

**There is No Time Like the Present: Conceptualizing a Radical Self-care Approach in
Black Women Social Workers**

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Abstract

Radical self-care is a self-care model that centers the health, wellness, and communal care of Black women. Radical self-care is rooted in self-determination, self-preservation, and self-restoration that nurtures the experiences of Black women. The theoretical lenses put forth in this paper show how interconnected COVID-19, Blackness, and Black womanhood in social work are all salient identities and experiences in need of radical self-care. Embedding radical self-care in the social work discourse is needed as it provides a method to broaden the well-being and retention of Black women social workers. It is imperative that social work organizations look at their policies and practices surrounding supporting self-care practices of Black women social workers as they are coping with racial trauma and navigating systems of oppression. In this paper I postulate how Black women social workers can take charge and ownership of their self-care needs and instill radical self-care practices in their marginalized clients through the proposed intervention of green therapy.

Keywords: Black women, social work, radical self-care, COVID-19, green therapy, mental health

Acknowledgements

“Trees and plants always look like the people they live with, somehow”

-Zora Neale Hurston

This doctoral journey is dedicated to Viola Sanders my great grandmother who is now an ancestor guiding me along this journey. This doctoral journey is dedicated to my ancestors who came before me and are holding me up in ways I would never know. This doctoral journey is dedicated to my mother Leola Sanders who unknowingly taught me the art of radical self-care passed down from her grandmother Viola Sanders.

I rest on the prayers that bought me through and over, the silent prayers of my grandmother Theresa and Viola that are still protecting me.

To my mother Leola Sanders the words thank you will never be enough to convey how blessed I am to have a praying, creative, beautiful, caring, and dedicated mother such as you. Thank you and I love you more than this lifetime can offer!

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Ase' Amen!

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Introduction

Self-care is a practice that should dominate social work discourse. In social work curriculum, training, storytelling, and practice, self-care is presented as an approach that may not be sensitive to various lived experiences (Miller, 2020). Of those lived experiences, those of the Black woman and social worker continue to be ignored as it relates to a self-care approach that truly nurtures their experiences. Using the Black feminist theory, theory of intersectionality and healing justice framework, and other guiding frameworks, this paper will put forth the concept of radical self-care and its impact on the wellness of Black social workers and Black women. While other relevant frameworks will be discussed, this paper will define radical self-care and consider how social work has or has not committed to an inclusive self-care approach that affirms Black women's social workers. This paper will also introduce a self-care intervention practice for Black women social workers to consider for themselves and a practice intervention with Black women. Practice gaps and ways policies may not nurture a commitment to radical self-care will also be discussed. For this paper, the phrase Black women will encompass Black trans women and Black cis women.

Self-Care

I am sick and tired of being sick and tired. -Fannie Lou Hamer

A Common Definition of Self-Care

Self-care is a broad concept that many different people have defined. Self-care has become a cliché' and catchall term that may be viewed more as a person engaging in activities like spa days, facials, manicures, and pedicures. These experiences, while appealing, may not nurture the entire self. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines self-care as the ability of individuals, families, and communities to promote health, prevent diseases, maintain health, and

cope with illness and disability with or without the support of a healthcare provider (World Health Organization et al., 2022). How and what defines self-care goes beyond the cliché' but investigates how self-care is a person-centered and community-centered approach to holistically taking care of yourself with or without health workers' assistance.

Theoretical Lenses to View Self-care

The author will utilize the theoretical lenses of Black feminist theory, intersectionality, World Health Organization self-care conceptual framework, and Adverse Community Environments to express the need for self-care practice and intervention. These theoretical lenses will show how interconnected COVID-19, Blackness, and Black womanhood in social work are all salient identities and experiences needing radical self-care.

Engaging in Self-care During a Crisis

Even with the aforementioned definition, defining self-care takes on new meanings within new situations such as a pandemic. On March 11, 2020, after more than 118,000 cases in 114 countries and 4,291 deaths, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic (CDC, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic shutdown in March 2020 proved that people went from relying on healthcare providers to care for their medical and mental health needs. This new unknown virus was deadly, and many feared interaction with others. More profoundly, Black women were faced with two pandemics in 2020, COVID-19 and the intersectionality of racism.

