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ABSTRACT

This article explores how profiled Norwegian and Swedish feminists utilise Instagram to perform self-care as a central part of their activism. In discussing how the platform's underlying premise of visibility is a driving force for their activity, in terms of the embodied resistance available for users appropriating the technology successfully, it points at how personal and collective well-being as a political incentive is intertwined with "doing diversity". Yet, activists are constantly negotiating their user practices in order to best stay true to their intersectional feminist conscience, attempting to care for themselves and their diverse Instagram sisterhood simultaneously. Building on observations and interviews with feminist opinion leaders whose followers exceed 12,000 each, the article's starting point is the notion of platform imaginaries, elucidating how platform users understand the technology at hand and how they organise their practices accordingly. The analysis identified three tactics employed by the informants in attempting to put diversity into practice on the Instagram platform: 1) Using their profile to promote the issues and images of marginalised users, 2) avoiding posting own material in order to make others more visible and 3) creating "feminist echo chambers" to protect themselves and their followers from harassment.

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

Lorde 1988, 130

Introduction

Audre Lorde's quote has been frequently shared in meme format (see e.g. Carrie A. Rentschler and Samantha C. Thrift 2015) on feminist, anti-racist and queer activists' social media accounts in the last few years, especially in the aftermath of the black lives matter (BLM) demonstrations in the summer of 2020. Although the politisation of well-being is nothing new, in attempting to distance themselves from neoliberal conceptions of self-care popularised by mainstream media (Inna Michaeli 2017), digital feminist networks have employed certain tactics to challenge misogyny and

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sexual harassment while simultaneously constructing close-knit activist communities based on support and empathy (see e.g. Rosemary Clark 2016; Kaitlynn Mendes, Jessica Ringrose and Jessalynn Keller 2019).

In Scandinavia, and Sweden specifically, the #metoo initiative saw several of its most profiled stories building on posts originating on the social networking platform Instagram. In its wake, however, discussions both within and outside digital feminist circles questioned the fact that the campaign predominantly represented the voices of white and cis-gendered women, who already had a platform on which to share their experiences with an audience.[1] Centring around first-person narratives and shared on personal social media accounts, #metoo and similar hashtag campaigns epitomise the second-wave slogan "the personal is political", pointing at how present-day feminism finds new expressions in the digital sphere. But *whose* personal stories that are—and should be—the most political, and which underlying structures determine the visibility of different users' stories on Instagram are questions that have been raised within feminist communities in recent years, particularly with regards to the Black Lives Matter campaigns quite literally taking over the Instagram platform in June 2020[2].

With these insights in mind, I seek to explore how the intertwining of self-care and diversity practices plays out on the social networking platform Instagram amongst profiled feminists in Sweden and Norway. I ask: Which tactics are employed by white feminist opinion leaders in order to perform diversity work and personal and collective self-care on Instagram? The inquiry builds on data material comprising a three-year long immersion into Scandinavian feminist communities on Instagram, undertaking non-participant observation and interviews with central activists with large audiences in their respective countries. Theoretically, in linking feminist self-care to diversity practices and discussing the tensions that arise in this vein, I first and foremost employ Sara Ahmed's 2012a; 2012b; 2017) notion of "diversity work". The concept is a central point of departure here, and functioned as a heuristic device during the analysis of the findings.

As I am interested in the strategic planning of this user group's actions on Instagram, the analytical framework for this study uses Karin Van Es and Thomas Poell's (2020) theorisation of platform imaginaries as a starting point, defined as "the ways in which social actors understand and organize their activities in relation to platform algorithms, interfaces, data infrastructures, moderation procedures, business models, user practices and audiences" (1). Through the analysis, three tactics employed by feminist opinion leaders in attempting to perform individual and collective self-care through Instagram emerged as especially dominant, and are considered guided by their platform imaginaries. Attention is particularly paid to how the #blacklivesmatter campaign, peaking after the shooting of George Floyd in June 2020, affected the posting patterns and considerations for the user group under analysis.

Deemed two of the most equal in the world, Norway and Sweden have been studied rigorously for their employment of "the Nordic model" for gender equality (Mari Teigen and Hege Skjeie 2017). Yet, there is still ground to be covered in terms of investigating contemporary feminist activism in Scandinavia. Furthermore, I seek to contribute to discussions around how social media platform perceptions inform content production and user practices, as well as shed light upon how allyship and intersectional considerations are put into practice in the digital sphere.

Self-care as feminist practice

Michel Foucault (1986; 1988) was an early advocate for linking self-care to the political subject, seeking connections between self-transformation and social transformation. His theory has however been critiqued due to its supposed inability to make room for collective—and gendered—resistance (see Margaret A McLaren 2004). That social media platforms are corporately owned also entails that user data is exploited for profit (see e.g. Frank Pasquale 2015), making these spaces far from neutral ground for self-care initiatives and social movements seeking change. These are aspects that must be taken into account by researchers studying self-care as feminist practice.

