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Living whose best life? An intersectional feminist interrogation of postfeminist #solidarity in #selfcare

Brianna Wiens & Shana MacDonald

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Abstract
This article argues that one of the many ways that white supremacy functions within digital culture is to obscure the realities of social inequity via neoliberal dictums for self-improvement and individualist calls to live our 'best lives'. For decades Black feminists have been advocating for self-care as preservation and community building. This article highlights the need for self-care to return to its roots in Black feminism and to distinguish itself from popular feminist enactments of self-care. To do so, we critically analyse examples of postfeminist enactments of #selfcare on Instagram to highlight how they exacerbate societal inequities. We first explore the relationship between #selfcare and Instagram itself, outlining the effects of Instagram's affordances on its users to demonstrate how both users and the platform shape each other. Next, we interrogate #selfcare as a space of #solidarity, arguing that current iterations privilege white upper-class frameworks that benefit from various oppressions. Last, we closely analyse The Nap Ministry, an Instagram account that highlights Black feminist self-care principles that intervene into prevailing white frameworks and, in doing so, co-opts the platform affordances of Instagram to model forms of action and offer frameworks we need for the present. In sum, this article suggests that genuine #solidarity through #selfcare must decenter whiteness and take up a more intersectional feminist lens.

Keywords: digital culture, feminism, hashtag activism, self-care, social media

Now, more than ever, #selfcare occupies a central place in public discussions of how to manage our highly mediated lives. Whatever sense of balance remained between work and life within our neoliberal frameworks has tipped and only been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 global pandemic. While #selfcare has been trending on mainstream social media platforms like Instagram and Twitter since 2016,[1] the constant onslaught of stay-at-home orders and the need to manage unknown, taxing realities – often without the support of our in-person communities – has made the focus on how to care for ourselves more urgent. It has also shown us the limits of these current self-care regimes for addressing the rise in greater structural inequities that constrain women and in particular women of colour within the pandemic. Currently, content tied to the self-care hashtag largely emphasises commodities and consumption as the answers to our ails. A cursory search of the hashtag on TikTok will reveal an ever-expanding series of montages of users' beauty regimes. On Instagram #selfcare circulates through posts with empowering mantras on a soothing pastel background, offering generic suggestions to hydrate and limit one's screen time, and links to the poster's bio self-care product lines or workshops which are largely directed at white women.

These examples make evident #selfcare's ties to a neoliberal, postfeminism that advances a 'boss babe' ethos of self-empowerment through consumption.[2] Many feminist media scholars have previously tied this spirit of consumerism to the postfeminism that has dominated women's media environments over the last three decades.[3] As Rosalind Gill notes, the problem with postfeminist media lies in the fact that 'claiming a feminist identity' from a postfeminist perspective sidesteps any real commitment to political action. For Gill and other critics of postfeminism, this version of popular feminism is 'championed as a cheer word, a positive value – yet in a way that does not necessarily pose any kind of challenge to existing social relations'.[4] Postfeminism finds a supportive home within the context of Instagram influencer culture. The emphasis on visual display within the platform's design ensures ample opportunity to both sell products and a commodity-generated lifestyle to users. It is an ideal site of exchange for building one's body as one's brand. It ensures that our self-care practices means we turn ourselves into what Baudrillard calls 'the finest consumer objects', wherein through Instagram you can purchase the commodities you need to turn yourself into a commodity.[5] This centrality of visibility within the platform makes it particularly interesting to feminist media scholars as women's overdetermined

representation[6] and 'to-be-looked-at-ness'[7] has been a continuous site of concern.

It is important to note here that while 'self-care' as a consumerist concept took off in mainstream culture in response to the outcomes of the 2016 US Presidential election, the history of self-care extends much farther, especially for women experiencing various forms of marginalisation.[8] Emerging as a medical concept prior to the 1960s, self-care became a political act during the rise of the women's and civil rights movements. Importantly, '[w]omen and people of color have viewed controlling their health as a corrective to the failures of a white, patriarchal system'.[9] When activists recognised that there was a direct relationship between poverty and poor health, they began the long and hard work of advocating for greater care practices and of beginning to dismantle the structures and ideologies that keep sexual orientation, gender, race, and class as barriers to care.[10]

In this article, we compare some of the different types of feminist ethos made visible by Instagram and #selfcare. Specifically, we examine the largely white, postfeminist enactments of #selfcare alongside uses of the hashtag by Black and racialised accounts to highlight how the hashtag both largely fails to offer forms of self-care that explicitly address societal inequities, but also opens up spaces of possibility for the articulation of a feminist politics antithetical to that of postfeminism. We start our exploration into postfeminist iterations of #selfcare on Instagram by considering how social media platforms operate as spaces of capitalist enterprise and as activist spaces of community building to comment on social media's capacity to hold both discourses simultaneously.[11] What is compelling is how both forms of self-care discourse are utilising the platform of Instagram to circulate their messaging. We thus critically frame two articulations of self-care: a neoliberal, postfeminist enactment tied up in practices of consumption, and the use of self-care as an activist tactic for those who enact it to survive in spaces marked by institutional constraints and the need to resist in order to simply exist. While certainly #selfcare extends beyond Instagram and is equally as active on Twitter and TikTok, we want to focus on the hashtag's articulation on Instagram by its largely millennial audience.