Self-Care Amongst Black People During a Double Crisis

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Black people were confronted with yet another racially motivated killing; Ahmaud Arbery was murdered on February 23, 2020. While marching, protesting and calling for action for the murder of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor was murdered on March 13, 2020, which was at the beginning of implementing stay-at-home

orders across the country for COVID-19. These events are significant not only because of the Black lives lost but also because a major component of self-care amongst Black people is that of collectiveness. Black people come together and feel together in community together. These events caused yet another level of unrest for Black people where the need to be in community with each other and organize for social justice actions.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the murders of Black lives set the stage for Black people, particularly Black women, who often carry the burden of care to maintain their physical, mental, and emotional health not just for themselves individually but communally. During the first few months of the shutdown, people established a new way of community through the virtual world of the internet through video-conferencing, social media, and texting (*Social Connection and Well-Being during COVID-19*, 2021.). Previous connections were re-established for people, such as becoming plant parents, gardening, and even cooking. The act of genuine self-care was being re-established and re-defined as people were seeking new ways of living life in isolation.

The Importance of Self-Care

The actions of self-care focus on maintaining the individual physical, emotional, and mental health, a deeper look at self-care goes beyond the care of self. Still, an all-encompassing holistic view should include communal care. Maintaining a balance of your overall health is vital for Black social workers who are coping with their trauma and racial trauma, navigating systems of oppression, and advocating for themselves, their clients, and their communities. Black social workers maintaining self-care practices that go beyond relying solely on themselves, but also have a community that fosters the care of self and each other is imperative to maintaining oneself as a social worker who is Black. Community goes beyond the Merriam-Webster (2022) definition of people with common interests living in a particular area. Based on the common

knowledge of community includes an individual's circle of friends, religious organizations, social organizations, and any other intimate personal networking systems (Cite). When self-care extends outside an individual's responsibility to care for themselves, it becomes radical self-care as it includes community care, social justice, self-determination, self-preservation, and self-restoration. The injustices, policing, and murdering of Black people during the start of the pandemic in 2020 opened the world's eyes briefly to the experiences of Black Americans. According to Buchanan et al. (2020), between May 2020 and the week of June 6, 2020, Black Lives Matters protests over the death of George Floyd, and others turned out half a million people in 550 places making the protests the largest in the country's history. Black people in America are disproportionately dying from COVID due to racism in the health system, poor and unequal living conditions, poor social policies and programs, unfair economic arrangements, and being essential workers such as health practitioners, grocery clerks, domestic workers, environmental services aide, etc. (Vasquez Reyes, 2020). Black women are coping with competing systemic issues and advocating for social justice, and the added stress of the pandemic means a deeper meaning to self-care must be explored for Black women (Wyatt & Ampadu, 2022). If a pandemic that is killing Black people at alarming and disproportionate rates, constant murders of Black women and men, financial stress, racial trauma, and racial battle fatigue is not an outcry that Black women are in desperate need of caring for themselves, then what is?

Self-Care and Experiencing Compassion Fatigue amongst Black Women Social Workers

Historically, social workers were primarily viewed as child welfare case managers. But the scope of their role goes beyond that; social workers are advocates, change agents, mediators, facilitators, and a link to lifesaving resources. Social workers focus on the care and well-being of

their clients continuously, with sometimes little regard for their emotional well-being. The in-depth work of social work professionals working with clients who have experienced trauma can take a toll on them emotionally and physically and sometimes result in them leaving the profession (King, 2016).

Compassion fatigue is a state of trauma during which social workers experience mental, physical, and emotional fatigue from advocating for their clients. Compassion fatigue is described as a state of emotional and physical exhaustion by those in the helping profession (Figley, 2015). Compassion fatigue, a term explicitly targeting helping professionals and caregivers, was developed from secondary and vicarious trauma, initially geared toward those in the medical profession (Figley, 1995). Figley (1995) observed that many people left clinical and therapeutic work because they could not cope with the trauma of the clients they served. Experiencing compassion fatigue could decrease the retention of qualified, skilled, and knowledgeable social workers if they leave the field of social work as a result.

Having healthy, dedicated, and educated Black social workers who are women in the profession creates a diverse workforce that is culturally competent in Black issues, problems, values, beliefs, attitudes, and Black joy and rest. Black women social workers are a small percentage of the overall workforce in social work. New social workers make up nearly 90% of women, and more than 22% were Black masters of social work (MSW) graduates from 2017-2019 (Salsberg et al., 2020). According to *Social Worker Demographics and Statistics [2022]* (2021), there are over 255,003 social workers employed in the United States, with an average of 80.5% of them being women, while men make up 19.5%; the most common ethnicity of social workers is white at 66.9%, Black 15.0%, Latino at 12.4%, and Unknown at 2.2% and 20% identified as LGBTQIQ+. Based on this data, 19.8% of new graduate social workers are Black