Drawing on Foucault, sociologist Inna Michaeli suggests that feminist activism can offer "deeply politicized and inter-generational practices of care, and feminist ways of conceiving self-care and collective care, building sustainable and transformative organizations and movements, and comprehending what being well means in situations of injustice" (2017, 50). This definition hence reaches beyond neoliberal conceptions of well-being as seen through popular media in recent years, and rather points to how self-care through a feminist lens is tied to fighting injustice: Feeling good through doing good for oneself and others. As Angela Davis declared in 2018: "Anyone who's interested in making change in the world, also has to learn how to take care of herself, himself, theirselves."[3]

Within a framework of intersectional feminist thinking, black feminist scholarship has been at the frontline of theorising political practices of care and compassion. Jennifer C. Nash (2013) has looked into the black feminist tradition of transforming love, interpreted here as a form of self-valuation, from the personal into a theory of justice. Referring to the second-wave activist scholars she investigates in her study, Nash states: "[L]ove acted as a *doing*, a call for a labor of the self, an appeal for transcending the self, a strategy for remaking the public sphere, a plea to unleash the radical imagination, and a critique of the state's blindness to the violence it inflicts and enables" (2013, 19).

In light of the racial justice social media campaigns of recent years, black sociologists and media studies scholars have enquired into how the performance of white allyship as collective self-care plays out on social media platforms. In studying digital allyship practices amongst white Twitter users during the early employment of the #blacklivesmatter hashtag, Meredith Clark refers to this as "white folks' work" (2018), finding that this entailed "strategic digital discursive practices designed to signal participation in antiracist work by educating other Whites and working toward the movement's shared goals" (524). Similarly, Melissa Brown, et al. (2017) enquiry into the use of the hashtag #sayhername, a campaign intended for highlighting Black women victims of violence, points at the formations of collective identities around intersectional social media activism. In their content analysis of over 400,000 tweets, they find that users taking part in the campaign engage in a dialogical "intersectional mobilisation", collectively bringing awareness to the multiple power relations affecting black women.

Diversity work

Feminist work on intersectionality has gained enormous traction in the last decade, and I will therefore not have space enough here to fully examine these strands in detail. In focusing on how intersectional values are the force behind the feminist praxis performed

on Instagram by Swedish and Norwegian feminist activists, I employ Sara Ahmed's notion of diversity work. Utilised by Ahmed first and foremost in her studies of the continuous affective labour undertaken by diversity practioners within higher education institutions, she points at how minority groups, already feeling "out of place", often are those who are given the jobs of transforming said institutions. She uses the term diversity work in two senses: "[T]he work we do when we are trying to transform institutions by opening them up to populations that have historically been excluded; and the work we do when we do not quite inhabit the norms of institutions" (2017, 331). The two strands, she contends, might meet in the same body. Ahmed argues that the main task of diversity work is to experience the encounter of resistance and thus countering that resistance: It is "a refusal to look away from what has already been looked over" (2012a, 183).

A growing scholarship is studying the employment of diversity practices amongst digital feminist communities. For instance, Fredrika Thelandersson (2014) has proposed that online-based activism can inhabit possibilities for community-building as it allows for feminists learning from each other about intersectionality and privilege. A similar conclusion is shared by Ealasaid Munro, whose examination of digital feminist groupings finds it is "characterized by its diversity of purpose" (2013, 22) and facilitates for transnational conversation opportunities that have previously been impossible. This, she argues, contributes to diversifying feminist communities and taking marginalised groups into account by reshaping activist terminologies.

Recent investigations of online-based feminist activism have also linked the challenges of diversity with the principle of visibility. For instance, in Alison Phipps' (2016) study of the role of experience in political campaigns, she underlines that some personal stories easier gain visibility and are hence framed as "more political" than others. Whose experiences these are, will never be arbitrary: Personal narratives are commodified and used as "investment capital" (2016, 304) by the already privileged in online forums, resulting in "selective empathies". Thus, marginalised groups may be "spoken for" in order to generate political gain for those who already are in advantaged positions. Similarly, Sarah Banet-Weiser's (2018) account of the "palatable" popular feminism embraced by mainstream media, such as certain framings of the #metoo movement, asserts that the most visible feminism online and offline is inevitably tied to contemporary capitalist logics that favour certain groups' experiences over others. These arguments are echoed by Rosemary Clark-Parsons (2019), whose case study of the #metoo hashtag points at the ways activists work for a "transformative politics of visibility" within digital platforms' socio-technical constraints. She argues that this type of hashtag feminism is "a type of contentious performance that enables activists to politicize the personal [. . .] by making it *visible*" (2).

