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Caring for Oneself

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Caring for Oneself as an Academic

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Care and caring are words with great power, and with lots of weakness included simultaneously. To care for others is something we generally admire (in others), and fear (in ourselves). We are afraid of the personal vulnerability that comes with being caring—with subordinating ourselves to the needs of somebody else who lacks the power or skills to care for themselves—and we respect those who have accepted the role and who still retain a strong facade.

The teaching profession turns gradually, as students grow older, more and more distant and less personal on the part of the teacher. By the time learners enter higher education, the last ties of caring have generally been severed, as the teaching professionals are no longer by name teachers, but rather lecturers lecturing at students, or professors professing their expertise at them. Care for students is, by this stage, outsourced to other professionals: tutors, counsellors, or psychologists, depending on the level of caring needed.

One type of care and caring that is seldom voiced is the care one needs to give oneself as a person—caring for the whole that our body-minds are, when we, as thinking, caring, and worrying individuals, are creating our academic careers and going about our daily lives as academic professionals. We are measured on, and reminded of, our achievements on a daily basis, sometimes explicitly by others, and constantly implicitly by ourselves. The feelings of despair, depression, insufficiency, and bitterness can alternate within us, when we are forced to mechanically deliver classes on topics we do not care for, or to author papers for journals we would not read ourselves. The aim of this paper is to explore the roles we are playing as academics, and to question how often we really do care for ourselves as academics.