When 'I' becomes 'we': An ethnographic study of power and responsibility in a large food retail cooperative

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Abstract

Based on ethnographic research of a large food retail cooperative in New York (the Co-op), this article raises the research question of whether organizations can cultivate an ethic of responsibility to others and, if so, how this can be secured in everyday working practices? It draws principally on the work of Foucault and especially his later writings on the care of the self and ethics but seeks to link these deliberations to Levinas in identifying responsibility to the Other as prior to identity. Indeed, one message that we seek to convey is that attachments to identities are frequently a stumbling block for developing ethically responsible relations and organizations and this may necessitate some normative control. While recognizing that normative control can easily become oppressive and there were occasional signs of this where staff were watching one another and demanding compliance, our research provides a platform for exploring conversations about alternative forms of organization. We explore how relations of power can produce ethically progressive relations, through generative norms that give space to, and nurture, care and responsibility for others to constitute morally engaging organizational life.

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Introduction

Our problematic in this article is to explore fieldwork data from an organization that exemplifies communal commitments to collaborative and cooperative relations with a view to theorizing power and responsibility. More precisely, we raise the research question of how an ethic of responsibility is cultivated while recognizing the potential dangers where it is secured through normative forms of control. Based on ethnographic research within a New York retail Co-op, our study is informed by three interrelated analytical frames: first, a recognition that while sometimes constraining and coercive, power–knowledge relations can also be ethically positive and productive of life (Foucault, 1997, 2010); second, an understanding of power, knowledge and subjectivity as mutually constitutive (Ibarra-Colado et al., 2006); and third, a focus on the ethical importance of enacting responsibility, rather than merely adhering to abstract moral codes (Crane, 2000; Roberts, 2003). In addition, we seek to provide a 'practical' illustration of Foucault's (1997: 292–298) vision for developing more morally engaging forms of institution, constituted through relational and generative modes of power. This involves an ethic of responsibility that puts into play 'a system of rules . . . not a mixture of order and freedom' (Foucault, 2011a: 33). These rules derive from member participation and are sustained through collectively embodied ethical enactments that we shall illustrate in the following account of the empirical research.

Of course, there is always some tension between collective collaboration and conformity around rules and norms; indeed, as Foucault (1982: 212) argued, normative self-discipline can be one of the 'greatest confinements' insofar as it forces us back on our own 'identity by a conscience or self-knowledge' that denies the self the freedom necessary to refuse this kind of subjectivity. However, this dark side to cooperative and collaborative relations can be minimized where subjects participate in an embodied way in formulating or modifying the rules of their engagement. Although there are instances in our case study where there is reason to be concerned that oppressive force to comply with the cooperative norms exceeds what might be seen as acceptable, on the whole members were free to challenge and change particular rules through democratic debate. With limited exceptions it would seem that the Co-op is an 'ethical experience [that] involves the approval of a demand, a demand that demands approval, (Critchley, 2007: 16). Should they not approve of the demands upon them, by contrast with oppressive regimes, Co-op members were free to depart from or marginalize themselves from the activity (McMurray et al., 2011).

Rather than generating solidarity through negative in-group/out-group divisions or stereotyping (see Husted, 2021), Co-op members orientate themselves to the collective as a reflexive cooperative community. They seek to preserve heterogeneity and freedom from oppression, while simultaneously calling 'individual autonomy into question by the fact of the other's demand' for care and responsibility (Critchley, 2007: 56). These relations of power make possible an intertwining of exogenous norms, endogenous freedoms and a responsibility for others, which we view as hallmarks of Levinasian and Foucauldian ethics (Dale, 2012; McMurray et al., 2011).

While in his classic study of Tech, Kunda (2006 [1992]: 224) examined the way in which the corporate culture involved normative control that was a 'subtle form of domination', he also argued that 'organizations have to be seen in a comparative light' for

Tech was 'more open to investigation than . . . a Cuban sugar refinery' and in this sense was not tyrannical. Similarly, the Co-op involved regular meetings where decisions and rules were debated and could be changed through democratic consensus. Also, because the Co-op was owned by its members, it was not under the same pressure as Tech to compete in international product, distribution and equity markets. But there are alternative ways of visualizing neo-normative control where it might reflect 'a *potentially* promising way of being "different together"' (Parker et al., 2014: 631 quoted in Husted, 2021: 146, emphasis in original). This alternative is also evident in Kociatkiewicz et al.'s (2021: 953) study of two Polish cooperatives where less hierarchical relations produced forms of '*radical inclusivity*' (emphasis added), 'grounded on democracy . . . which strives at involving all voices, including dissenters'.

While vigilance must be maintained, overall, we believe the potential for ethical relations of responsibility within cooperative modes of organizing outweigh the dangers that normative control can encompass. At the same time, we need to be realistic for cooperative forms of organization have been in existence since 1844 when formed by the Rochdale pioneers in the UK yet have failed to challenge the sovereignty of 'the neo-liberal corporation and its "leadership"' (Wray-Bliss, 2019: 18).

Our research explicitly builds on a Foucauldian framework that recognizes how 'people's talk [and actions]' reflect and reproduce 'identities and organizations', through recursively constituting 'processes of normalization' (Huber and Brown, 2017: 1123). This is so, we argue, even in a cooperative organization where hierarchical power is comparatively absent as members exercise 'responsibility *for* others' in their dealings as a matter-of-course (Levinas, 1998). An ethic of responsibility infuses all aspects of the Co-op, not as the result of a carefully managed instrumental agenda, but because dominant principles provide forms of mutually positive self-discipline through principles of: (1) limited hierarchical control; (2) democracy; (3) collaboration; (4) responsibility; and (5) solidarity. The continuity and coherence of these principles is fundamental to how members interact with one another – constituting cooperation, commitment and participation in a community that inspires members to act in ways that are deemed appropriate by others (Gherardi and Masiero, 1987). This regime endows members with a 'positive relation-to-self' that moves subjects from 'I' to 'we' through a 'being for' others form of togetherness (Honneth, 2012: 204). This experience affected the primary researcher's subjectivity and energized our analysis.

The contribution of the article is, first, empirical where we identify a generic ethic of responsibility that is sustained through a commitment to, and disciplined compliance with, the *five* shared principles listed above. Second, theoretically, we analyse our data through debating the work of Foucault and Levinas to show how power and responsibility manifest themselves in the everyday enactments of our research participants. Overall, we suggest that enacted ethical practices are coextensively constituted through power and responsibility by organizational members, who working in 'close proximity' to each other, exercise 'their frail and vital sentience' (Roberts, 2003: 263) in sustaining collaborative organizational relations.

