations, shaped by physical, conceptual, and relational limits. These boundaries—relational (relationships) and procedural (operations)—defined what was achievable and influenced the creative process. For instance, one *Creative* described how ethical boundaries shaped a dance project’s bodily exchange with senior women: “If... Crossing those boundaries feels wrong, [then the project] is not for me anymore” (Aldouby-Efrain, p.156). The boundaries were shaped by each project’s unique conditions (e.g., site norms, cultural values, objectives) and navigated challenges like emotional labor, power dynamics, and accountability, addressing personal and audience vulnerabilities. Concurrently, some recognized how these challenges could foster creativity and enhance inclusivity. Thus, the boundaries determined the level of reciprocal care expressed throughout the projects.

### *Discomfort*

The *Creatives* defined discomfort as moments of unease experienced in their bodies and expressed explicitly or implicitly in their behavior during artistic engagements. These instances may have stemmed from sharing susceptibilities or addressing tension in interactions with their project audiences. Discomfort can originate from pain, stress, anxiety, or other distressing emotions and poses challenges during engagements, especially within the complex and often ambiguous context of social justice work. For example, triggering trauma in visitors who participated in an art project exhibited in a historical prison. Additionally, the *Creatives* often face tension and disappointment (their own or their participants) arising from misalignments like constrained project timelines and conflicting expectations and priorities. Reflecting on these moments, vulnerability and somatic discomfort were highlighted as significant sources of

unease. Interestingly, some *Creatives* reframed uncomfortable situations—often stemming from patriarchal cultural backgrounds that discourage vulnerability—as opportunities for growth and innovation. This perspective shaped their decisions to design art workshops and engagements that directly address vulnerability and openness.

Specifically, in some *Creatives'* work, the body becomes a barometer for discomfort—expressed through somatics, which relates to or affects the body (e.g., gestures and gazes). Emotional engagement was also utilized to adapt to social interactions, using discomfort to drive deeper creative exploration. For example, some *Creatives* believe “that there are certain kinds of experiences and types of information that lodge themselves in your body and therefore, whether it’s joy or trauma, [you need] to get to know it and to perceive how it has shaped who you are” (Aldouby-Efraim, 2024, p.179). This process-based somatic approach fosters agency, reciprocity, and trust, pushing beyond traditional workshops to enhance the engagement and performance of learners. Furthermore, this somatic approach helps the *Creatives* reimagine spaces, prioritizing human experiences of discomfort to allow for “re-envisioning structures that prioritize people over outcomes.” (Aldouby-Efraim, 2024, p. 157). Altering the course of action during engagements emerges as a fundamental principle, acknowledging discomfort as a significant qualifier for EoC. The *Creatives'* ethical responses reflected belief systems shaped by the discomfort they encountered. This discomfort influenced their stances, such as acknowledging boundaries, which served as acts of care that encouraged audiences to share their stories and feel recognized.

## Care

*The Creatives'* source of care was deeply rooted in their early family and community relationships, all of which shaped their approach to care in their professional and creative practices. While pointing out the exact origin of care can be complex, some *Creatives* credited inspirational figures who modeled care, influencing their leadership to foster agency and trust, while others drew from nurturing environments like nature, which shaped their holistic approach to care. As one of *the Creatives* reflected, “Care...means different things as it relates holistically to principles...: that process must be prioritized over outcome, relationships...prioritized over objectives... deliberately pair care with accountability, that is, to care for a person and people who are carrying the work and fulfilling the promise of practice” (Aldouby-Efraim 2024, p.172). The *Creatives'* approach emphasized the layered nature of care, with ethical guidelines

shaping their understanding and practice. Values like prioritizing relationships fostered acknowledgment, respect, and inclusion, creating conditions that enabled care to be implemented. The ethical guideline of accountability was, therefore, closely tied to their development of care.

### *Reciprocity*

Reciprocity, defined as the quality of being shared, felt, or shown by both sides (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), fosters a sense of connectedness between the creatives and the audience, resulting in shared experiences and collaborative outcomes. It is consistently mentioned in how creatives define care in exchanges within the art projects and workshops: “have a presence in the room...have a very open ear to what is happening ... and be able to mobilize and or modify based on the exchange and empathy” (Aldouby-Efracim, p.175).