women, and 12% of social workers in the workforce are Black women. With Black women social workers making up an average of 12% percent actively working in the profession, a decrease of 7.8% from the 19.8% that initially graduated with an MSW, the reduction in retention is cause for concern. The wellness of Black women in social work is critical to maintaining well-trained, dedicated, educated, and compassionate professionals. The need for Black women social workers is relevant to the profession and practice of social work, as typically minority individuals, primarily Black and poor communities, are serviced by Black women. Representation matters not only for the social worker educated by the academy but also for clients, as that representation can be identified based on ethnicity, race, gender, culture, values, and beliefs. Maintaining Black women social workers who can care for themselves, their families, friends, and communities mean that the profession of social work gains significantly from their presence, knowledge, and expertise that is culturally grounded.

Without educated, well-trained, dedicated, and knowledgeable Black women social workers, Black communities and individuals serviced by agencies employing social workers suffer. Identifying the signs and symptoms of compassion fatigue also ensures a focus on the health and well-being of Black women social workers. Compassion fatigue can result in the lack of retention of these indispensable professionals. The lack of retention of Black women social workers is vital at the table as they bring their culture, education, innovative ideas, solutions, and leadership to the deciding table.

Considerate Theoretical Approaches

Black Feminist Theory

Black feminist theory is a philosophy that centers around the idea that Black women are inherently valuable; Black women's liberation is a necessity not as an adjunct to somebody else's, but because of their need as human persons for autonomy ((1977) *The Combahee River Collective Statement* •, 2012). Black feminist theory/thought demonstrates Black women's emerging power as agents of knowledge as women who are self-defined and self-reliant individuals confronting race, gender, and class oppression (Hills Collins, 1990). Black feminist theory allows individuals to sit in many world realities. Many oppressive societal systems are experienced by Black women and their communities, creating more significant potential for unapparent life stresses (Bryson & Lawrence-Webb, 2000).

Black feminist theory allows Black social workers to center themselves as Black women living and breathing on this earth daily. When Black women take care of themselves, they are seen as radical and political hence the need for radical self-care. Within many marginalized communities, self-care has political and social justice roots. Black feminist self-care practice, as stated by Nayak (2020), invokes the work of Audre Lorde' an intersectional anti-racist political imperative that radically challenges traditional social work theories.

Black women in social work are a part of the families, communities, and social networks they work with (Nayak, 2020). Black social workers face the same issues as their clients because of the intersectionality and duality of their identities and careers. Black feminist theory centers on Black women social workers defining who they are, their needs, and how they should maintain self-care based on their experiences and knowledge.

Theory of Intersectionality

Kimberlé Crenshaw, a legal scholar, coined the term intersectionality in 1989, referencing how Black women's experiences of oppression and injustices were not separate but intersecting. Intersectionality illustrates how systems of oppression overlap to create distinct experiences for Black women with multiple identity categories, as their oppression could not be encompassed exclusively by racism or sexism (Crenshaw, 1989).

A holistic approach to self-care involves considering how a person's most salient identities are nurtured. Intersectionality gives credence to this approach and makes it clear that acknowledging and recognizing the entire self is essential to the holistic approach of self-care for Black women.

Conceptualizing Audre Lorde's Self-care

Audre Lorde' is often seen as the pioneer of modern self-care, but Surya Nayak has laid out three principles of Audre Lorde' that lay the foundation for Black feminist self-care. These three principles also set the foundation for radical self-care for Black women as activists and humans desiring to live freely. The three principles can be broken down into energy, language, and power in developing a self-care intervention for Black women and people.

Energy: The first principle Surya Nayak (2020) discusses choosing areas where your energy is most effective. Energy is about the collective connection between Black women sharing powerful political energy and taking action in areas where their energy can be most effective (Nayak, 2020). From current day movements such as Black Lives Matter to past movements such as the Black Panther Party, Black women have been on the frontlines of movements.

Language: The second principle Surya Nayak (2020) discusses the transformation of silence into language and action. The second principle exposes the falsity that keeping quiet protects Black women; breaking silence is life-affirming for Black women (Nayak, 2020). When Black women turn silence into language and action, a process of self-determination, self-definition, and agency is activated so that Black women occupy spaces (Nayak, 2020).

Power: The third principle Surya Nayak (2020) discusses learning to love the power of your feelings and to use that power for your good. Black women's feelings have the power to disrupt dominant apparatuses of intersectional racism; their feelings have revolutionary potential (Nayak, 2020). Black women's anger is foundational to activism and resistance in mobilizing for liberation from intersectional racist oppression and realizing their vision (Nayak, 2020).