The article is organized into four major sections. First, we review relevant literature on, what has been termed, the later Foucault (Barratt, 2004, 2008; Munro, 2014) alongside a limited account of Levinas in relation to power and responsibility that might

contribute to knowledge of ethically positive social arrangements. Second, we provide a brief summary of our research design before presenting our case organization and modes of research in which there is substantial evidence of an ethics of responsibility. Third, findings are presented and fourth, in a discussion section, we develop our theoretical deliberations through the work of Foucault and Levinas, focusing on their overlaps and diversions with regard to an ethics of responsibility. We conclude that our empirical findings have implications for organizations even where their authoritarian hierarchy effaces democratic principles of radical inclusivity, collaboration, ethical responsibility and solidarity.

Productive power and ethical responsibility

In this section, we consider the literatures on relations of power and an ethics of responsibility. Our interest is in how organizational members form and reform their community through enacted principles that constitute embodied responsibility for others. We argue that empirical studies informed by Foucault's analysis have tended to focus on domination, discipline and deviance, the latter of which can engender solidarity through resistance to authority. Yet, one of Foucault's most important ideas was how we might constitute forms of organization through which relations of power are played out with minimal dysfunction and domination (Foucault, 1973, 1988, 1991). This focuses on the productive and positive effects of power (Foucault, 1982) in organizations where people constitute a collective ethos for living an aesthetic and ethical existence (Foucault, 2011b) within which responsibility to, and for, others is routinely enacted (Levinas, 1998).

By identifying a multiplicity of relations through which power and knowledge are distributed and dispersed throughout society, Foucault (1980) shows how they are irretrievably contingent, *exercised* rather than possessed, and not necessarily coercive, negative and repressive but also productive, positive and liberating. More particularly, they are productive of subjectivity (Foucault, 1982) in the sense of transforming individuals into subjects who secure their 'sense of identity, meaning and reality' through participating in the practices that power invokes (Knights, 1992: 527). Many empirical studies 'treat . . . the individual as an entity that collides with power and resists it, as it pursues projects of selfhood and identity' (Gabriel, 1999: 188) rather than understanding the potential of power to generate ethical subjectivities (Detel, 2005: 8–9; Foucault, 1988). Foucault draws a distinction between morality in terms of moral codes, their general approval and the conduct of subjects in complying with them and ethics, which concerns the mode of subjective self-formation, caring for the self and truth-telling as reflected in the ancient Greek concept of parrhesia. This often means challenging organizational and institutional norms and regulations regardless of risk to oneself (Foucault, 2005, 2011b) transforming our relationship to truth, power and ethics to 'constitute ourselves as moral agents' (Foucault, 1991: 351).

The ontological status of modern power is central to Foucault's discourse, such that he 'does not presuppose a relation of sovereignty in the form of a centralized origin of power or the systematic and interminable domination of one group by another' (Mills, 2003: 254). Power flows through discursive practices, irrespective of whether *relations*

are asymmetrical within 'the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which [people] operate and which constitute their own organization' (Foucault, 1981: 93). Power, as opposed to domination, is action upon the action of others whose freedom means that they can always act otherwise. As Foucault (1991: 205) notes, performativity and 'the knowledge that may be gained . . . belong to this production'. Power is effective insofar as it is exercised in ways that transform this freedom into self-discipline through a bio-politics that works not just on the soul or the mind but also on the body (Foucault, 1991). In our case study presented shortly, this operates to constitute ethical responsibility.

There are a number of interrelated streams of research within organization studies that are useful for furthering our argument. To begin with, empirical research has demonstrated how organizational members become self-disciplined through discourse (Clarke et al., 2009). However, a discourse is not simply talk, 'it is always *embedded in social practices* which reproduce that way of seeing as the "truth" of the discourse' (Knights and Morgan, 1991: 253, emphasis added). Thus, if concrete principles are to become dominant in organizational or institutional life, they must be performed by members in their everyday interactions to constitute systems of 'right' and 'truth' that have a normalizing effect – simultaneously empowering and denying certain practices. Within Foucault's conception of ethics, regulations and techniques are integrated into 'the art of living' (Foucault, 2001; Munro, 2014), so that a community is disciplined to 'think' as self-governing subjects, who act collectively (Betta, 2016).

Localized power–knowledge relations are situated within and co-constructed through regimes of truth, which are exercised in actions and tied to the ability of individuals and groups to 'effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being' (Foucault, 1988: 18). Such an embodied-practised ethic is a political process that invests members with critical awareness, centring on the effects of one's actions on and for others, in ways that generate processes of normalization and freely embraced self-discipline (Wray-Bliss, 2002).

While supporting Foucault's commitment to caring for the self, this may not result in caring for, and being responsible to, others (Casey, 1999) because the attachment to identity and the order, stability and security that it is falsely anticipated to accomplish, often become an overwhelming diversion. Consequently, despite his claim that truth places us in a 'position of otherness' (Foucault, 2011b: location 7589), 'his affirmation of the singularity of the subject does not necessarily lead to the defence of the singularity of the other' simply because his borrowings from ancient Greece do not 'give the other a transcendent status' (Hofmeyr, 2005: 209). Moreover, this is reinforced by enlightenment thinking that Foucault, in contrast to Levinas, does not reject outright. Rather, Foucault (1991: 45) argues that 'we must free ourselves from the intellectual blackmail' of 'being for or against the enlightenment' and its mantra of autonomy, reinforced by neo-liberalism, which continues to reflect and reproduce a self-interested individualism.

However, this ambivalence reflects his resistance, along with Lyotard (1984: 37), to 'the inhibiting effect of global, totalitarian theories' that while possibly useful as 'tools for local research' cannot be a substitute for it (Foucault, 1980: 80–81). In other words, universal or totalizing global discourses may guide localized research of the kind we

have conducted enabling us to give some 'specificity to the politics of truth' (Foucault, 1991: 73). But this specificity concerns the 'ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true' (Foucault, 1991: 74). In our contemporary post-truth times, it is important to acknowledge the rules that constrain, but do not deprive power of its truth effects. Focusing on the procedural aspects of truth means privileging epistemology over ontology while recognizing that our knowledge can never escape an engagement with the political realms in which we work (McMurray et al., 2011). Thus, what are the conditions (i.e. principles) through which neo-normative control may be positive for and beneficial to, ethically driven pro-social practices? Husted (2021), for example, suggests how 'positive neo-normative control' can be qualified by a responsibility to others. Here, it avoids 'individualization' or the 'unquestioned hegemony' that might otherwise diminish community values of democracy, accountability and transparency (Husted, 2021: 147; see also Kociatkiewicz et al., 2021).