In order to compare postfeminist perspectives of #selfcare that privilege white upper-class lifestyles with Black and Brown feminist-owned accounts that actively decenter whiteness and take up an intersectional feminist lens to enact a politicised #selfcare we engage in a close textual analysis of a small

corpus of accounts and posts selected from within the larger #selfcare movement on Instagram. Central to this is an analysis of how postfeminist and activist visions of self-care formally engage Instagram to achieve their respective goals of consumerism and coalition building. Because Instagram's algorithm privileges particular forms of communication over others, certain forms of #solidarity (or lack of) are enacted and encouraged, while others are not. At present, consistent, prolonged, and actionable consumer engagement is key for Instagram and other major social media platforms. For example, Instagram's algorithm explicitly values the act of saving a post over solely commenting on it or commenting on a post over liking it. There is thus a discursive and material flattening built into the platform, encouraging the slide from 'feel-good' mantras to acts of consumption in order to 'properly' engage in self-care. In this mediascape, anti-racist and feminist activism on Instagram becomes particularly instructive for their visual, textual, and cultural 'hacking' or co-opting of Instagram's affordances. In the case of #selfcare, feminist and anti-racist promotions of anti-capitalist communities are significant, and in the latter half of this article we thus highlight how #selfcare has been taken up as a form of survival against oppressive sociopolitical systems that are replicated online in both design and culture.

To conduct our analysis, we gathered a small collection of posts via a search for #selfcare on six personal Instagram accounts used by researchers in our lab at the same time on a mid-week afternoon in Winter 2021. These six accounts were owned by a senior scholar, a doctoral student, two undergraduate students, our longstanding research account (@aesthetic.resistance), which is part of a dedicated feminist Instagram activist community, and a test account we set up for the data collection. Attempting to collect the most popular posts circulating on the platform we were curious if a certain genre of #selfcare would be prioritised and highlighted via Instagram's algorithm and if these prioritised posts would be different based on the social locations associated with each of our unique accounts. It came as a surprise that despite our differently situated ages, races, and sexualities, we all found that the top twelve posts each of us encountered held a lot of overlap. While we all identify as feminists and activists to some degree, the twelve top posts we each found in our search page feed were largely oriented towards consumer products being sold by 'influencer' personalities (Figure 1).

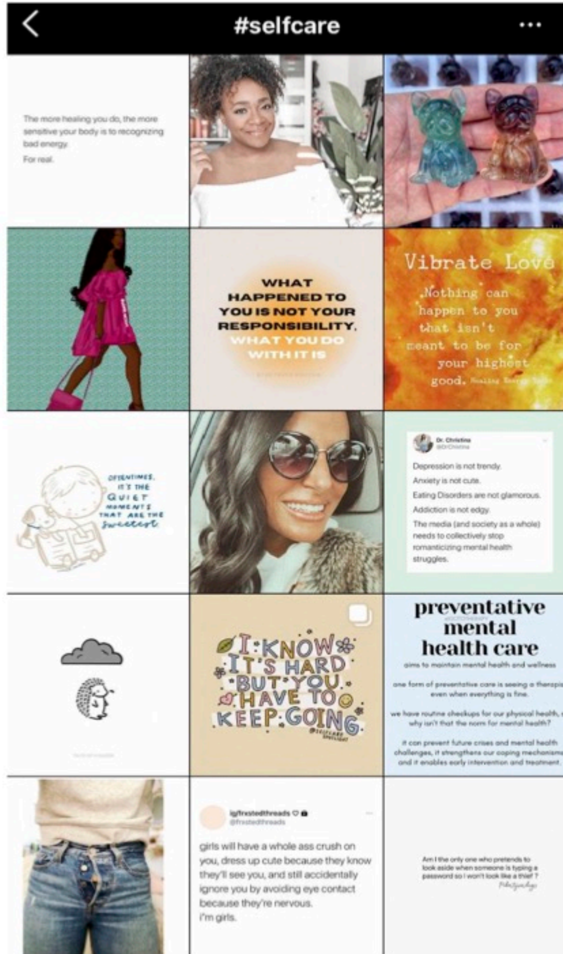

Fig. 1: Top posts on the search page, 17 February 2021.