Some Creatives view reciprocity as a catalyst for growth, emphasizing responsiveness to project dynamics, even if it means altering original plans for empathetic exchanges. This approach fosters consensus through collective engagement, creating a shared agenda where everyone feels valued and recognized. The *Creatives* attest that this reciprocal interaction instills deep appreciation, embodying a pedagogy of care and love driven by an “intrinsic motivation to serve.” (Aldouby-Efracim, p. 175 ). This interaction centers on giving back by empowering others, being informed by navigating discomfort, and setting boundaries to create belonging.

The next section integrates the threads of ethics and care into a unified **EoC** framework. Although the *Creatives* demonstrated varying degrees of engagement with ethical considerations, their investment in ethical questions differed in intensity and focus, using their actions to exhibit care by fostering trust, belonging, and cooperation.

### *EoC*

In defining EoC, some *Creatives* advocated pairing ethics with care as a philosophy that ensures the inclusivity of all community members. Other *Creatives* linked care with ethics, establishing accountability guidelines, including safety measures during the art engagement to support women affected by domestic violence performing testimonials. As one *Creative* attested, “EoC means assessing who is at the table, their levels of privilege and specific needs, highlighting the intersectional lens required to address varying lived experiences” (Aldouby-Efracim, 2024, p. 177).

## Relationality

The *Creatives* viewed care as a dynamic core theme, enriched through relationality—interconnectedness and interdependence with the environment and participants, enhancing meaning and identity through relationships (Merriam-Webster, n.d.): “Relational caring [is]...: how the topic of framing the artistic [collaboration] works and how they [participants] treat each other...” (Aldouby-Efrain, 2024, p.176). One *Creative* developed a “Diversion practice” (Aldouby-Efrain, 2024, p. 90), a somatic technique to explore societal issues like incarceration through verbal and nonverbal exercises (gestures, gazes, self-discovery). Observing participants' emotional distress during a workshop connecting rival groups (e.g., incarcerated individuals and police), the *Creative* used this practice to ease tensions.

Thus, relational care shapes artistic collaborations and participant interactions by enhancing sensory awareness, adopting an ecological perspective, and encouraging community involvement. Through these practices, EoC nurtures empathy, cultivating compassionate and holistic relationships (hooks 1994; Pencak, 2022). Inherently, EoC fosters relationality by advocating for a balance between flexibility and accountability in personal and professional spheres. Interestingly, relationality is often enabled through Somaesthetics, a pattern evident across all the *Creatives'* data.

**Somaesthetics.** Enhances the approach of bodily awareness, meaning-making, and reflective thinking (Shusterman, 2013). Some *Creatives* used curiosity and gestures to connect deeply with participants in settings like historical sites or shelters. For instance, one *Creative* despite his discomfort, visited a participant in a shelter to gather feedback after his workshop, reinforcing connections. This approach deepens moral imagination and empathy, contributing to more intuitive and accessible designs (Tschaepé, 2021). Ultimately, Somaesthetics heightens sensory and cognitive engagement, enabling SPA practitioners to reflect critically on their interactions with communities while fostering ethically informed artistic interventions (Bresler, 2007; Mason, 2016). Continuous assessment within collaborations enables EoC guidelines, fostering reciprocity in a caring engagement.

## Discussion

This exploration of care and ethics through the *Creatives'* profiles suggested a theoretical framework for understanding EoC in collaborative art, emerging

from the cross-case analysis. It reveals how care is integrated through principles like acknowledging discomfort and boundaries (Laukkanen et al., 2022) and using Somaethics to navigate these dynamics. Curiously, the *Creatives* recognized there is a necessity to "...think beyond one's own needs...[care] has a collective aspect... and is never isolated, never about one person... It can only function ethically and with meaning in the context of a collective thought (Aldouby-Efraim, 2024, p.173). This necessity inherently involves emotional labor, requiring individuals to manage their emotions while sensitively responding to the emotions of others to maintain and nurture a collective ethos.

By integrating ethics into care, the *Creatives* highlight care as fundamentally rooted in reciprocal actions, underscoring the normative significance (i.e., ethical or cultural norms) of the interplay of human experiences, emotions, and physicality. Delving into this interplay is crucial because care extends across ethical and sociological dimensions that profoundly affect human life (Hartelova, 2016; Mayeroff, 1971). This interplay is described by Lipman's conceptualizing "Caring thinking." (1995, p.1) Uluçınar & Ari (2019) further expand on this interplay where humans exhibit a range of affective states: "... esteeming... healing, consoling, taking care of, nurturing, empathizing, sympathizing...appreciating, celebrating, and responding to the other in caring thinking" (as cited in Aldouby-Efraim, 2024, p.18).