This privileging of epistemology contrasts sharply with Levinas (2002 [1989]) who does the opposite, thereby beginning with an *ontological being that is prior to all philosophy*, involving an ethics of responsibility to the other as its foundation. An ethics of responsibility represents a reflexive rejection of enlightened, individualistic self-interest or what we have been theorizing as the preoccupation with identity. For Levinas (1998: 48), this preoccupation is seen as incompatible with any face-to-face encounter with the Other[1] where there is 'a risky uncovering of oneself, in sincerity, the breaking up of inwardness and the abandonment of all shelters, exposure to traumas, vulnerability'. In a direct challenge to the humanist tradition of celebrating the potential of individuals to reach out to fulfil their potential, it is the self's *passive* exposure to the other, and not its autonomy as an active agent, that is constitutive of the subject within Levinas's ethics of responsibility. Moreover, there is no sense of reciprocity because the relationship is one of asymmetry where the responsibility and obligation is total and not contingent on any imperative or rule outside the self but simply involves an inexhaustible care for the Other. Life or ontology has to be suspended or bracketed in a phenomenological epoché in order to explore its essence (Husserl, 1977).

So, when it comes to an ethics of responsibility, does this mean that we have to abandon Foucault in favour of Levinas? We think not because while their philosophies diverge epistemologically and ontologically, in practice there is much overlap (McMurray et al., 2011). So, for example, Levinas's ethics can be seen as excessive in its projection of responsibility for the Other since the asymmetry means a concentration on one side of face-to-face relations yet once the Other assumes an identical position of responsibility then reciprocity is a practical outcome not a defining condition of face-to-face relations. Asymmetry gives way to symmetry and Levinas can then be seen as much closer to Foucault who begins from the ground of caring for the self but, through symmetry, cannot fail to care for the other since it is only through the Other that the self exists (Mead, 1934). Levinas (2002 [1989]) would, of course, reject this social ontology because it conflicts with his belief in ethics as the first philosophy prior to life as we know it, but it might be argued that there is a problem in even speaking about the self in this pre-social manner since its very formation depends on lived experience (Mead, 1934).

A further convergence occurs when Levinas (1998) moves outside of a focus on dyadic or intimate face-to-face relations, for here he reverses his rejection of enlightenment autonomy and reason by appealing to Kantian deontological ethics where universal laws and rules of justice are seen as necessary means of arbitration in relations that involve a third individual or a multiplicity of persons. Although judgement has no place in situations involving a singular other since a passion for responsibility is its only condition (Levinas, 1998), multiple relations invariably encompass conflicting demands, which can only be resolved by resort to rules, customs and reason for this, in effect, is a question of social order and how diverse peoples can live together in some degree of harmony. Yet, even here there is an irresolvable paradox that continues to haunt Levinas's ethics since, in finite social and organizational situations, neither infinite responsibility nor abstract rules provide a resolution and sanity can only be sustained through confronting relations with some form of irony (Rhodes and Badham, 2018). This irony involves acknowledging the limits to, and fallibility of action and the discrepancy between ethical ideals and the practical constraints that restrict their delivery. Our embodied engagement in ethical relations can simultaneously compel us to reflect with humour on the contradictions and strains of their possibility (Rhodes and Badham, 2018). By retaining a balance between ethical commitments and their inevitable failure, we avoid falling into the trap of cynicism or worse, the pursuit of individual self-interest. However, irony could be considered as a way of relieving the guilt that we might otherwise have to suffer through the conflicts and paradoxes of unending responsibilities. How might ethical subjects be prepared to act in response to others as a way of living 'while not resting easy on their own ethical righteousness' (McMurray et al., 2011: 541) lest they tie their actions to the self in ways that constrain, or deflect attention from, a responsibility for the other? Community collaboration of the kind we have observed in our case study might be a way of resisting the exercises of power that leave subjects individualized (Critchley, 2007) where inevitably they become preoccupied with, and attached to, their individual identities (Knights and Clarke, 2017).

To summarize, we think that Foucault's deliberations on ethics are a vital contribution to academic debates concerning the practice of care and responsibility for others. For he makes clear that certain organizational regimes constitute progressive practices through which an embodied ethic might flow materially, 'as an instrument and vector of power' (Foucault, 1977: 30). This raises a point of divergence in that while Levinas makes self and subjectivity conditional upon ethics, Foucault sees ethics as an outcome of deep reflections on the self and subjectivity. While we endorse the sense in which Levinas's view of ethics as prior to the self, renders identity preoccupations absurd, his ontology diverts attention from a reflexive recognition of how the self is co-constituted through self-conscious relations with others (Foucault, 2005). The problem then is how subjects might acquire an embodied and practical *ethos*, 'the practice of the self', through which to constitute forms of organization relatively free of arbitrary, abusive and unnecessary forms of authority (Rhodes, 2020). As intimated earlier, while identity is clearly an outcome of power so is ethics, but both are equally processual and interrelational, as we shall seek to illustrate through our empirical research.

Research design

Conceived as an ethnography, this study seeks to explore how members of an organization constitute normative requirements of responsibility for others and, in particular, their everyday accomplishment within 'the situated interdependence' of organizational life (Halford and Leonard, 2006: 658). Our research design echoes calls for greater 'deliberation over the meaning of the ontological relation between self (as researcher) and Other (as researched) and the exercise of power that is embedded in this relation' (Rhodes, 2009: 665). Noting that Foucault singled out anthropology as 'a discourse that breaks with the representationalist paradigm in favour of a practice of knowledge' (Ali, 2019: 11) through which we might 'have access to the truth' (Foucault, 2005: 190), our aim is to provide an evocative and holistic account of seemingly trivial encounters.

In doing so, our research design subscribes to a 'Foucauldian ethical commitment' that 'links the personal presence' of the researcher (Wray-Bliss, 2002: 21) to regimes of truth that constitute subjectivity through the 'cooperative and collaborative nature of the ethnographic situation' (Tyler, 1986: 126). The aim is to provide an embodied account of deeply constituting processes inscribed in the (collective) body such that we share an ethical agency with our participants (Wray-Bliss, 2002: 21).

Consequently, participative research (Wray-Bliss, 2002) is the reflexive embodiment of a 'care of the self', through which the researcher might actively resist 'everything which . . . breaks his links (*sic*) with others' and 'ties him to his own identity in a constraining way' (Foucault, 1982: 211). Put simply, this engagement facilitates a self-reflexive and other-directed reconstitution of the researcher that reflects the ethos of the site and its participants while simultaneously enabling a philosophical interrogation of ongoing performative and power effects. This process of engagement was augmented further through observations, ideas and talk within and on the scene, so that the 'minimally manipulated accounts' (Humphreys and Watson, 2009: 42) might become more reflexive, coherent and nuanced (Denzin, 1997: 283). That said, we recognize that 'being personally involved' both as a subject and object of study 'means that one may be less able to liberate oneself from some taken for granted ideas or to view things in an open-minded way' (Alvesson, 2003a: 183). There was an attempt to mitigate this through three devices: (1) embracing an ironic position that might help distance the research from mimetic referents to constitute a more critical analysis (Brown, 1977); (2) engaging theory to escape from common-sense understandings (Foucault, 1976); and (3) reading the researcher's data in multiple ways and through diverse interpretations in collaboration with the second author (Alvesson, 2003a: 186–187).