Using our own personal accounts was a decision grounded in our intersectional feminist politics, which, in this paper, aims to highlight how ways of knowing are influenced by our social locations and that dominant ways of being often obscure important knowledges from the mainstream view.[12] Focusing on our own feeds was a necessary methodological and political intervention. Because #selfcare hinges on personal experience and because, in true feminist fashion, the personal is political, we use our own ethnographic

experiences on Instagram to structure our analyses of the distinctions between postfeminist and intersectional feminist #selfcare mandates. Here, part of our initial reflection and critical analysis was on how a 'matrix of domination'[13] that gives precedence to whiteness and neoliberalism manifests within #selfcare on Instagram. What our approach also suggests is that as researchers we are never truly distanced from the phenomena we examine; it works on us and through us even as we aim to grapple with it.[14]

From the small corpus of posts we gathered, we engaged in a close textual analysis which included three interrelated sets of questions around text, context, and paratext.[15] The first step was a direct reading of the post as a visual-textual object that we analysed for form and content so that we could draw out both themes and representational tactics that were specific to the affordances and unwritten stylistic rules of the platform. Second, we examined the accounts more broadly to gather the context behind the post-as-text and to determine what frameworks and politics informed the post. Finally, we examined the groupings of hashtags used on a given post as well as any comments and replies attached to the post to get a sense of the paratextual discourse surrounding the post. Taken together, these three layers of analysis offer a comprehensive picture of how a given post operates within the existing script of the platform, where it conforms, upholds, and where it deviates and resists. Through this analysis we wish to suggest that #selfcare offers important insights into poetic or world-making techniques[16] for better understanding different embodied and material realities from a feminist perspective.

The promises and perils of social media platforms

To question the circulation and promotion of feelings, ideologies, and politics on social media platforms requires that we consider the relationship between contemporary ideologies of gender, race, and class, and the platforms themselves. Thus, we turn to platform studies to explore what 'the matter of media devices … can tell us about the forces and conditions that shape our media landscape' and, by extension, our social and cultural worlds.[17] As two queer scholars, one of us mixed-race, we want to ensure this article responds to Rianka Singh's calls for feminist, queer, and POC materialist perspectives to fill in the gaps of existing scholarship on platforms. We take this call seriously by addressing the question of feminist material practices via the site of

#selfcare on Instagram. One way into expanding this discussion is to note how the affordances of social media platforms are constrained by the conditions they were imagined and designed under.[18] As Tania Bucher and Anne Helmond note regarding platform design and social media affordances, '[a] feature is clearly not just a feature. The symbols and the connotations they carry matter.'[19] Thus, the very materiality of the platform affects what kinds of meanings, hopes, understandings, and feelings emerge and move online. On Instagram, affordances take place within 'a nexus of technological architecture, sociocultural contexts, and globalized commercial practices', providing Instagram users with unique sets of 'material, conceptual, and imaginary' strategies for producing and interacting with content.[20]

Within the case of #selfcare on Instagram, affordances manifest as a reliance on visual-textual content that promote particular meanings and understandings of the concept of self-care while sidelining others. The use of a hashtag encourages networked public communities through its persistence as a stable discursive form that can be easily replicated, searched, and in some instances turned viral.[21] The #selfcare 'networked publics' on Instagram are notably 'restructured by networked technologies' and emerge 'as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice'.[22] The platform shapes the user just as the user and their practices shape the platform, simultaneously encouraging and constraining new forms of participation, practices, and communicative habits.[23] Importantly, as Momeni (2020) notes, in the context of political activism and social media affordances, these 'dynamic interaction[s]' on social media 'assist participants not only in making their own voices heard', but also in 'allowing them to participate in elevating other peoples' voices and experiences',[24] even as these discourses are influenced by the tone and design of the platform. These practices between social media participants and between platforms are key for visibility, accessibility, and critiquing dominant systems, especially for marginalised people. We suggest that postfeminist self-care eschews a responsibility to care for others and our communities in favour of a limited self-focus that does not encourage or support the social and political change necessary for more equitable, sustainable futures.

Interrogating whiteness and postfeminism in #selfcare

In August 2013, Mikki Kendall, writer, speaker, and blogger, tweeted #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen in a moment of 'hood feminist' frustration at the continued silencing of marginalised voices – specifically, Black voices – by white mainstream feminism.[25] Despite calls for anti-racist and anti-sexist policies in Canada and the United States, the violent targeting, abuse, and exploitation of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people persists through white supremacist colonial patriarchal norms. Taking Kendall seriously, we argue that one of many ways that white supremacy functions within digital culture (and within North American culture more broadly) is to obscure the realities of social inequity via neoliberal dictums for personal self-improvement and individualist calls to live our 'best lives'.

This works in direct conjunction with the types of erasures enabled by postfeminist discourse. Postfeminism's 'dominant' presence 'in western culture's discourses of gender'[26] acknowledges feminism in order to reject it. By evoking 'the cultural power of feminism', postfeminism 'empt[ies] it of its radical critique'.[27] Themes tied to a postfeminist ideology that are relevant to discourses of self-care online include: linking femininity to the body; women's self-subjectification through practices of self-surveillance, competitive individualism, and the myths of 'choice and empowerment', rather than objectification from the outside; a reification of sexual difference as 'natural' alongside the 'sexualization of culture' and a consumerist code that employs a 'commodification of difference'.[28] The risk then of a neoliberal, popular postfeminism is that it can 'explicitly recognise that inequality exists while stopping short of recognising, naming, or disrupting the political economic conditions that allow that inequality to be profitable'.[29]

