

Reference

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A Heretical Truth: Self-Care May Not Be Enough

Acknowledging and handling emotions, fatigue, and the need for self-care, when working in unsafe and stressful circumstances is named by the International Federation of Social Workers as one of six key ethical challenges practitioners face globally during COVID-19 (Banks et al., 2020). This coupled with surging nationalism, aggressive immigration policies, and lethal racism create the context in which we live and provide behavioral health services to Latino/as today. As we usher in 2022, we're met with a sense that this is the new normal, a reconceptualization of what wellbeing means while coping with entrenched racism and a global pandemic. It is a truth that now more than ever, self-care is vital, so it feels slightly heretical to give voice to the reality that perhaps, for some of us, self-care just doesn't make sense, this luxurious destination unattainable to those doing the work.

Self-care as we know it seems adrift, far from Audre Lorde's (1988) permission to thrive, where "caring for (one)self is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare" (p. 130). It's a colonized thing, a construct of systems of oppression that create in us the very stress, anger, fear, grief and exhaustion we're trying to prevent. It is a westernized vision spawned by rugged individualism. It's professionalized, where an ethical rationale is asserted for the importance of taking responsibility for our own wellbeing to prevent committing harm to those we serve. To not practice self-care can be felt as a failure, an indictment on our mental wellness, competence, or self-worth. In effect, self-care is rapidly becoming a tool for perpetuating imposter syndrome, that anxious space we inhabit surrounded by self-doubt, criticism, feelings of unworthiness, and the drive to over-prove and achieve perfection, to exude wellness.

These visions of self-care take us far from our families and communities, where knowing one's worth is rooted in the sense of belonging and mattering. They divorce our wellbeing from collective wellbeing and the necessity for connectedness. They ignore that our wellbeing is, in part, grounded in a collective responsibility to care for others during times of struggle.

These visions also fail to inquire about what is really influencing our wellbeing in these times. Where the literature on self-care is robust, little is out there about how to attend to the collective, cultural, and cumulative wounds we carry while we bear witness human suffering in the face of endemic racism and a pandemic. Particularly true for Black, Indigenous and Practitioners of Color, our suffering as helping professionals manifests as deeply felt racial battle and resilience fatigue, imposter syndrome, and real trauma. The solutions we're offered to resolve this collective suffering can sometimes be superficial quick fixes that never reach our souls.

Indeed, it feels as if "the world we live in is a house on fire and the people we love are burning" (Cisneros, 2015, p. 296). So what, now, do we actually do to achieve wellbeing amid all this? We go back to basics and start by breathing in self-love for five counts and exhaling collective care for eight. Sounds simple, right? It..is..that..simple.

A term like self-love can be as colonized and westernized as self-care. What is meant here by self-love is radically acknowledging your raw humanity, your limitations and imperfections and practicing unconditional love and compassion with yourself anyway. It means showing up when you can and practicing stillness and rest when you can't. It means knowing you are truly loved and valued, not solely for the work you do, but because your voice, thoughts and being are valuable just as you are. It means embodying the knowledge that you are not alone, but part of a greater whole. Finally, it means fully trusting yourself to know what you need when you need it and to go and do the thing that will help you heal.

We have choices in how we pursue wellbeing. We can reframe our struggles, radically accept our struggles, seek solidarity in the struggle, or remain in the struggle. Seeking solidarity means embracing and committing to collective care. Collective care is the belief that wellbeing is not the sole responsibility of individuals, but a responsibility shared by many, our partners, our families, our communities, our colleagues. This goes beyond asking others, "What are you doing for self-care?" and instead asking, "What can I do to support your wellness?" Collective care also means practicing radical allyship and standing in solidarity with those impacted by oppression. It means fostering connections with elders to share in their wisdom and with youth to learn from their innovation. And, it means, while we have a responsibility to be in support of others in their time of suffering, equally important is fostering the trust necessary to allow others to support us.

In order for us to practice self-love and collective care, we need community and we need resources. A helpful resource is the *Nap Ministry*, a collective who asserts, "Rest is a form of resistance because it disrupts and pushes back against capitalism and white supremacy" (The Nap Ministry, n.d.). Another powerful voice in collective care is Melissa Harris-Perry, who reminds us that "marginalized populations have performed self-care for centuries in the face of systemic oppression. The truth is we exist in matrices of allies and friends who do this work for us. If we're honest, it isn't #self-care. It's #squadcare" (Harris-Perry, 2017). Finally, if you're curious about how to integrate these concepts into your work as a practitioner, take a look at Fook's *Social Work, A Critical Approach to Practice* (2016). In solidarity, I wish you all wellness through whatever path brings you joy.

References

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