Case context

Food cooperatives can be understood as a 'consumer movement' with a mandate to serve the member community by responsibly (and responsively) minimizing any negative impact on society. This is done, for example, by stocking environmentally friendly products while not sacrificing quality or imposing price penalties. These organizations are generally small-scale enterprises that follow a 'localized' or 'place-based ownership model' (Imbroscio et al., 2003). The Co-op has been operating since 1973, when a small

group of founding members decided to operate a buying service that would provide healthy and affordable food to anyone who became a member. What sets the Co-op apart from many other consumer cooperatives is the size of its membership, which has grown to an 'aisle bulging' 16,500 'strong'. Unlike many US food cooperatives (see Holtz, 2003; Parker, 2002: 1476), volunteer-members carry out the majority (around 75%) of the organization's work requirements and are responsible for everyday operations in the store, which has steadily grown into a business with an annual turnover of US$50 million.

Data collection

The primary researcher (first author) worked up to 30 hours each week, as an 'observant participant' (Wacquant, 2015), for over one year in 2011–2012 in the following areas: checkout; cash registers; food processing; bulk stocking; receiving; and in the office. The main source of data was field notes, which contained a substantial number of informal observations, conversations and work interactions. The primary researcher received permission from a general coordinator to carry out the research, with the provision that he took care to introduce himself to other members as a doctoral researcher and always asked permission to take notes. Some of the quotes used below are 'naturalistic' comments made by colleagues with whom he was working. Following such informal conversations, many confidants volunteered to be interviewed during their leisure time in neighbouring coffee shops. In total, 60 semi-structured interviews were electronically recorded, many of which were indistinguishable from typical conversations between workplace friends. Interviews were conducted with 35 women and 25 men, of which 45 were volunteers, 13 were full-time coordinators and two full-time general coordinators. As is typical, the names of informants and interviewees have been changed to provide anonymity. To substantiate and deepen these conversations and personal narratives, the Co-op's own bi-weekly newspaper (the *Linewaiter Gazette*) was also reviewed, accessed via the organization's website, drawing on 'tales' and 'member letters' to situate their own observations in a 'historical repertoire of stories' (Czarniawska, 2007: 388). These discourses provided depth to reflections and offered iterant checks against ongoing interpretations to constitute a degree of 'reflexive pragmatism' (Alvesson, 2003b: 14). The aim was to develop an embodied discursive approach to data collection that would provide a rich set of data through which we might analyse how people enact care and responsibility for others through discourses that are important to the processes of self-formation as a performative enactment (Butler, 2005).

Modes of research

Our analysis describes yet inevitably constructs how Co-op members engage in ethical responsibility for others but, in so doing, invariably objectifies aspects of discursive practice (Geertz, 1973: 29). The series of representations that follow depend on explicit as well as implicit assumptions regarding the subjectivity of others, but we have attempted to mitigate this problem (to some extent) by reflecting on the primary researcher's embodied engagement with others as a participant in knowledge production. This is a

practice that 'braids the knower with the known' (Van Maanen, 1988: 81) but also embodies some active resistance to a narcissistic politics of the self (Foucault, 1973), through disciplined, corporeal and intuitive self-reflexive questioning (Huber, 2022). We make no claim that the vignettes follow incontestable or intrinsically complete representations of those studied (Geertz, 1973: 29) since all accounts are partial and far from exhaustive. They are situated within relations of power that give them their meaning and represent our desire to enliven them through reflexive testimony (Van Maanen, 1979) by weaving discourses into evocative and plural stories, deepened through an engagement in a 'state of being' that exercises care in giving facts 'ontological weight' (Foucault, 1986/2004: 139). Writing autoethnographic vignettes, based on field notes, helped enhance 'the presentational richness and reflexivity' of our analysis (Humphreys, 2005: 840) through an 'explicit literary and figurative device . . . [that] permits a valuable combination of . . . [embodied, aesthetic] and conceptual rigour in the production of an account' (Linstead, 1993: 298).

Reflecting ethical encounters experienced by the researcher during shifts, while he worked alongside key informants, the data include narratives shared and discussed during semi-structured interviews that sparked recognition, conjecture and participants' own stories. Such encounters, and our engagement with narratives from the *Gazette*, resulted in three interrelated themes emerging that represent members' awareness and wisdom – a process through which 'I' becomes 'we' as individuals related to each other and their mutual situation.

The vignettes can be understood as the doing of ethnography; speaking, listening and acting together (Saldana, 2003: 181) and allowing one 'to recover, yet interrogate, the meanings of lived experience' (Denzin, 1997: 95). In this sense, we wished to embody the spirit of ethnography by carefully infusing facts with meaning (Geertz, 1983: 395).

Autoethnographic texts 'are not just subjective accounts of experience, they attempt reflexively to map multiple discourses that occur in a given social space' (Denzin, 1997: xvii) to situate the reader within a persuasive prose that provides a degree of access to 'naturalized' assumptions and actions in relation to the Other. Theoretical insights are interwoven into the telling (Van Maanen, 1988; Watson, 2003), placing analysis within the cultural and political 'spheres that surround them and contribute to their production' (Sprinker, 1980: 92). Each story incorporates other encounters and tales, through which 'the "I" becomes "we"' (Cheney, 1991: 20), augmented by further experiences, observations, ideas, talk, descriptions and snippets of dialogue from the scene. They document 'the practical dynamics' of embodying an ethic of responsibility for others in interaction with the 'voices of a more heterogeneous range of organizational actors' (Barratt, 2008: 530).

Findings: The Co-op, Brooklyn, New York

At the Co-op, normative requirements for responsibility are framed through a set of principles that discipline a 'being-for' form of togetherness (Bauman, 1993, cf. 2001) constituted as a 'politico-ethical exercise of choice' (Kjonstad and Willmott, 1995: 447). As Elaine, a coordinator, argues, the Co-op is an ethical model that 'brings people together

around certain values . . . moves the subject from "I" to "we". That's a very important thing . . . it's a model that we can use in the bigger networks that determine our lives' (*Gazette*, 31 May 2012: 4).

Care of the self: 'Being in good standing'

I (first author) begin my observant participation, working across the organization, hoping to connect with members and glean insights. The squad system is, I was told during my Co-op 'orientation' – a two-hour workshop, which all prospective members must attend to join – 'the essential building block of the Coop', because 'if people became lax about showing up for their regular shifts', it undermines the process (Leo, a general coordinator, *Gazette*, 15 December 2011: 4). I have joined a 'Receiving' shift, and am now bent down, squeezed next to a shelf, wedged in by a convoy of shopping carts. When restocking, my fellow worker Rob, a friendly soul who has volunteered to show me 'the ropes', opines, 'The goal at the Co-op, I think, is to have a good degree of consensus about how things are run. It is kind of a miracle.'