At issue here is the distinction, as Banet-Weiser (2018) outlines, between an economy and a politics of visibility. As Banet-Weiser notes, the 'media landscape' of an economy of visibility makes possible 'a set of tactics used by some feminisms and some misogynies to move into the spotlight with more ease than others'.[30] For a popular postfeminism, these tactics include selling the concepts of 'empowerment, confidence, capacity, and competence'[31] to women across online spaces. These are precisely the concepts driving the self-care market and some of the key markers of Black feminist critiques of the concept of solidary when promoted in largely white liberal feminist spaces. The relationship between viral hashtags like #selfcare and #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen is one of an economy of visibility, or, who's

perspective and ethos gets circulated with what degree of acceptance over another. These disparities bring to light the material and affective realities of the neoliberal underpinnings of self-care, both for participants and for those witnessing it unfold in social media spaces; the ways that the hashtags are situated within an 'economy of visibility' matter. Within the economy of visibility on social media, political action 'begins and ends with representation'.[32] As such, the individual popularity in particular of white celebrity users and influencers are privileged, and power and empowerment are premised on heightened representation within individual exchanges.

These forms of more visible postfeminism counteract the important and radical Black feminist and restorative work that #selfcare is meant to do, particularly when it comes to making visible the economies of power that mediate violence against communities who are already marginalised. In contrast to an economy of visibility, a 'politics of visibility'[33] highlights how 'representation is part of a collective struggle to achieve political goals'[34] and mobilises collective action against structures of inequality as they attempt to affect change. It is thus 'the process of making visible a political category (such as gender or race) that is and has been historically marginalised in the media'.[35] It is here that '[r]epresentation, or visibility, takes on a political valence' and becomes a potential operative of change.[36] This tension between a hyper-visible economy of representation that obscure realities and ways of being beyond capitalist exchange and a tactical use of visibility to enact different, more resistant forms of political change plays out directly in the different ways #selfcare is employed on Instagram. Below we more closely examine this tension by outlining the findings of our digital ethnographic pursuit, analysing the effects of the circulation of #selfcare across our different feeds to outline how rampant the politics of visibility around white neoliberal femininity really are on the platform.

Of the posts we gathered there were ten that overlapped across the six Instagram accounts we used. These six posts addressed themes of fitness and wellbeing, and self-empowerment, spirituality, and alternative health. The six posts each linked to an online store or website where Instagram users could purchase products (graphic prints and cards or yoga accessories, for example), commission an item, attend a workshop, or subscribe to additional content (for instance, on Patreon or OnlyFans). Each post, despite thematic overlaps and their shared use of the self-care hashtag, had its own lexicon of additional hashtags as well as unique groups of publics that engaged with the posts. An examination of the content, context, and paratexts of these posts

demonstrate quite clearly how an economy of a white, neoliberal, postfeminist visibility operates across them and suggests what is required by the Instagram script of #selfcare to make it to the top of the platform's search page.

Take for instance one of the posts we examined which was a selfie of a white fitness, food, and fashion blogger. In the post the blogger centres her image in a close-up in her car with her face turned for a three-quarter profile image. She is wearing oversized glamorous sunglasses and a faux fur vest, her brunette hair is in perfect waves down one side of her face, and she is smiling broadly with pearly white teeth. Not pictured in this post but in a follow-up is her must-have Louis Vuitton bum bag to finish the outfit (caption: 'feeling cute and cozy'). There is a grainy, vintage filter over the image that adds a muted and stylish sheen. It looks almost as if the photo was captured mid-movement and adds a sense of dynamism to the overall image. By dominant standards of beauty and of professional looking selfies on Instagram, it is a successful and compelling selfie. Unlike our analysis of public accounts below, we have not added an identifying handle for the account nor shared the image because despite the profile belonging to a public figure, it is still a private account. Suffice to say, the description we have provided here indicates a very common iteration of the influencer beauty selfie that we wish to focus our analysis on. The image and its hashtags have all the hallmarks of a postfeminist sensibility outlined by Gill above. It is a showcase of self-regulation and (com)modification of the body into current beauty standards that is supported by consumer products, like the sunglasses, lip gloss, designer bag, and hair products. The image conforms to a visual-textual script of influencer culture[37] which suggests that these practices lead to individual empowerment and self-satisfaction – feelings of self-worth derived from Western beauty standards.

The post is accompanied by the caption 'Careful. She comes from another world' and the wealth of hashtags below the caption that include:

> #selfcare #selflove #selflovejourney #worthit #beauty #strong #strongwoman #strongertogether #strongereveryday #strongisbeautiful #confident #womenempowerment #womeninspiringwomen #loveyourself #wellness #wellnesswednesday #wellnessjourney

Taking the visuals and hashtags together, this post intends to inspire and encourage an image-centered practice of self-empowerment and wellbeing. It gestures towards possible community (#strongertogether; #womeninspiringwomen) but locates that empowerment within the #selflovejourney that

arrives ultimately at a form of #beauty that affirms the poster is #worthit. Notably, this is a self-love journey. It is a community that is singular and steeped in individual amplification for validation.