Healing Justice Framework

Healing Justice is a political strategy conceived to intervene and respond to generational trauma and systemic oppression and build community and survivor led responses rooted in southern traditions of resiliency to sustain our emotional, physical, spiritual, psychic, and environmental well-being (*Kindred Southern Healing Justice Collective*, n.d.). The Healing Justice Framework evolved out of the social movement for justice and liberation within the last ten to fifteen years, making it more pertinent in recent years due to the increase of egregious police violence against Black, immigrants, people with disabilities, queer and trans bodies as well as the COVID pandemic (*Kindred Southern Healing Justice Collective*, n.d.).

The duality of the trauma that Black social workers face as social justice advocates, witnessing violence whether viewing it on social media or firsthand, and simply living in the world as Black calls for healing justice. As stated by Kindred Southern Healing Justice

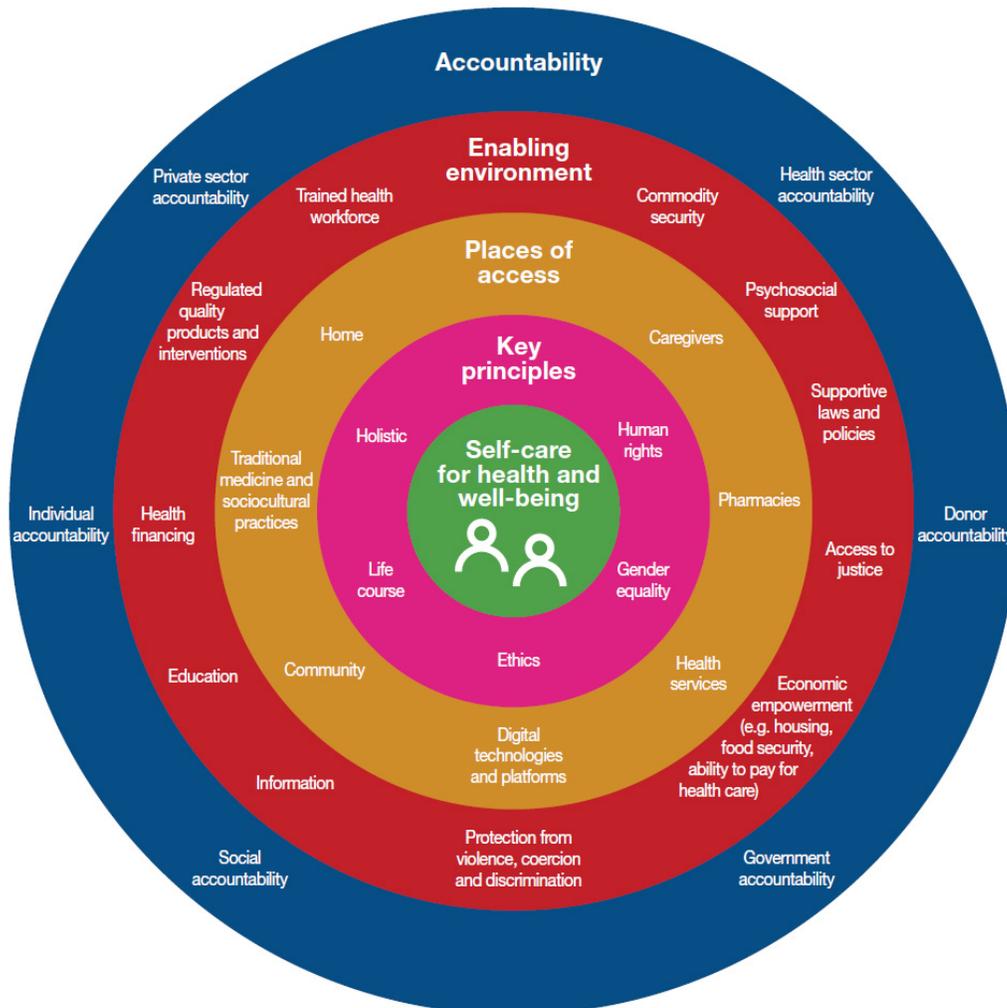
Collective (2020), there is a demand for the reevaluation and complete transformation of the relationships between oppressed communities and the state, which is a call to build actions to transform the traumas of Black communities. As Black people are coping with two pandemics, COVID made it clear that racism is a public health issue and healthcare disparities in the Black community are a leading cause of death for Black people. Healing and wellness go hand in hand, particularly for Black social workers who often feel like they are not able to have a break from the systems of oppression and need radical self-care as a form of refuge.