Annabelle, on a food processing shift, claims that the Co-op 'reinforces a sense of choice and free will as opposed to being forced to be there. I am here because I want to be here; I choose to be here and I am here on my own terms.' Natasha, our squad leader who is listening interjects, 'there is this idea, isn't there, that we should all be treated as responsible members who don't need too many rules in order to get this thing done'. I feel a little in awe of this community, which Brenda, a volunteer who works in the Office, describes as fulfilling 'the basic principles of honesty, cooperation, responsibility, self-determination'. However, I keep running into members, who have made it clear I 'Can Do Better . . . the more spirit and mindfulness we bring to our Coop, the stronger our Coop becomes . . . It's about individual consciousness, the decisions to make small changes for the better' (Tony, volunteer member, *Gazette*, 31 May 2012: 4). I am conscious of Milla, a volunteer squad leader's advice: 'You have to monitor yourself and there is also this sense that somebody else is looking, watching you . . . I feel that, I feel that's totally within the sense of responsibility and I would defend it.'

While these practices might be seen as a form of cultural and normative control of the kind that Kunda (2006 [1992]) described in his study of the PLC Tech, by contrast our case study organization was founded and sustained on *cooperative* principles, and in this respect, the sentiment if not the ontology is resonant with Levinas. For the Co-op is not like Tech where multinational corporate and market conditions imposed performative pressures on staff absent from the Co-op. Also, members of the Co-op always justified their demands for compliance to certain rules on the basis of a sense of responsibility to others. We recognize the dangers of idealizing the Co-op and becoming insensitive to the possibly oppressive demands for compliance but members were able to participate in democratic decisions to change the principles and rules and, thereby, were inclined to embody them as a 'practical core of their understanding-of-self' in ways that constituted a mirror for reflection (Honneth, 2012: 205). As Fred, a volunteer on checkout argues, 'it is all about perspective. It is all about pulling back and being able to recognize the social structures, the rules that govern our lives, these mutual agreements on how we are all going to behave.' Despite its subjugation of subjects, Foucault (2003) argues that society

must be defended and Levinas also realized that for justice to prevail, there was a need for rules to facilitate compromises in situations where total responsibility to one conflicted with that to another.

Claire (a volunteer in the office) says she exercises responsibility through self-discipline: 'I care . . . to demonstrate more self-control, to just be more mature about the way you're interacting . . . there is some kind of switch that happens.' Yet, there were instances where a member spoke emotionally to me about the regressive effect of normative rules. As a volunteer member confesses, in a report entitled: 'Making-up with the coop – back from the dead(beat)', he feels duty-bound to work his way back into 'good standing' rather than apply for amnesty, 'I felt like I owed it to [the Co-op] to make-up the work I owed: to do my part and not cop out' (Cesc, *Gazette*, 26 January 2012: 3). For fellow volunteer member, Katie, making up shifts owed, what she terms 'bad standing', became an imperative, aided by the help and concern of another: 'I cried in the arms of an office coordinator who consoled and reassured me that it wasn't my fault. His soothing ways restored my faith' (*Gazette*, 27 January 2011: 2). There was a general concern to resist punitive and oppressive forms of normative control, so that formal rules, norms and practices were discussed and problematized ad infinitum: in the *Gazette*, during work shifts, in the shopping line for checkout and the monthly general meeting. There was a common view, voiced here by Joe (a volunteer in food processing), that membership meant 'chart[ing] your own course' within certain limits and being aware that normative rules should not displace being 'tuned into . . . everyone has a little ownership in what is going on'.

Being responsible, in accord with collective principles (Sprinker, 1980), generates 'choice of actions and the reflexive self-monitoring of those actions' (Feldman and Pentland, 2003: 109). As one coordinator writes, 'What are the rules of the road, unspoken, written and implied? How could we move through the store and perform our shifts more consciously and cooperatively?' (Jon, *Gazette*, 28 June 2012: 3). As his fellow coordinator, Elaine, writes, responsibility constitutes a care of the self, 'devoted to the ways in which we can give of ourselves the agency to create a world that embodies our own values' (*Gazette*, 31 May 2012: 4). It is the foundation of 'trying to figure out who we are and why we are here' (Brenda, volunteer, office shift). As Elaine concludes, this 'network' of force effects 'brings people together around certain values' that she constructs as 'an ethical model' that:

> . . . moves the subject from 'I' to 'we'. That's a very important thing. When I ask for something in the store, I don't ask, Do you have it? I ask, Do we have it? . . . it's a model that we can use in the bigger networks that determine our lives. (*Gazette*, 31 May 2012: 4)

It is what a long-time volunteer member, Laura calls her 'wholehearted belief' in the 'cooperative spirit where each person gives of themselves for the benefit of the whole' (*Gazette*, 31 May 2012: 8).

Responsibility: 'When a stranger calls'

I work the phone, taking calls from other members who need help organizing and booking their work slots. My caller explains that she has to miss her shift and cannot find a

trade (another member to switch slots with). She sounds extremely desperate; is worried that 'my squad leader always' penalizes missing shift workers by applying 'the 2 for 1 rule to everyone', remonstrating 'I have a clean record.' I empathize, after all, as Barnaby (a volunteer squad leader in food processing) notes, 'the volunteer aspect and the collective cooperation aspect . . . makes you feel differently'. From personal experience, I understand Alex's (a fellow volunteer member) sentiments, who implores: 'reward members [including herself] for responsible shift attendance and be less punitive for those who have missed shifts . . . this would benefit everyone. Please implement this policy ASAP!' (*Gazette*, 29 December 2011: 6).

I search for a response, seeking to 'fulfil my humanity, responsible to/for myself' (Susie, *Gazette*, 4 October 2012: 13), aware that we need 'to hold people accountable to an extent, but also to be flexible and human' (Bill, volunteer, office shift). My thoughts and sentiments reflect the voices of others, as Ellen (a volunteer in food processing) notes: 'You tend to make it a part of your own narrative, so that it becomes "your own" telling. It becomes individualized. You get attached to it and tend to reuse it, so that it becomes embedded.'

I say, 'you can give me a call at home later and I will look in my diary. If I am not already working, I will work your shift for you.' As another volunteer member Sky says, 'we have to treat the checkout person [caller] as a person, as a fellow member. You have a level of responsibility' (*Gazette*, 5 May 2011: 4). There is a stunned silence on the other end of the phone. To my mind, this simple solution to her issue constitutes collaboration coupled with an ethic of responsibility for the other – but, I can imagine her wheels turning as she considers my offer. A few seconds later I fill the silence by assertively giving her my cell number, 'give me a call later' and then cheerfully say goodbye. Alice (a volunteer member writing in the *Gazette*) says she aims to help more people, 'a lot of folks are hurting, and need help . . .. I want to tell them, "You're beautiful," and make them feel they counted. Everyone deserves that. If you are into you . . . I tell them, "Now, go be yourself"' (12 January 2012: 5). Later that day the phone rings, it is my caller, sounding much happier, yet still somewhat incredulous. She informs me, 'thanks for your kind offer, but I have found someone to swap with'.