Other posts on the account page highlight that the profile owner is a Weight Watchers ambassador, and her Instagram bio notes that she lost a good deal of weight on the program, indicating a value placed on thinness and diet culture. A linktree includes links to her blog, Amazon faves storefront, the fitbod app, and a promotional offer for a sponsored nut butter. Hair products, life inspo, nut butter, and trendy OOTD (outfit of the day) highlights are saved to the profile. The fitness, food, and fashion influencer seems to be highly supported by almost 32K followers, with the comments on posts including statements of 'supermodel', 'movie star', and 'beauty queen' from followers and others – they love her sunglasses, her aesthetic, her lifestyle. Other 'before and after' posts of her full body index an intense self-scrutiny and self-regulation, highlighting postfemininity's requirements to empower oneself by conforming to dominant beauty standards. These standards are a thin, white, upper class body; a visual cultural value and requirement that extends back centuries and across varied institutions and knowledge systems.[38] While the selfie we describe here is just one of many selfies on the account, it aligns with both the additional hashtags and with the account's overall essence to promote healthy menus, portion sizing, and 'fitspo' body selfies, tracing her journey of weight loss and advocating the same for others. This demonstrates quite directly the economy of visibility Banet-Weiser cautions against in *Empowered*. It is by making the body a visible object of success that elides the important political critiques of how such successes are accessible and ultimately achieved.

In a different post that appeared across all six of our accounts' #selfcare search is a bright yellow background image depicting a fluid, sparking cosmos (Figure 2). In large letters at the top of the image the post offers the imperative 'Vibrate Love' and then in smaller letters 'Nothing can happen to you that isn't meant to be for your highest good.' The caption reiterates this message from the visual posts with the line 'Vibrate Love!' and includes hashtags:

> #goodvibes #abundance #happiness #newera #trust #intuition #universe #nirvana #blessings #peace #love #higherfrequency #instalove #timetothrive #lightworker #bestrong #intuition #healing #bliss #consciousness #selfcare #awakening #gratitude #grateful #thankyou #1111 #5d

Fig. 2: @healingenergytools; posted 17 February 2021.

The account, @healingenergytools, sells 'handcrafted meditation pyramids, jewelry, and sacred geometric tools', linking their website. Their feed is curated to alternate between images of products they sell and new age spiritual mantras on similar-styled cosmic backgrounds in different jewel-tone colours. At first glance, the suggestion to send out intentional vibrations like 'love' to the universe seems uplifting and benign. The hashtags #1111 and #5d index an online community of spiritualists seeking alternate dimensions (or the thresholds between them). The appeal to #intuition, #healing, #bliss, #consciousness, and #higherfrequency can be found in yoga and alternative medicine communities, which have become mainstream and widespread in their social presence in mediated and unmediated settings.

Upon closer examination, however, the message of this post points towards some troubling aspects of this particular economy of visibility, especially as it pushes the burden of lived experiences onto the individual and removes any accountability or responsibility from the systems that constrain

some individuals more than others. In this way, the sentiment that all our lived experiences, positive and negative, are leading us on a path towards abundance, nirvana, peace, love, and awakening (all hashtags included in the post), negates the very real material effects of sexism, racism, colonialism, classism, and transphobia within our social spheres. Moreover, yoga and alternative medicine customs that hashtag communities point towards are customs have been appropriated from South Asian and East African practices, which have often been taken out of their traditional contexts and contorted to fit within the Global North and its obsession with self-improvement and self-love amidst stressful neoliberal settings. This again is tied to an individualist notion of empowerment that, while not requiring the forms of postfeminist beauty in the post analysed directly above, does require forms of self-regulation and betterment that ask nothing of our social structures and blames the individuals it is directed at for not 'making the most' or channelling negativity into positivity from what may befall them. This example of Instagram's commodity-driven posting practices supports Banet-Weiser's caution against the economy of visibility while also suggesting how imperative it is to seek out the ways a politics of visibility within the platform may counter the effects of the white-centric postfeminism that at the moment persists and thrives.

The consumerist focus on profiting from acts of self-care, as seen through the links in Instagram bios to webstores, hashtags like #WellnessWednesday and #SelfCareSunday, and new corporate focuses on self-practices of care, suggests that there is, indeed, a paradox here: at the same time that self-care has become a $10 billion industry,[39] women continue to experience higher rates of eating disorders, anxiety, and depression.[40] Evidently, neoliberal forms of self-care bypass systemic issues of racial injustice, gender inequality, and wage gaps in favour of self-help mantras of empowerment and relaxation products. But empowerment to do what? Products for who? When amplified on social media platforms like Instagram, such ideologies and material items become all too common, gaining validity and velocity through likes, re-posts, stories, and reels. On Instagram, self-care is a brand, a marketing technique that convinces users not to truly check in with their own bodies or the social and political climate. But radical possibilities exist for solidarity and care when users are able to engage digital literacies to recognise that Instagram's affordances can be used in other ways.