Other Guiding Frameworks

World Health Organization

The World Health Organization developed a guideline on self-care interventions for health and well-being in 2019 and revised it in 2022. Within the guideline, a conceptual framework for self-care interventions was constructed to provide a starting point for the field of self-care and to identify self-care interventions (World Health Organization et al., 2022). The conceptual framework utilizes core elements that focus on a people-centered and health systems approach; Figure 1. shows the people-centered approach to health and well-being lies at the core of this framework (World Health Organization et al., 2022).

Figure 1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR SELF-CARE INTERVENTIONS



Source: adapted from Narasimhan M, Allotey P, Hardon A. Self-care interventions to advance health and well-being: a conceptual framework to inform normative guidance. *BMJ*. 2019;365:l688. doi:10.1136/bmj.l688.

Person-centered is a tenet of Black feminist praxis and radical self-care. Black people are often coping with the intersectionality of their identity while advocating for themselves and others. Radical self-care is a holistic view of well-being that focuses on the individual and the community. As stated by the World Health Organization et al. (2022) and as shown in Figure 1. the fundamental principles that align with Audre Lorde's self-care conceptual framework are human rights, gender equality, ethics, and holistic. Taking a holistic approach to care for each

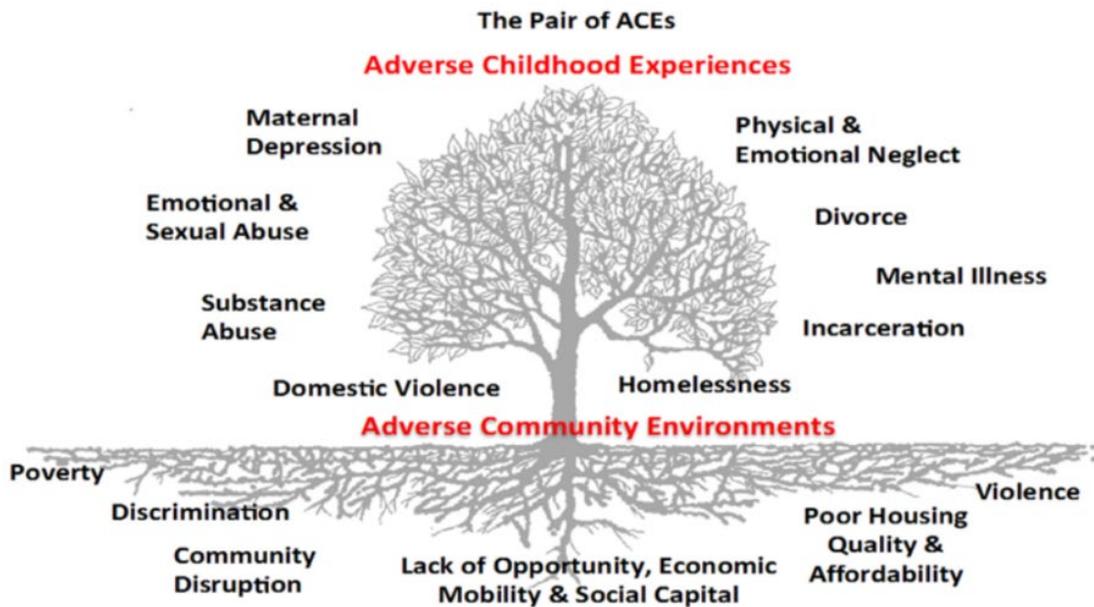
person, their circumstances, needs, and desires across their whole life course, and the environment within which they live is a people-centeredness approach (World Health Organization et al., 2022).

Suppose the environment in which an intervention takes place is not safe. In that case, the likelihood of self-care as a priority in that environment is diminished because it is more about survival versus thriving. Although, even in unsafe environments, one must have even small interventions of self-care to help aid them in nurturing their health and wellness to meet them where they are. World Health Organization et al. (2022) discuss a safe and supportive enabling environment being essential to facilitate access to and the uptake of products and interventions that can improve the health and well-being of underserved and marginalized populations. Although it is ideal for self-care interventions to take place in safe and supportive environments, this is where radical self-care differs in that often, that means meeting the person where they are to guide them through self-care interventions designed for the individual and community.

Adverse Community Environments

Adverse community environments (ACES) address how the environment someone lives in can be linked to the lack of resources or increased threats at the family and community levels, as childhood adversity does not occur in a vacuum (Ellis & Dietz, 2017). Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are magnified when they transpire in the context of adverse community environments (Ellis & Dietz, 2017). Adverse childhood experiences address the physical health of an individual due to trauma, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity, and adverse community environments address the community inequities that one experiences, such as system racism, limited access to social services, poor housing conditions, violence, and substance abuse (Ellis & Dietz, 2017).

