

Episode: *Author Interview: “Radiate Youth?”*

Guest: Lio Barnhardt

Host: Tim Hoff

Transcript: Cheryl Green

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[bright theme music]

[00:00:03] TIM HOFF: Welcome to another episode of the Author Interview series from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*. I’m your host, Tim Hoff. This series provides an alternative way to access the interesting and important work being done by Journal contributors each month. Joining me on this episode is Lio Barnhardt, an interdisciplinary filmmaker, writer, and comic artist who was also a former Art of Medicine intern with the Journal. They’re here to discuss their pair of illustrations, *Radiation Rejuvenation* and *Anemia and Necrosis*, in the August 2025 issue of the Journal, [Existential Health Care Ethics](#). Lio, thank you so much for being here.

LIO BARNHARDT: Yeah, thank you. [music fades]

[00:00:47] HOFF: To start with, please tell us a little bit about what we’re looking at in your pieces.

BARNHARDT: My piece is a diptych, a two-part piece, showing a parody of pharmaceutical health advertisements from the early 20th century. They display a spoofed beauty advertisement for a irradiated health product, which is based off of a real company, Tho-Radia, that produced irradiated beauty products for women. The first image shows what could be a normal health advertisement from the 1920s: a beautiful woman in front of a glowing light. And the second image shows an inversion of that advertisement showing the effects, the real effects, of radium that were seen by the Radium Girls, the dial painters in the 1920s and ‘30s.

[00:01:44] HOFF: And so, what should health professions students and trainees and clinicians of all stripes be taking from your work?

BARNHARDT: I wanted to discuss pharmaceutical advertisements and how they often appropriate White patriarchal ideals of beauty and happiness, which often contrasts the more serious nature of these substances. I use the imagery of the radium craze in the early 20th century to highlight this, because the contrast between the imagery of the advertisements and what we now know about the dangers of radiation is very evocative. A lot of the ads market a beauty ideal for women, regardless of how effective or safe the product is.

I’m a big history lover. It’s very true that a lot of regulations or scientific understandings are written in blood. I think the biggest takeaway from my piece should be that history can be our best source and the best way to remember how we can do better. Like I said, my piece was very inspired by the story of the Radium Girls, without whom some

of the dangers of these products wouldn't have been understood or put on record. But the story is as much of a feminist and a workers' rights issue as it is a medical one. It's important to remember these events.

[00:02:51] HOFF: And finally, if you could add something to this piece that you didn't quite have the time or space to fully explore, what would that be?

BARNHARDT: I realized while researching this project that a lot of these products didn't actually contain any amount of radium in the first place. In fact, these beauty products like Radium Springs and face creams didn't actually contain any significant amount of radium. And so, they were, in fact, just quack cures. [theme music returns]

[00:03:19] HOFF: Lio, thank you so much for your time on the podcast, and thanks for your contribution to the Journal this month.

BARNHARDT: Yeah, thank you so much.

HOFF: To read the full article, as well as the rest of this month's issue for free, visit our site, journalofethics.org. We'll be back soon with more *Ethics Talk* from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*.