Radical possibilities of #selfcare

What is most interesting about social media platforms is how they can be both 'culturally dominating' and 'limiting' as they 'elevate only some voices and regulate action, they also necessarily reproduce a certain kind of feminism'.[41] In line with scholars of colour who have advocated for the significant and critical need to problematise the democratic promise of digital platforms,[42] we agree that platforms like Instagram uphold and perpetuate existing oppressions like misogyny, racism, and ableism. For example, although hashtag campaigns circulating on Instagram and Twitter like #JusticeforLiz, #BringBackOurGirls, and #SayHerName have amplified Black women's stories and paved the way for groundbreaking movements like #MeToo to emerge with such force,[43] they have also made clear the pervasiveness of a white savior complex that gathers its strength through white supremacy.[44] Here, there is a troubling normalcy and frequency with which whiteness as an ideology underscores much of the #selfcare content circulated and promoted on social media platforms. This has violent material and affective consequences for Black and Brown women's everyday lives and for otherwise marginalised people, limiting the possibility of genuine #solidarity.

Taking this healthy skepticism about #selfcare further, we wish to explore self-care beyond its current status as a site of consumerist self-improvement. A notable and important history to highlight is the role of self-care in Black feminist activism, since before the rise of what is understood as second-wave feminism.[45] When considering the larger spectrum of self-care discourse online today, one that includes activist media spaces, think-pieces, blogs, and memes,[46] many orient their notion of self-care around the oft-quoted phrase by Audre Lorde: 'Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.'[47] Often missing, though, are the gendered, racialised, and classed dynamics that motivated Lorde's work, which, as seen in the above Instagram posts and profiles, can be attributed in recent years to the rise of popular feminism and the on-going white-washing of Black feminist thought by white liberal feminism.

Acknowledging this history and turning to Lorde's insistence that self-care is self-preservation, Sara Ahmed reflects:

> When you are not supposed to live, as you are, where you are, with whom you are with, then survival is a radical action; a refusal not to exist until the very end; a refusal not to exist until you do not exist. We have to work out how to survive in a

> system that decides life for some requires the death or removal of others. Sometimes: to survive in a system is to survive a system. We can be inventive, we have to be inventive, Audre Lorde suggests, to survive. Some of us. Others: not so much.[48]

Here, Ahmed emphasises the inequality in current institutional systems, making clear who must be inventive to survive and who has survival built into the very foundations of the systems that surround them. This is why such inventiveness, such refusal and radical self-care, is key as political resistance – it indexes this deep inequity while claiming what Judith Butler calls 'the right to a livable life'.[49]

The focus on self-care as an activist principle of self-preservation brings a politics of visibility to the question of who has the right to a livable life under the constraints of a colonial, capitalist, heteropatriarchy. While the two posts analysed above exist within an economy of white neoliberal visibility, we want to consider other posts from our research from women-identified artists of colour who advance a message of self-care quite from a self-regulated, competitive individualistic form of empowerment. In a post from the account @talesofelanor, dedicated to the 'tales of … [a] brave hedgehog and her daily struggles', there is an image of the illustrated hedgehog Eleanor under a dark grey cloud (Figure 3). Eleanor is drawn in grey and white, placed in the center of the frame, and her eyes are squeezed shut with tears spilling out. There is no text in the image but the comment below reads:

> Eleanor is trapped under a dark cloud today. Nothing makes her feel better. Sometimes you just need a good cry Ellie. It happens to us all.

This is with no accompanying hashtags. The comments from followers include many heart emojis as well as supportive affirmations for 'Ellie' to let it all out, noting how helpful tears are.

The account offers a somewhat different discourse of self-care on Instagram that conveys the importance of naming pain and sadness. This works in opposition to the more common imperative to regulate ourselves into idealised consumers and images. The post critiques the types of visibility found in beauty and celebrity culture by asserting that our experiences can sometimes be dark and awful. The post seeks out a networked public that recognises sadness and depression as reasonable states of being. The account utilises the visual affordances of Instagram – that offer communicative and social visibilities – to produce an alternative narrative where Ellie the hedgehog

can share quotidian struggles with her audience. Ellie's visible struggles contrast the thoroughly sanitised postfeminist neoliberal feminine ideal of 'success' on Instagram through its understated visual and textual aesthetic.

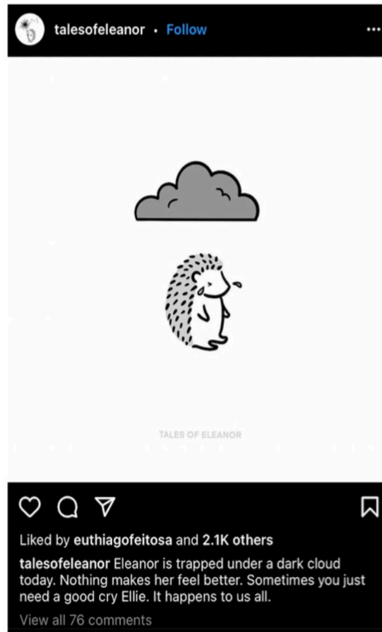

Fig. 3: @talesofelanor; posted 17 February 2021.