Figure 2. THE PAIR OF ACES TREE



Ellis, W., Dietz, W. (2017) A New Framework for Addressing Adverse Childhood and Community Experiences: The Building Community Resilience (BCR) Model. *Academic Pediatrics*. 17 (2017) pp. S86-S93. DOI information: 10.1016/j.acap.2016.12.011

Acknowledging and identifying both ACEs is crucial in working with Black women and determining practical self-care practices. Understanding the depths of adverse community environments empowers social workers to be humble in listening to what Black women experience in their community and the world and how that affects their ability to care for themselves and others. Adverse community environments are a framework for Black women social workers to digger deeper into understanding the obstacles and oppressions their clients are experiencing.

Social Work and Self-Care

Historical Approaches to Self-care

The social work profession is grounded in six ethical core values that are the foundation of social work's unique purpose and perspective (*Code of Ethics: English*, n.d.). Social work's first ethical principle is service, which is to serve people in need and work to address social

problems, and elevate service to others above self-interest (*Code of Ethics: English*, n.d.). The second ethical principle is social justice, which states social workers should challenge social injustice and pursue social change, particularly on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups (*Code of Ethics: English*, n.d.). The last four ethical principles outlined by The National Association of Social Workers are dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence.

The Black Panther Party introduced 65 community survival programs between 1967-1982 that were developed and implemented in the Black community based on social welfare needs (*BLACK PANTHER PARTY COMMUNITY SURVIVAL PROGRAMS @ BPPALN.Org*, n.d.). Those community survival programs included GED classes, free breakfast program for children, WIC (Women, Infants, and Children), and others (*BLACK PANTHER PARTY COMMUNITY SURVIVAL PROGRAMS @ BPPALN.Org*, n.d.). The introduction and implementation of these programs highlight social work's first ethical principle of service. The Black Panther Party not only identified a need in their communities, but they served in their communities by implementing programs that addressed the needs of their communities and social problems. Black women were some of the most prominent leaders in the Black Panther Party, particularly in the institution of Community Survival Programs. Because of misogyny, it is not well known how instrumental Black women to organizing.

The Black Panther Party's Community Survival Programs were a clear example of community care. If a mother cannot feed herself and her children, how is she expected to care for her physical, mental, and emotional needs? Black women led many Community Survival Programs that the Black Panther Party is widely known for; some of these programs still exist

today, such as Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Legal Aid, free health clinics, free breakfast programs at schools, child development centers, and even drug and alcohol abuse programs.

Marginalized people have historically worked as a community to elevate the needs and stresses within their communities. For example, caring for children and elders is a community effort, community gardens to feed those in need of fresh fruits and vegetables in a food desert, the creation of community food pantries, and literacy programs organized by the community religious organization. Community care has always been a part of the self-care movement within the Black community, and Black women have often led the charge because their babies' lives depended on how they managed their care and the household. Under Frances Beal, the Third World Women's Alliance of 1970 organized educational programs and study groups and expanded beyond Students Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (Taylor, 1998). The educational programs and study groups empowered Black women through academics to advocate and organize their formal education and knowledge, which they gave back to their communities.

Historically social work has masked anti-oppressive, intersectional racism and anti-discriminatory practice under the multicultural and cultural competence code of ethics (Nayak, 2020). In 2021 the National Association of Social Workers added professional self-care to the code of ethics to address the exposure to trauma in the workplace and challenging work climates and expanded on the code of ethics around cultural competence (*National Association of Social Workers (NASW)*, n.d.). Although it was necessary to identify the ethical need for social workers to care for themselves, was it enough for Black women?

Policy and Practice Setting Approaches

Observing an agency's culture and environment is essential to consider how they prioritize social workers caring for themselves at work and outside of work. Wellness policies and practices aid in maintaining retention, which can protect against burnout and compassion fatigue in a profession with only 12 percent of Black women. In addition to compassion fatigue, personal and organizational factors cause a decrease in the retention of competent, dedicated, and passionate social workers. According to Zlotnik, DePanfilis, Daining, and Lane (2005), social workers experience negative personal factors, such as burnout, role overload, conflict, and stress, as well as negative organizational factors, such as low salaries, limited supervisory support, unreasonable workloads, fewer opportunities for advancement, and hostile organizational cultures. Several studies on compassion fatigue found that between 14 and 35 percent of participants experienced levels of burnout (Howell, 2012; Smith, 2015; Zlotnik, DePanfilis, Daining, & Lane, 2005), while 40 percent of social workers reported experiencing compassion fatigue (Adams, Boscarino, & Rigley, 2006). The data observed varied depending on the sample size.