Members of the Co-op can be understood as 'self-determining individuals, [*with*] a burden of responsibility' for the community (Willmott, 1993: 527, re-emphasized). Here, responsibility is realized through 'substitution and transaction as well as empowerment and transformation' (Tomkins and Simpson, 2015: 1020). This was evident in my interaction with 'a care recipient' who chose to 'help herself', conscious that her actions reflected a commitment to 'central' values at the Co-op for 'by leaving the choice up to the individual, each member consults their own mind and heart' (Duffy, a volunteer member in the *Gazette*, 22 March 2012: 18). Yet, embodied forms of responsibility through cooperation cannot completely ameliorate our individualized society feeding into the community and seeking to control behaviour through positive or negative sanctions. Alex illustrated a part of this above when she objected to more control and punishment for deviance but she reflected the individualistic instrumental aspects of the wider society by insisting on giving extrinsic rewards for compliance rather than a concern for 'compassion, care and the ability to sustain intimate relationships' (Gabriel, 2009: 383). These broader societal norms are precisely those that can turn what may be essentially a cooperative and communal sense of

responsibility involving thinking about where one is acting and for whose purpose (Sprinker, 1980) into, at best, a culture of 'what's in it for me', or at worst, one that is authoritarian and oppressive in its demand for conformity. We have to admit that there were at times aspects of both these cultures but also the opposite when Bill (a volunteer in the office) argued that we should 'not make the rules come at the expense of relationships with people. I think that is a way to be cooperative.' Other members were prone to speak about forms of kinship and fidelity, which, sustained through care and responsibility, appeared to be 'the most provocative tie' within the larger network of power relations (Dixon, 2007: 290). As Elaine (a coordinator writing in the *Gazette*, 31 May 2012: 4) proclaims: 'That's why I love the Coop . . . in which we can give ourselves the agency to create a world that embodies our own values.'

As fellow volunteer member Jessica declares, an ethic of responsibility within the Co-op involves the conscious movement from 'I got mine' to 'we need ours' (*Gazette*, 23 August 2012: 1) – empowering members to 'bring up issues which concern them' (Jimmy, a volunteer member in the *Gazette*, 4 October 2012: 13). Claus (a volunteer member) embodies this sentiment, in stating: 'I no longer believe it is ethical not to act, or that my own identity can be an excuse for thinking this is about other people' (*Gazette*, 19 April 2012: 18). For me, and others, 'this is the way the Co-op is' (Joe, volunteer, food processing shift): 'it's about . . . personal responsibility' (Rosa, volunteer, checkout shift) exercised through a 'community' of 'positive values' linked to 'good fellowship, spontaneity, [and] warm contact' (Douglas, 1991: 303).

Solidarity: 'The alterity of others'

The core of members who make up the squad of which, I (first author) have been a member of for one year, have worked together as colleagues for a number of years and have collectively decided not to nominate a leader. There is a collegiate atmosphere, which Theo says 'puts everyone on the same level and I think in that sense, it creates a sense of community' (volunteer, checkout shift). In practice, Xanico says we are required to 'think of others' (volunteer member writing in the *Gazette*, 19 May 2011: 4) by recognizing and respecting their alterity. This fundamental heterogeneity produces commitment to what Zoey, a volunteer member, describes as 'our goals of inclusiveness and respect for diversity and civility' (*Gazette*, 17 May 2012: 13). Nagina, a fellow volunteer, illustrates this by arguing that: 'We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality . . . a process of mutual engagement with difference', which represents 'the potential to invigorate our connections to each other and to the Coop as a place and an ideal. It helps us to discover the contours of our community, and moreover, contributes to shaping them' (*Gazette*, 19 April 2012: 7).

I reflect on my interview conversation with Ava, who told me, 'The Co-op is not separate from us, the way other institutions are. We are the Co-op' (volunteer, checkout shift). For volunteer member Schiller, the Co-op 'fosters a sense of community. It's fragile [a network that can work for others] but it's real' (*Gazette*, 31 May 2012: 4). While Ava 'can see a certain set of values that do reproduce themselves' (volunteer, checkout shift), there remain 'misdemeanours' that stretch people's 'tolerance' (Katie, a volunteer member writing in the *Gazette*, 27 January 2011: 5) as people struggle to develop and advance the values of co-operation. As Nagina writes:

> Are we self-reflective? Will we get better at cooperation – which demands, by its very definition, that we grapple with the tensions and differences among us – or will we let our core tenets become lax in order to maintain a fragile yet 'happy' veneer? (volunteer member writing in the *Gazette*, 9 April 2012: 7)

Exercising ethical discourses means 'routinely' respecting and celebrating the 'alterity of other people' (Rhodes, 2012: 1312). As Frankie says, it's about 'your own individual responsibility coupled with not infringing on other people's rights' (volunteer, office shift). This responsibility for others is entwined in 'the underlying fabric of the Co-op' says fellow volunteer Stella, but 'we can inspire others to follow our example' (*Gazette*, 4 October 2012: 6). Discourses that venerate diversity, solidarity and co-operation encourage 'people to become engaged. We want to involve people. Their input can become part of our vision' (Fleur, a volunteer member writing in the *Gazette*, 31 May 2012: 4).

The practices that constitute one's responsibility to others are face-to-face (Levinas, 1998) but are practised, says volunteer member Asli, 'every day [as] patience and solidarity, less competition and more collaboration' (*Gazette*, 3 November 2011: 5). Such productive relationships 'entitle any man or woman the right to express his or her views provided that this freedom is not taken as a license to trample on the feelings of other members of the society [Co-op]' (fellow volunteer, Celina, *Gazette*, 15 August 2012: 15). This sense of solidarity is maintained through practices that bind members together, as volunteer member Molly declares, 'The Co-op is a utopia within the dystopia of Park Slope', an area now infamous for gentrification and rising house prices and judgemental forms of entitlement: 'It's the only place in my neighbourhood where I see very different people bonding, connecting, disagreeing, getting into it, engaging with each other' (*Gazette*, 27 December 2012: 2). This is a sentiment elegantly captured by a fellow member, Nagina:

> That kind of looking within – whether personal or collective – inevitably requires courage; it is a gesture riven with uncertainty. Yet, it prods us towards a place of both strength and humility [that] entails reflecting, questioning, accepting, reading, asking, listening and speaking one's truth. (volunteer member, *Gazette*, 19 April 2012: 7)

All members are self-disciplined within an over-arching framework that is engaging, as Leo (a general coordinator) says, 'The thing about the Co-op is, we don't try . . . to control people, you have to let them have their own interpretation of what is going on.' This is what coincides perfectly with Foucault's ethics of refusing to be the individualized self that we have become through so many exercises of power (Foucault, 1982) to embody a 'position of otherness' (Foucault, 2011b: location 7589) as 'the chutzpah', writes volunteer member Tom, 'to come to an informed place of personal choice driven by one's own moral compass, rather than simply to go with one herd or another' (*Gazette*, 22 March 2012: 17). As Leo insists in an article:

> 'We do not measure members on their adherence to any political position. There is no litmus test here for members other than whether the member is co-operating . . . We are open and welcoming to all who practice co-operation'. (*Gazette*, 8 March 2012: 5)

Discussion

> [A] sense of responsibility is something that is immediately experienced, lived through, and therefore embedded and embodied in the infinite totality of human life. (Bevan et al., 2011: 3)

As we have seen from our interview, journal and vignette material, members of the Co-op seem to live by norms through which responsibility for others is materially performed. This generates power effects that 'bend the behaviour of those involved' (Gherardi and Masiero, 1990: 556). It produces and reproduces 'what is best in' (Solomon, 2004: 1022): 'our . . . principles . . . to be responsible . . . lead by example . . . committed to diversity and equality . . . and to respect[ing] the opinions, needs and concerns of every member' (this statement was reproduced in every *Gazette* we reviewed). As Perrow (1986: 157–158) notes, 'it is the nesting' of these principles 'into the whole that gives them meaning', forging powerfully members' commitment to care of the self, through which each affects 'the greater public good' (Solomon, 2004: 1022).

Following Foucault, an ethic of responsibility is best understood as exercised, rather than prescribed – as 'willingly' self-disciplining, rather than merely conforming to abstract rules (Rhodes, 2012). To think and act responsibly involves a passivity of the self or a responsibility that is 'not a return to a self' and its preoccupations but 'the contracting of an ego going to the hither side of identity' (Levinas, 1998: 114). An ethic of responsibility is an 'endless labour' that constitutes a 'concern for existence' (Burchell, 1996: 33) as it is one that constructs 'others' as primary to the self (Rhodes, 2012: 1319).

As Roberts (2003: 260) notes, 'the weight of moral sensibility is felt by everyone who constitutes the chain of disciplinary links within an organization'. Thus, in the Co-op, individual members are susceptible to the 'gaze' of others (Foucault, 1977) and, in accordance with naturalized interaction systems (Deetz, 1992), tend to exercise responsibility in their talk. If Foucault has credibility in his argument that subjects are constituted through discourses of power, then as Crane (2000) has observed, when 'moralized' discourses are prevalent, people tend to exercise these principles in their dealings with others. Yet, at the Co-op, in accordance with Levinas (1969 [1961]: 300), this 'is brought about in all the personal work of [their] moral initiative (without which the truth of judgment cannot be produced), in the attention to the Other'.

Our findings demonstrate that everyday face-to-face interactions 'are a hugely important resource . . . that we might see the effects of what we do or that others will point these effects out to us' (Roberts, 2003: 260–262). This provides us with ethical cues that normalize our performativity, where 'proximity is as pervasive as the disciplinary gaze that surveys it' (Roberts, 2003: 260). Thus, an ethic of responsibility is exercised, reciprocally, where others respond in kind, as they are 'guided and governed by the rules of the game' (Willmott, 1984: 362). These ontological conditions are what Levinas terms the other Others: the 'institutionalization and universalization of responsibility' (see Fagan, 2009: 11). Such principles should not denude the face of the other, but rather be interpreted and applied as ties of care, cooperation, openness, solidarity, trust, respect, love and so on – all of which are both mediums and outcomes of responsibility (Rhodes, 2012).

Here, it is important to recognize that a fundamental concern for order (Berger and Luckmann, 1967: 92) is balanced by ethical freedom 'informed by reflection' (Foucault,

1997: 284). However, a preoccupation with order can parallel a preoccupation with self or identity such that it could block ethical freedom informed by reflection and leave us trapped in 'psychic prisons' (Morgan, 1997: 12). Insofar as they can be an 'avoidance of impermanence' and 'tendency to conform, to normalize, to secure and control', this may result in a destructive technocratic 'nihilism' (Levin, 1985: 74). Even radical forms of management, which are legitimated through democratic processes, cannot ameliorate forms of dominance completely (King and Learmonth, 2015). Yet, through exercising self-care, Co-op members felt able to 'establish a certain consensus . . . within a certain network of practices of power and constraining institutions' (Foucault, 1997: 197). In the Co-op, on the whole, power was not exercised against the interests of the other but rather resulted 'in an "empowerment" or "responsibilization" of subjects' that constitutes principles for others (Lemke, 2002: 53). In the Co-op, responsibility for others constitutes 'the very bond of human subjectivity, to the point of being raised to a supreme ethical principle' (Kelemen and Peltonen, 2001: 159).

Still, we should chime a note of caution for our findings do sometimes intimate certain oppressive demands to conform. The power of neo-liberalism as a legacy of the enlightenment with its promotion of individual self-interest has prevailed to limit an ethic of responsibility. This is so, even though it is self-contradictory, as it is illusory to develop a sense of self separate or autonomous from the selves of others (Knights and Clarke, 2017). Despite the impact of Foucault in our field, a proprietary, rather than a relational, view of power often prevails such that responsibility is at best exemplified by reciprocal exchanges of individual self-interest. Yet, if power is seen as relational then it cannot but involve responsibility to the other. This is because the self is a product of others' senses of us (Mead, 1934), and therefore we can only care for the self consistently through caring for one another. Consequently, as was evident to a certain degree in our case study, an individualized subjectivity can be refused where a mutual and collective self-discipline of communal responsibility is to be embraced.

That said, humanistic issues such as *not infringing on others' rights* and *respect for diversity and civility* do not necessarily speak to a radical and unknowable difference between people. For example, such talk might reflect the liberalism of individualism (and politically correct respect for the individual) of which Levinas (1998) is critical, because it restricts our concerns to that of securing social confirmations of the self rather than projecting a boundless responsibility to the other. Indeed, both Foucault and Levinas were heavily opposed to the individualism that humanist appropriations of enlightenment thinking, and neo-liberal socio-economics recklessly reinforce. In relation to situations beyond the face-to-face, in making compromises between the demands of different others, Levinas accepts an appeal to disciplinary principles that ensure a sense of fairness regarding outcomes (Rhodes, 2020). This might be seen as paralleled by Foucault's appeal to parrhesia as a courage to speak the truth regardless of risk and 'bearing witness' through one's way of life (Foucault, 2011b).

For Levinas, alterity is the unknowable 'other' that generates how we are driven to a responsibility that has no finitude other than physical death. But the parrhesia that Foucault (2018) subscribes to has a not dissimilar sense of unending self-disciplined, asceticism in bearing witness to a responsibility to the other – that resonates with, rather than replicates, Levinas's pre-ontological ethics. Foucault chimes with Levinas in recognizing that power

is relational, whereby we cannot separate principles, judgements and ethics into 'different spheres of life' (Rhodes, 2012: 1318, 2020: 6). For, as Levinas (1969 [1961]: 300) notes: 'In the measure that the face of the Other relates us with the third party, the metaphysical relation of the I with the Other moves into the form of the We, aspires to a State, institutions, laws.'