Another example of the alternative articulations of #selfcare on Instagram is the account @thenapministry, which explores self-care principles from a Black feminist and anti-capitalist perspective. This account engages in a performative, cultural co-optation of Instagram that imagines more inclusive and supportive ways of being. The Nap Ministry, founded in 2016, is a space to critique and counter capitalist imperatives of hyperproductivity. It situates naps and rest as restorative rituals central to the fight against white supremacy by aiming to 'examine sleep deprivation for all people' and 'honour, reimagine and recapture the dreamspace [of enslaved Black people and ancestors] that was stolen for centuries'.[50] The ministry positions itself in dialogue with Black anti-capitalist activism, drawing on Black liberation theology, afrofuturism, womanism, and Black feminism. Run by The Nap Bishop, Tricia Hersey, a performance artist and theatre maker, activist, theologian,

and community healer (http://www.triciahersey.com/), with workshops, a hotline for recorded 'rest messages', nap events, and public rituals including altars, group napping, and eating in community.[51] The regular posts that the ministry shares on Instagram and Twitter, where it has an equally active following, assert nap and rest as resistance, while also critically intervening into the whiteness of the 'wellness' industry in vital and necessary ways.[52]

The core of the ministry's message can be seen in a post from January 2021 (Figure 4), which uses the account's central colour scheme of bright yellow with black lettering to frame the text

> You are exhausted physically and spiritually because the pace created by this system is for machines and not a magical and divine human being. You are enough. Rest.

The visuals are clean and direct allowing the message to come to the fore. The calming and energising shade of bright yellow suits the message of rest and abundance that speaks to a dual crisis of spiritual weariness and bodily depletion that the account suggests many face at the moment. It situates these crises firmly within a system of capitalism, or perhaps more succinctly a necrocapitalism that requires many bodies to function as machines for the benefit of a privileged few.

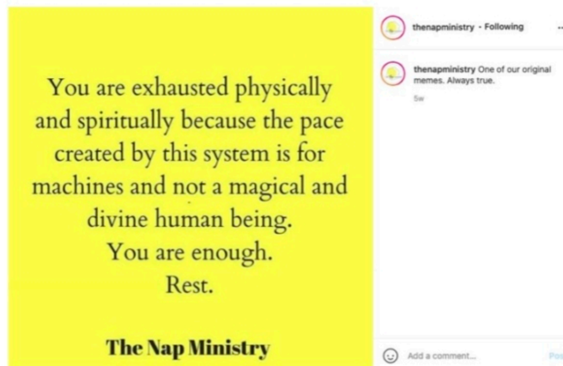

Fig. 4: @thenapministry; posted 18 January 2021.

Alongside a naming of such weariness, depletion, and the site of its propagation, it suggests that to be human is to be divine and magical. These terms make reference, of course, to the leitmotif of the ministry as a religious or

spiritual space, but also to the concept of humans as more than elements of our systems of exchange and work. The appeal to the spiritual here is a way of arguing our value exists beyond placement as consumers and as goods of and for consumption. That is the crux of the post's text: that we consider instead the ways that we are enough in who we are despite existing political and socioeconomic structures that require a better, productive, tireless us, in order to validate our existence. This is key to The Nap Ministry's work to dismantle socially constructed barriers that marginalise people and keep them from genuine care. And, the method for doing so is both the most readily attainable and most widespread form of self-care: rest. Rest as resistance pushes against all that is being asked of people in our hyper-consumerist, hyperproductive moment. In this way, the textual message and its appeal to an anti-capitalist form of spirituality is both radical and compelling.

Similar anti-capitalist messaging is found throughout the account's posts and public actions. Importantly, this messaging does not exist without an equally distributed focus on how entwined capitalism is with white supremacy, especially when we remember that rest as radical self-care began with Black women and must be attributed to Black women. The account is centered on Black feminist desires for Black women's liberation as a vital step in the fight against many sites of oppression. In another post from January (Figure 5), @thenapministry makes this link explicitly by providing a passage from the Combahee River Collective (CRC) Statement that argues Black women's freedom will allow for broader collective freedoms, because their freedom requires the destruction of all existing oppressive structures. In the comments, @thenapministry notes that this is the foundational principle of the ministry's work and encourages their followers to read the statement in its entirety because, as the post notes, 'Your deprogramming depends on it.' Moreover, following the linktree embedded in the account does not lead followers to online stores or consumer product, but instead offers music playlists, interviews with Black activists, the CRC statement, Tricia Hersey's guest appearances on various podcasts and in publications discussing the work of The Nap Ministry, and other resources to support the work of deprogramming through forms of rest that will enable personal reflection and anti-racist practices. The Nap Ministry's project is one example of activist self-care that uses care with words, bodies, concepts, and practices (see for example: @audrelordeproject, @thebodyisnotanapology, @iamchrissyking [creator of #BodyLiberationProject], @charlenecarruthers, and @gurlstalk). These accounts all center on self-work, but they locate that work in dialogue

with a sense of community responsibility suggesting how necessary coalitions are for supporting the daily struggles of activists engaged in anti-capitalist and anti-racist #solidarity work.