The organizational policies and practices that are or are not implemented impact the wellness of social workers remaining at an organization. Social workers deserve to be in a place where their wellness and self-care needs are an organizational priority so they can show up as whole and healthy people for their work. Black social workers shoulder the same stressors as their peers and the added stressors of system racism and race-based trauma, all while trying to decide how they show up as unapologetic and authentic. The intersectionality of being a Black

woman and a social worker is why Black women have a greater need for self-care; they need radical self-care.

Radical Self-Care

Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare. -Audre Lorde *A Burst of Light*

For Black women, it is essential to be radical in their self-care. Radical self-care is a Black feminist ideology that denotes indispensable self-care acts rooted in self-determination, self-preservation, and self-restoration (Wyatt & Ampadu, 2022). Black feminist theory uses a racial consciousness that places Black women at the center of radical self-care interventions and practices.

To understand radical self-care, first, the understanding of what is radical should be explored. To be radical is to be ideological and to believe that total transformative change is imperative in reducing social problems (Wyatt & Ampadu, 2022). Black social workers understand social issues and systems of oppression two-fold in their personal and professional life. Black social workers need a self-care model that centers on the health and wellness of Black people; this becomes radical, given that they are a part of a society that threatens their well-being (Wyatt & Ampadu, 2022). Black women need radical self-care to breathe fully from the depths of their souls and release the tension they carry with them daily. They hold stress even when they do not recognize they are holding it. Black women deserve radical self-care.

Radical self-care practice is a vital response to racial battle fatigue (micro and macro aggressions) and the continuous fight for social justice, equity, inclusion, and freedom to live, breathe, walk, play, drive, and sleep freely. Political work is hard and taxing mentally, physically, and emotionally, but to continue activism and advocacy work, Black feminists like

Audre Lorde', Angela Davis, and bell hooks promoted self-care and actively made self-care a part of their activism.

Radical self-care is setting professional and personal boundaries, knowing that rest is resistance, as coined by Tricia Hersey, founder of the Nap Ministry. Radical self-care is not being silent but knowing how powerful your voice is and owning it, honoring your feelings in the now, and knowing how to use them for your good. A radical self-care approach allows Black women to disrupt the status quo and prioritize their healing and wellness by embracing practices that keep them physically and psychologically healthy and doing things that align with what matters to them. Radical self-care does not solely focus on the wellness of the Black woman for personal well-being but also considers their communal care needs.

If an individual's environment is not whole because of a lack of nutritious food, money, stable housing, access to health care, and a community of people who care for them, then maintaining their mental and physical wellness is last on the list. Radical self-care also recognizes that the individual and the community have a reciprocal relationship (Wyatt & Ampadu, 2022). This reciprocal relationship is embedded within the community and is affected by the events of that community and vice versa (Wyatt & Ampadu, 2022). Radical self-care includes communal care, as the community benefits when each person focuses on self and the community's wellness. Communal care opens the window to utilize power, privilege, and resources to lift the people within and outside the immediate scope of reach but reach all who can benefit.

Communal care is the foundation of togetherness and connection with others; by cultivating communal care, Black women are equipped with more resources to support their well-being and the well-being of their families. Engaging in communal care can take place on the

micro-level and macro-level. Micro-level communal care acts examples are offering a friend emotional support, offering to babysit, cooking a meal just because, reaching out to friends and family members who are seen as the strong ones, inviting a friend for a walk, buying a friend or loved one a cup of coffee, watch a movie with someone, send a card to someone, and the list can go on. Micro-level communal care involves close relationships with family, friends, or those in immediate surroundings. Micro-level communal care acts are on a more personal level. Macro-level communal care acts examples are voting in local, state, and national elections, protesting, donating, volunteering in the community or beyond, connecting others to resources, practicing anti-racism, and activism, attending community gatherings, attending rallies led by local organizers, and the list can go on. Macro-level communal care extends beyond your close connections and allows you to be open to supporting others, specifically those who are marginalized and experiencing systemic issues and oppression. Macro-level communal care acts are taking literal actions in your community.

Green Therapy

Green therapy is a radical self-care practice intervention for Black women through the act of cultivating, growing, and watering something outside of themselves that reminds them to care for themselves as much as they care for it. Green therapy is an act of radical self-care as it allows Black women to bring nature into their homes in a world that often denies them access to natural resources.