The danger is that disciplinary norms come to 'represent nothing more edifying than a mindless obedience to custom' and a commonly exercised 'tendency to feel that whatever harms the self is evil, and whatever benefits it is good' (Eagleton, 2009: 172). Insofar as Foucault (1961: 23) recognized in his early work how such attachments to oneself were 'the first sign of madness', like Levinas, he was aware of the generic dangers of identity. These dangers could only be restrained or eradicated through an active reflexivity that involves a 'continuously established and re-established relationship of oneself to oneself' in constituting more responsible 'modes of subjectivation' (Raffinsøe, 2020: 1337). Only through a refusal to be what we have become through so many exercises of power (Foucault, 1982), and an ethics of transforming one's relationship to oneself, can we begin to engage in 'an intense questioning' of life (Raffinsøe, 2020: 1336) so as to think differently. This demands a level of self-reflection and a recognition that one's attachment to identity or identities is an obstacle to exercising an ethic of responsibility. As our case study indicates, what is required are 'facilitative conceptions of power' (Clegg, 1989: 15) that generate embodied enactments (Mol, 2003) of power/ knowledge relations to produce, inform and sustain ethical collective and communal practices of responsibility.

Our case provides compelling evidence that relations of power define, shape and maintain a collective identity. We have explored, examined and presented the anatomy of the process of becoming a member of a cooperative in which responsibility is continually enacted as a 'mutually positive self-discipline' (our phrasing) to define and secure collective identity. In doing so, we have augmented Levinas's focus on the individual through organizational enactments. Levinas (1969 [1961]) acknowledges that there is a commitment, coercion and certain consequences for the individual (e.g. discouragement, disregard and so forth) in their responsibility to the Other. In the Co-op, this was accomplished through an internalized self-discipline, built around the values of cooperation and collaboration that were manifest in an ethic of responsibility. In this sense, the community affects individuals and their actions as members of the cooperative in ways that manifest a responsibility for the Other. In our case, we see practices of responsibility to others as emanating from the collective sense of membership of the organization together with the principles of cooperation that it embraces. Our analysis shows how power relations produce self-disciplinary embodied enactments that reflect and reproduce a cooperative sense of subjectivity.

Returning to Foucault, such community relations that strengthen ties of fidelity, love and cooperation cannot help but augment self-possessed efforts to enact care of the self and responsibility for others. Importantly, Foucault and Levinas shared reservations about phenomenology as generally expounded by Husserl, vigorously problematizing the supposed 'self-sufficiency of the subject and the primacy of action' before sociality (Bergen and Verbeek, 2021: 335). For Levinas, an endless responsibility to others requires us to locate our sense of security in community relationships rather than a

desire for 'internal coherency and stability' that reduces the other to the same (Zueva-Owens, 2020: 617) for purposes of securing the self. As our findings intimate, self-formation processes (and the ethics that people enact) are inseparable from community, and yet, while 'community . . . is a source of the exercise of power that conditions the self-formation process, it is not totalizing in its determination of identity' (Huber and Knights, 2021).

An ethics of responsibility necessarily involves 'an incessant questioning of the self by the other' (Rhodes, 2012: 1320) and is enacted in members' identity work through ethical questions and sentiments such as: what am I called upon to do in this circumstance and what might be the effect of my actions on others? We find this reflected in Foucault's (2011b: location 7384) observation that 'truth demands a position of otherness' such that there is no separation of subjectivity (power) and identity (knowledge) from ethics. In the Co-op, responsibility is characterized by a movement from 'I' to 'we', whereby certain principles become 'virtuous' (Parker, 2003: 193) and by conducting oneself as a virtuous member of the community, individuals engage in ongoing acts of self-care and responsibility to the other (Foucault, 1997; Levinas, 1998).

Conclusion

We suggest that members of the Co-op exercise responsibility as a fraternal discourse for others to result in the self 'exceeding' egoism and domination (Foucault, 2005; Levinas, 2002 [1989]: 75). In presenting our research, we have sought to reconcile the Levinasian view of the face of the other as primary whereby 'We are all responsible for everyone else' (Levinas, 2002 [1989]: 75) with Foucault's (1997) belief that a philosophy of life (Hadot, 1995) in the practice of freedom through reflexive self-formation and transformation is the wellspring of ethical practice (Foucault, 1997: 284). For there is no separation between acting for the other and principles that condition such actions. In the Co-op, organizational members constitute a community within which individuals 'direct and control the conduct of others' for others (Foucault, 1997: 298). Still, we recognize that even when the corporate demands for profit and efficiency are looser than in a PLC, the normative control through which an ethic of responsibility is sustained can be oppressive especially where the individualized effects of contemporary neo-liberal power mediate community relations. Consequently, there are numerous imperfections and dangers surrounding the ethics of responsibility in the Co-op. Furthermore, the Co-op we studied is an organization that, even within the cooperative movement, seems unique so we need to remember that 'one swallow does not a summer make'. However, these limitations in our study might encourage future research to seek out further examples of organizations that reflect ethical concerns for care and responsibility and to theorize them in ways that might inspire members of organizations beyond those of a cooperative form to envisage a world of work that is more, rather than less, communal and reflective of an ethic of responsibility.

Our findings indicate how members of this relatively large food retail Co-op, actively grappled with tensions between (a) positive community relations that eschew or efface individual self-interest and (b) disciplinary norms, often referred to as neo-normative control (e.g. Fleming and Sturdy, 2011; Husted, 2021), which while potentially liberating, can

become oppressive. For example, authoritarian corporate regimes preclude radically inclusive principles of de-limited hierarchical control, democracy, cooperation and solidarity. Consequently, they are implicated in producing individualizing and alienating forms of freedom that efface ethics of responsibility for others (Casey, 1999). Our findings complement Husted's (2021) examination of an 'alternative organization' within a political party, where participants became *other than* those who exercised typical norms, and instead enforced a neo-normative control where practices of ethical responsibility were maintained through difference rather than uniformity. In our case, Co-op members embodied care and responsibility for others by embracing and exercising organizationally sanctioned principles of community. This '*promising way*' of acting together ensured that 'independence and autonomy does not turn into individualization' and 'solidarity with the group does not turn into an unquestioned hegemony' (Husted, 2021: 147, emphasis added). Our case study analysis provides vital evidence that principles of co-operation and community are not simply prescriptions for the way people should act (Parker et al., 2014: 36), but also generate and sustain a disciplinary regime in which members exercise embodied ethical responsibility for others as a routine organizational practice.

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Note

1   Levinas capitalizes Other in order to convey the unknowability of another and we follow this in appropriate places in this text.

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