Indeed, incorporating celebration into workshops and rituals symbolized community connection, promoting "rights and joy through participation, and all of that became its own care metric" (Aldouby-Efraim, 2024, p. 142). This aligns with Gude's (2004) perspective on joy as essential for deepening emotional connections in art and hooks' (1995) view of joy as a form of resistance that fosters resilience and inclusivity. Helguera (2011) further supports this approach, suggesting that joyful engagements enhance SPA by encouraging meaningful, community-oriented experiences. Joy serves as a powerful ethical force in collaborative practices, fostering reciprocity and positioning *Creatives* as "Guardians of the Experience" to ensure care-based engagements.

Thus, similarly to existing scholarship, this study advocates for a holistic approach to EoC encompassing interpersonal and personal dimensions, both human and nonhuman (e.g., the site) (Braidotti, 2013; Coombs & Millner, 2022; Cranton & Roy, 2003). This approach centers on care through reciprocity, with trust as foundational, aligning with DA's process-over-product focus that redefines art as a dynamic exchange fostering understanding across diverse groups (Bishop, 2006; Kester, 2004). The *Creatives* built trust by upholding

shared values like accountability, cultural awareness, openness, inclusivity, shared authorship, and respect for diversity. Additionally, becoming reflective practitioners, as Schön (1983) advocates, invites us to examine “how can you know yourself and another more deeply...” (Aldouby-Efrain, 2024, p. 97), underscoring the role of self-awareness and relational understanding in practice.

### EoC in Art Education

How do art educators navigate ethics in collaborative SPA? Educators who embrace pedagogies centered around care, from Freire (1970, 1998) to hooks (1994), Gay (2000), and Emdin (2020) highlight relational interactions and respect for the inclusion of varied backgrounds and needs of learners: Projects and curricula are designed to foster a nurturing environment, enabling learners to explore personal and social identities through art.

Similarly to EoC, the *Pedagogy of Discomfort* (Boler, 1999; Zembylas, 2014) encourages challenging beliefs through emotion, dialogue, and vulnerability, fostering critical empathy and awareness. By embracing risk, this Somaesthetics pedagogy invites participants to confront their roles in social injustices. Thus in navigating discomfort, the *Creatives* in this study who are also art educators, are faced with navigating boundaries to guide self-reflection and facilitate active caring engagement (Aldouby-Efrain, 2024).

### Conclusion

“... EoC should be present in all of our social spheres, all of our activities, and everything that we enact on a regular basis” (Aldouby-Efrain 2024, p.177). By blurring the boundaries between life and art (Dewey, 1934), SPA provides a platform for EoC to function not only as a ‘way of knowing’ but as an evolving approach to exploring relational dynamics in collaborations.

This paper re-presents findings from the study on *EoC in Collaborative Art Practices*, highlighting how an EoC-informed framework reveals the evolution of the *Creatives'* ethical perspectives within their project contexts. The cross-case analysis examined SPA practitioners' trajectories and responded to the research question on the origins, practices, and conditions of care, showing that these elements are grounded in early care experiences and expressed through themes of communication (e.g., Somaesthetics), power dynamics (e.g., leadership), and shared values (e.g., flexibility, meaning-making). The analysis revealed patterns in ethical stances and care practices shaped by the environment (e.g., site,

materials, audience, ethos) and participants' roles (e.g., artist, facilitator, curator). Ethical actions often emerged in challenging contexts, influenced by personal discomfort or empathy for vulnerabilities, underscoring reflexivity, boundary-setting, and accountability. Despite conflicts, a shared commitment to values like knowledge exchange and co-authorship established a foundation of reciprocity rooted in the *Creatives'* care experience. This exploration of shared themes from family and community relationships highlights how narrative interpretation could deepen insights into caring within community-based practices. Thus, the findings indicate that integrating ethics into care forms a belief system, linking care with collective thought to promote reciprocal actions. This link fosters participants' growth and advocates for a more audience-centered responsive SPA.

As EoC continues to emerge as a vital framework for fostering connectedness (Gary, 2022), its integration into SPA offers new opportunities to embed ethical care into creative collaborations. Future directions include expanding research on Somesthetic awareness to recognize diverse voices, embracing discomfort as a catalyst for care, aligning roles and boundaries for accountability, and embedding audience insights to guide processes and outcomes. By centering EoC across disciplines and age groups, art educators can contribute to an expanded definition of care, ensuring inclusive collaborations that genuinely value and respond to diverse perspectives and needs during these challenging times.

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