Green therapy is the term that will be utilized instead of ecotherapy as it encompasses formal and informal uses of utilizing green therapy for mental health well-being. Ecotherapy is the practice of nature therapy to boost mental health growth and healing, which can be called green therapy, horticulture therapy, or green care (Chaudhury & Banerjee, 2020). Ecotherapy

techniques are effective in the medical treatment of hypertension, obesity, post-surgical recovery, and psychosocial conditions like depression, stress reduction, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and adjustment disorders (Chaudhury & Banerjee, 2020).

Green therapy is a holistic practice of self-care in psychotherapy and outside psychotherapy as an individual wellness practice. Green therapy aids people in connecting with nature to assist in healing as a reconnection that seeks to evoke in humans that we are an integral part of ecosystems rather than separate from them (Chaudhury & Banerjee, 2020).

Green therapy as a self-care practice increased in 2020 due to COVID-19 shutting down the world. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, people spent \$8.5 billion more on gardening related items in 2020 than they did in 2019, which was an increase of 18.7% (SSSD, n.d.). The use of green therapy by Black women will be researched and analyzed using a qualitative discourse analysis of the social media platform Facebook.

Research Method

Discourse Analysis

Three research questions were explored using qualitative discourse analysis. In what ways do social workers conceptualize radical self-care? To what extent do Black women social workers practice radical self-care? How do Black women social workers engage their clients in radical self-care? Discourse analysis is a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts within some given qualitative data. Determining those concepts will help in understanding what discourse is currently present regarding the subject.

Facebook Groups

The social media platform Facebook was utilized to gather data via groups about Black women who care for houseplants as a form of green care. The initial search started with using the word plant, then limiting the search to just plant groups. After filtering the search to plant groups, it was essential to filter them by either public or private groups. The search was filtered to only public groups. During the search of the Facebook groups, several inclusion factors were considered; the first groups started during or after March 2020, second groups were only for Black women. After searching over 100 groups, with some of the groups duplicated in the search by Facebook, only one public group for Black women who engage in the care of houseplants was found. The name of the group Black Women Who Love Plants-Creative Group is a public group that is visible to anyone and created on August 14, 2020. This group has 185.4 thousand followers with an average of 90 plus posts a day and an average of 1,740 posts a month.

Research Terms

The research terms used to find a relationship between the care and upkeep of houseplants were self-care, anxiety, depression, and mental health. The search term self-care brought up posts such as #selfcaresunday or #selfcaresaturday, the purpose of these posts was to showcase the care of plants or pictures of new plant purchases. The search term anxiety brought up posts about anxiety with caring for a broken, browning, or yellowing plant, not necessarily coping with anxiety by having or caring for plants. The search terms mental health and depression yielded more results of individuals using the care of plants as a coping tool for their mental wellness and well-being.

The preliminary data showed the group supported Black women expressing their mental health needs and journey related to the care of plants. On World Mental Health Day, two of the

groups' moderators hosted a Keep Calm and Plant live session with the group to celebrate World Mental Health Day. The group has created polling questions asking if owning a plant benefits mental health. Individual Black women have shared their experiences and thoughts on how plants affect their mental well-being. In this space, Black women have shared how plants have helped them cope with the grief of a loved one as it relates to their mental wellness.

Intervention

"Trees and plants always look like the people they live with, somehow."

-Zora Neale Hurston

In addition to the analytical tool mentioned above, the author puts forth an intervention that considers the practice of radical self-care amongst Black women social workers. Utilizing the Black Feminist Praxis to develop a radical self-care workshop that focuses on green therapy as an intervention tool for social workers and their clients. The workshop will focus on understanding the practice of radical self-care and how to take ownership of it for themselves and incorporate it into their routine and work. The workshop will nurture an environment focused on wellness and intervention tools for self and clients.

Future Implications for Research and Social Work

Black women need private spaces to connect and feel safe is an act of radical self-care. There were limitations in the preliminary research due to the Facebook group being a public group that anyone a view, but to honor the sacred space of the women sharing their stories and coding it into data would have been a violation of their place of refuge. Future researchers should consider a focus group to collect empirical data from participants discussing how green therapy impacts their mental health and self-care.

Within the Black community, self-care has political and social justice roots; social work cannot continue to ignore the self-care needs of Black women because until Black trans women are free no one is free. Black women perseverance is dependent upon not just caring for themselves, but whole and well communal spaces.

The following are guiding research questions can be used to explore more into the radical self-care research agenda: How do social workers conceptualize radical self-care? To what extent do Black women social workers engage in radical self-care? How has the connection to nature impacted the mental health of Black women? How do Black women protect themselves in communal spaces?

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