

Self and Collective Care for Black Women - Workshop

NUS Women's Campaign have designed a workshop to enable black women in activist and organising spaces to gain greater understanding of self and collective care, its necessity, and methods of practice that pertain to them.

Introduction

NUS Women's Campaign is committed to celebrating and supporting the work of black women across our student movement. We are also aware, however, that the labour of these women routinely goes unrecognised or is erased, and this consequentially takes great toll on the wellbeing of these women. The Women's Campaign have created this new workshop as a resource for black women in activist and organising spaces. The outlined session is to be facilitated by and for black women students, and aims to enable students to:

- ☐ Understand the meanings of Self and Collective Care
- ☐ Understand why both practices are particularly necessary for black women
- ☐ Examine their current practices of Self and Collective Care
- ☐ Gain new methods of practicing Self and Collective Care
- ☐ Learn ways to apply these practices in their working environments

About the workshop

Length of workshop: 2 hours

Suggested capacity: 25 people

Workshop Agenda

1. Introductions (10 mins)
2. Confronting the Term & Words of Resistance: (30 mins)
3. Practicing Care (25 mins)
4. Collective Care (30 mins)
5. Our Capacities for Endurance (20 mins)
6. Reflection (5 mins)

Things you will need:

- A4 printouts of the five quotes from black women relating to self-care (at the end of this document)
- A3 paper and marker pens
- Post-it notes and pens

Workshop Outline

1. Introductions: (10 minutes)

- Introduce yourself and your pronouns
- Explain the aims of the workshop and read out the workshop agenda
- Ask everyone to introduce themselves, their pronouns, their current relationship to self-care, and a black woman they love.

2. Confronting the Term & Words of Resistance: (30 minutes)

- Ask the group - "What is "Self-Care?"
- Note the political nature of the term and its necessity to black women.
- Split everyone into 5 smaller groups.
- Ask each group to discuss and write down: their current definitions of self-care, misconceptions of the term, and any barriers they face when trying to take care of themselves. (*A3 Paper and marker pens*)
- Give each group a quote from inspirational black women relating to self-care. (attached)
- Ask the groups to discuss what they take from the quote. (*Facilitators are encouraged to emphasise that caring for ourselves is a long tradition amongst black women. You are also encouraged to use quotes you personally find powerful as well*)
- Whole group feedback: What were our definitions and misconceptions of self-care? Have our definitions changed hearing those of others and the words of celebrated black women?
- Ask for suggestions of: "Self-Care is..." "Self-Care isn't..."

3. Practicing Care: (25 minutes)

- Ask participants to write down 1 or 2 things they currently do for self-care. Emphasise that these can be anything! (*Post-it notes. Collect and stick to board at front of room*)
- Select some of the ideas contributed and read them out.
- Whole group discussion – "How do these practices help us? Are they all sustainable/healthy? If not, how might we make them so?"
- Note any similarities between shared practices and frequently suggested ideas.
- Ask the group what ideas they've gained and note those we might not initially consider as a potential practice. (*e.g. rising or sleeping early, turning off post/email notifications, reciting mantras, taking a walk, creative writing*)
- Explain: *Self-care is a practice! It involves listening to ourselves, thinking about what short and long-term actions we can take to maintain our wellbeing. Your needs will probably change and so we must continually be cultivating a practice that's best suited to us. Some things may become less helpful over time, so it's important to take the time to check in with yourself and review. "Progress isn't linear, it's cyclical."* - Fope Olaleye, NUS BSC. Note that we can take mantras from our friends, not just famous black women.

4. Collective Care: (30 minutes)

- Split everyone into 5 new smaller groups.
- Ask everyone to share with their group a time when a community or safe space has proven important to them at work or university.
- Discuss the necessity of community and safe spaces. Note how important it is to strengthen relationships with those who share our lived experiences.
- Discuss ways in which we can cultivate support networks and practice collective care. *For example: making group chats with other black women in organising spaces, noticing when someone is becoming isolated/quiet and checking in, amplifying/celebrating one another's work, meeting and making effort to talking about topics other than work, sharing grievances, offering each other advice for handling familiar situations.*
- Open floor - In these groups of 5, people are free and encouraged to talk about troubling experiences they're currently facing. The group listen and ask open questions, without judgement or interrogation. This is to give a brief example of the type of deeper

conversations we should feel able to talk about with other black women, a short opportunity for catharsis as well. This should be at least 10 minutes.

5. Our Capacities for Endurance: (20 minutes)

- Split into 5 new smaller groups
- Explain that as black women we are often expected to be selfless. Our productivity is valued (although often undervalued, or entirely uncredited) but not our wellbeing. We must therefore take caring for ourselves and fighting for the recognition we deserve into our own hands.
- Ask the groups: "Now understanding ways we can practice self and collective care - how might you bring these practices into your individual student activist or organising space?" (A3 Paper and marker pens)
- Ask the groups: "What might be practical ways to ensure your labour is recognised and valued within your organising space?" *For example: noticing and calling out behaviours or habits of your team that might be undermining your work, ask to be included in correspondences on projects you're working on, practice assertive phrases to use with staff, senior officers and team members, check your name is being attributed to your work etc.* (A3 Paper and marker pens)
- Note that it's important to recognise, as we're all aware, there will be times we are not listened to. In these cases, self-preservation is a priority. Preserving our health and wellbeing is the most important thing. We are more than our productivity.

6. Reflection: (5 mins)

- Re-join the entire group. It may be best to seat everyone in a circle.
- Going around the room, each participant shares the favourite part of the session, a practice they are going to try and maintain, and a way in which they are going to cultivate a community in their organising spaces.
For example: "I enjoyed considering song lyrics alongside academic text. I will try and have a more structured sleeping pattern. I am going to organise a date to meet up with some of the black women in my SU!" (5 mins)

*** Quotes from inspirational Black Women relating to Self and Collective Care:**

1. Audre Lorde, A Burst of Light (Essay Collection)

"Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare."

2. Lucille Clifton, Won't you celebrate with me (Poem)

"what i have shaped into / a kind of life? i had no model. / born in babylon / both nonwhite and woman / what did i see to be except myself? / i made it up / here on this bridge between / starshine and clay, / my one hand holding tight / my other hand; come celebrate / with me that everyday / something has tried to kill me / and has failed."

3. Solange - Weary (Song)

"I'm weary of the ways of the world / Be weary of the ways of the world / I'm weary of the ways of the world / I'm going look for my body yeah / I'll be back real soon / You going look for my body yeah / I'll be back real soon / I'm going look for my body yeah / I'll be back real soon / ... / Be leery bout your place in the world / You're feeling like you're chasing the world / You're leaving not a trace in the world / But you're facing the world / I'm going look for my glory yeah / I'll be back real soon / I'm going look for my glory yeah / I'll be back real soon / I'm going look for my glory yeah / I'll be back real soon / But you know that a king is only a man / With flesh and bones he bleeds just like you do / He said "where does that leave you" / And do you belong? I do I do"

4. Nina Simone - You've Got to Learn (Song) / I Put a Spell on You: The Autobiography of Nina Simone (Book)

"You have to learn to get up from the table when love is no longer being served." / "What kept me sane was knowing that things would change, and it was a question of keeping myself together until they did."

5. Angela Davis – (Yes Magazine Interview, 2016)

"I think our notions of what counts as radical have changed over time. Self-care and healing and attention to the body and the spiritual dimension—all of this is now a part of radical social justice struggles. That wasn't the case before. And I think now we're thinking deeply about the connection between interior life and what happens in the social world."

This workshop was designed by Sarah Lasoye, NEC 2nd Place Women's Campaign 2017-18.