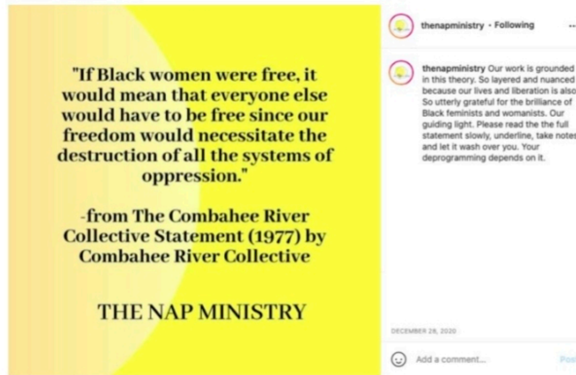

Fig. 5: @thenapministry; posted 28 December 2020.

While circulating selfies and amplifying self-care routines does not always require critique, continuing to uplift a culture that marginalises bodies that cannot and do not conform to dominant standards of thinness, whiteness, and richness perpetuates harm. Countering unjust dominant narratives with activist accounts across social media platforms is thus important for re-directing narratives of self-care back to their sustainable roots. In considering #selfcare content on Instagram and the sociocultural contexts in which content is produced and circulated, we argue that the varying and situated knowledges and practices of Black content-producers should be more fully attended to by media scholarship in order to highlight tacit and explicit knowledges that are overlooked within dominant postfeminist and neoliberal thought. This article thus seeks to generate a different conceptual paradigm for attending to social media activist work that pushes for more equitable and sustainable futures.

Fig. 6: @thenapministry; posted 27 January 2021.

On mainstream Instagram, where high follower engagement, frequent posting, and various modes of interaction are necessary to achieve and maintain 'influencer status', there really is no rest – even when posting about #selfcare. But without deliberate rest, we cannot engage in genuine self-care. In a third post from January 2021 (Figure 6), with soft grey lettering over a muted beige background and gold accent shapes, The Nap Bishop bestows a set of wishes on her followers: comforts like tight hugs, warm blankets, connection, and community care. Her wish foregrounds softness, silence, and support and an invitation for followers to contemplate both the state of their heart and their unspoken grief in these moments of pain and constraint. It is a blueprint for relating in care-ful and sustaining ways. This is the form of self-care needed for the struggles at hand – it is a care that challenges us not to give in to 24/7 cycle of self-optimisation and display. The Nap Ministry and other accounts like it effectively co-opt the affordances of Instagram to advance a different ethos grounded in anti-racism, feminism, and anti-capitalism. If taken seriously, such sentiments can encourage social media users who seek a revitalising #selfcare to consider alternative formations of #solidarity that contribute to intervening not only into Instagram's platform but into our social systems, for more equitable ends.

Authors

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Notes

[1] Harris 2017.

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[7] Mulvey 1975.

[8] Harris 2017.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Wiens & MacDonald 2020.

[12] Harding 1992; Smith 1989.

[13] Collins 1990.

[14] Conquergood 2002; Dolan 1988.

[15] MacDonald & Wiens, forthcoming.

[16] Wiens & MacDonald 2020.

[17] Anabel 2018.

[18] Shoshana Zuboff 2019.

[19] Bucher & Helmond 2017, p. 234.

[20] Hurley 2019, p. 1.

[21] boyd 2010; Bucher & Helmond 2017.

[22] boyd 2010, p. 39.

[23] Bucher & Helmond 2017; Wiens & MacDonald 2020.

[24] Momeni 2020, p. 179.

[25] Kendall 2020.

[26] Levine 2009, p. 137.

[27] Gill 2007, p. 74.

[28] Ibid., p. 149.

[29] Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer 2017, p. 886.

[30] Banet-Weiser 2018, p. 2.

[31] Ibid., p. 3.

[32] Clark-Parsons 2019, p. 5; Banet-Weiser 2018.

[33] Banet-Weiser 2018.

[34] Clark-Parsons 2019, p. 5; Banet-Weiser 2018.

[35] Banet-Weiser 2018, p. 22.

[36] Ibid.

[37] van Driel & Dumitricia 2020.

[38] Gilman 1985.

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[40] Women's Institute for Policy Research 2019, cited in Conlin 2019.

[41] Singh 2018.

[42] Benjamin 2019; Noble 2018; Singh 2018.

[43] Bailey & Jackson & Foucault Welles 2019.

[44] Higgs 2015.

[45] Harris 2017.

[46] See e.g. Celia Fernandez 2019 writing for *The Oprah Magazine* or the Pinterest page on self-care.

[47] Lorde 1988.

[48] Ahmed 2014.

[49] Butler 2015.

[50] See @thenapministry on Instagram, 'Mission' story highlight.

[51] See http://www.triciahersey.com/.

[52] See e.g. @thenapministry on Instagram 10 January 2021.