DREXEL UNIVERSITY
Center for
Science, Technology
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College of Arts and Sciences

# Marketing Self-Care: From Femtech and Biohacking to Painmoons and Extreme Travel

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Self-care today is a highly lucrative industry, and co-optation, appropriation, and neoliberal optimization undergird contemporary self-care discourse and its associated market. Trends here target the enhancement of an "ancient" or "sacred" femininity, and feminine self-care is further associated with the idea of refueling oneself to be of better service to others. However, in its contemporary, westernized, and white feminized form, this type of care may be about being more efficient, effective, and better at caring for other people, but not necessarily about directly caring for or standing in solidarity with underserved populations or marginalized communities. Instead, "care" for women in the Global South becomes linked with improving the world economy and international relations, while care for those in the Global North looks more like wealthy white women rolling out business ventures and pampering themselves (and their nuclear families).

In this lecture, I map out the history of competing self-care discourses and movements, juxtaposing today's "self-care moment" against its radical and abolitionist historical origins. One of the most paradoxical aspects of the contemporary iteration is that "community care" is promoted as *good for the self*—that is: doing social justice work (broadly construed) which emphasizes diversity, equity, inclusion, and even "intersectionality," is understood as *personally* beneficial, which is ultimately put forward as the most important reason to do it. After examining the historical roots of self-care and interrogating contemporary fads as they pertain to health and wellness, I show how today's market and industry are fully compatible with neoliberalism and the commodification of care, and argue that they are rooted in a white liberal feminist political economic vision. Eradicating the concept of "self-care" completely may be one imperative step toward a more revolutionary formulation, wherein the part about *care* is re-centered, while the part about *self* is de-centered.

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3401 Market St. Suite 110, IDEA Lab

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