42 Self-Care Is Crunk

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The Crunk Feminist Collective (CFC) has always been committed to an ethic of community accountability and care. To accommodate and negotiate our external caregiving practices, we concentrate on self-care as a preface to our activism. As women-of-color scholar-activists who are also mothers, professors, graduate students, homies, partners, caregivers, breadwinners, bloggers, and daughters, we understood early on that our shifting selves, over the years and in the midst of our various circumstances and social justice projects, would require that we emphasize and strategize self-care with the same fervor with which we care for others. We imagine crunk self-care to be an attitude, practice, and legacy of Black feminism that we must incorporate into our lives for survival and well-being. While our foremothers did not have access to the digital technology that we do, the lessons and warnings they issued—around doing too much, being too accessible, and prioritizing others above ourselves—inform how we choose to engage our work in the digital humanities.

As crunk feminists, we see Black feminist community-building, or creating what we want and need as a group, as one of the necessities of self-care. This means that in addition to our online presence, which has facilitated a feminist support network and helped usher in the Black feminist voices and representations of women of color that we now enjoy on the interwebs, we value our off-line relationships. We understand that technology gives us the opportunity to reach folk en masse, but for online communities to be sustainable—and this includes DH communities—they must be supported by offline relationships. Having an in-person support network is necessary when we need child care, emotional support, or someone to bring soup and tissues.

Crunk feminist self-care thus becomes a means of resisting and disrupting the individualism that causes much of the harm we experience in society. We care for ourselves by caring for each other. We reject the idea that we should do anything alone. Crunk feminist self-care resembles the way our mamas, aunties, and
grandmas collectively cooked meals, raised babies, and mourned losses. As graduate students, we collectively resisted classroom spaces that refused to acknowledge the contributions of Black feminist theorists by taking over portions of the class to say their names. As professionals, we prepare for job talks, interviews, and tenure reviews with a delicate balance of gossip and wine. We hold space for one another and prioritize our friendships. We hold Google Hangout strategy sessions to design game plans for figuring out difficult work situations. We send each other handwritten notes, celebrate each other’s success, and take trips together. As bloggers, we publicly show love and support for one another and our sisters and kinfolk, biological and chosen, because we understand the necessity of having each other’s backs and covering each other’s fronts. Our commitment to collectivism is as crunk as our feminism. We actively refuse to do anything alone, so we collectivize every part of our existence and find new applications for the communal self-care of our mothers.

We also recognize that self-care has limits. Asking women of color who often have limited financial, emotional, and spiritual resources to dig deep in the wells to care for self seems misguided and rooted in a neoliberal narrative about self-sufficient forms of individualism. The expectation that women of color who struggle due to their individual circumstances should “take care of themselves” without assistance is also contrary to the collaborative intentions of DH work and fails to account for intersectionality. We understand that sometimes we reach the limits of our individual capacity. This is why we believe in collectivity. Collectivity facilitates our ability to care for ourselves better by placing us in community with those who are mutually committed to sharing the load. Sometimes, we care for each other online by moderating the comment sections of especially contentious blog posts for each other. Other times, we start a text thread that simply says, #selfcareis, urging a response from each crunk feminist and adding suggestions if we feel that the self-care plan offered is insufficient. Occasionally, disengagement from digital space altogether is another form of care.

We also always prioritize people over product. This means that if we need to adjust the CFC blog schedule to accommodate life events, we do. In this way and others, we have created a structure that prioritizes care as a critical component of our notions of collectivity. But we recognize that we need to engage in an expanded cultural conversation. We must explore what structural care looks like in family-leave policies, habitable and hospitable workplace environments, and the creation of digital spaces that are not rife with harassment and discursive violence. We believe we can use technology to dream and create “care-fully” designed community networks where we might be able to live and thrive with long-term financial, personal, professional, spiritual, and sexual self-care. To broaden our understanding of how we best care for self and how we represent that care in digital spaces, our goal has been to recognize how our “whole self” feels: where she lives, what she does, and how she is loving.
Crunk feminist self-care is something that has to be demanded incessantly. Our feminist foremothers told us that the most difficult words for black women to say are “no” and “help.” So we have sent up prayers, written in our journals, and called on our sisterfriends, all in the name of finding the courage to say these two words. When we are finally able to part our lips to say no or to ask for help, we are not always prepared for the possibility that our self-care efforts will be rejected. When people we love get angry at our newfound “no’s” or when our pleas for “help” go unanswered, we are reminded that mastering these words does not only change us but also changes the nature of our relationships. To place limits on what we will no longer do, or to ask those people who rely on us to hold us up, strips away their image of us as superwomen. Like Audre Lorde, we see self-care as a necessary “act of political warfare.” Our crunkness inspires us to care for ourselves and each other first and foremost.