Feminist platform imaginaries

With Instagram being a visually-focused platform, all posts uploaded have to include a picture, whereas written text is optional. Diversity work taking place on the platform is hence bound up with the aim of promoting a diverse group of users in terms of appearances. Planning how to best optimise for visibility on Instagram thus means imagining how your posts will be seen through the platform's technology (Jill Walker Rettberg 2014) for their envisioned audiences (Tama Leaver, Tim Highfield and Crystal Abidin 2020). Several studies have in recent years investigated how people's social

imaginaries (Charles Taylor 2004) are intertwined with their conceptualisations of the function of the digital platforms they use on a daily basis. These include investigations of how feminists have envisioned their audiences, focusing on e.g. the "activist imaginary" at play in the mediatisation of the Femen activists' topless protests (Camilla M Reestorff 2014) as well as the imaginaries of "digital sisterhoods" arguably guiding the social media use of London-based women's organisations (Aristea Fotopoulou 2014).

Anne Balsamo (2011) has suggested that behind the abundance of technological innovation lies the "technological imagination", enabling people to think with technology and transform visualisations into possibilities. In this vein, Taina Bucher (2017) has shown how users on Facebook relate to and visualise the way algorithms sort information through what she dubs "the algorithmic imaginary"—which ultimately also is part of altering the algorithm itself. Through the use of social media, then, users will inevitably encounter the "black box" (Pasquale 2015) of algorithmic systems; a vital factor in determining visibility on digital platforms.

Building on beforementioned Taylor (2004) and Bucher (2017), Van Es and Poell (2020) study Dutch public service media's use of digital platforms and how they attempt to adapt to the challenges of platformisation. They propose the notion of "platform imaginaries" to conceptualise how understandings of the functions of digital platforms guide the uses of them. This includes imagined audiences and their perceptions of the content, and the platform in question's treating of the content uploaded in terms of moderation and algorithmic sorting and visibility. These visualisations are central for the enactment of feminism and diversity work on Instagram, and I am hence adopting Van Es and Poell's approach for this study. As the intention here is to understand how accounts of diversity practices *as* self-care is accomplished—or attempted—through use of Instagram's affordances, I understand *feminist platform imaginaries* to be informing this user group's quest for merging the personal with the political. For feminist activists, then, central platform imaginaries involve envisioning how one's diverse sisterhood will perceive and react to your posts and how they will shape senses of feminist collectivity. Additionally, it includes determining how Instagram, commonly viewed as a kind of extension of the patriarchal systems as experienced in their offline lives, will treat the multimodal feminist messages constructed via their interfaces.

Data, methods and materials

In investigating self-care practices and how diversity is "done" (Sara Ahmed and Shirley Swan 2006) by the informants on Instagram, my methodological approach is inspired by feminist conversation analysis (CA) and ethnomethodology (e.g. Celia Kitzinger 2000; West Candace and Don H. Zimmermann 1987), concerned with the gendered enactment and production of the social order. As I am interested in how feminist activists actively are attempting to construct diversity through their posting—or *not* posting—practices, this field of analysis underscores how realities are produced by people's actions. Posts and interaction on Instagram are here then analysed mainly as action and ways of "doing" social life. On the Instagram platform, users' actions quite literally produce the social world, through "inviting" and "blocking" users from participating in conversations, as I will explicate in the following.

Through my non-participatory observations between September 2017 and September 2020, I identified and followed the personal profiles of Swedish and Norwegian feminist users with large followings whose posts and activity almost solely surround voicing and discussing feminist issues. The criteria for selection included that the profiles had more than 10,000 followers, that they were active on the platform and posted material at least several times weekly, and that they did not have a commercial outlook like more mainstream "influencers", whose Instagram use is mainly a means for making money through paid advertising (Leaver, Highfield, and Abidin 2020). This way, I was left with a relatively small sample, but it also meant that I was able to reach a unique user group of idealistic feminist activists with a significant reach both online and offline, who choose to devote many hours weekly—sometimes daily—to activism on Instagram. This group of feminists, then, likely differ significantly from those interviewed in studies where informants are chosen on the basis of their self-identifying as *being* feminists: The participants in this study has reached a following purely because of their constant *doing* of feminism (Rentschler and Thrift 2015) through Instagram, and consequently their followers depend on their persistent feminist work through perpetual postings "challeng-[ing] deep structures of inequities" (Banet-Weiser 2018, 11).

Four Norwegian feminists were interviewed face to face, and out of the three Swedish informants that agreed to participate, one requested an email interview and the two others were interviewed via Zoom. All of which have followers above 12,000 each, and their age ranged between 26 and 43 years-old. All informants identify as women, are white or white-passing and three of them refer to themselves as "body positivists" or "fat activists", entailing that they use pictures of their own bodies in their quest for the representation of more diverse body types on Instagram. The oral interviews lasted between 60 and 100 minutes, and were recorded and transcribed verbatim. All quotes have been translated to English and the informants given pseudonyms in order to protect their identities.

The interviews took place at the end of the observation period, from august 2020 until November 2020. This allowed for having participants elaborate on their postings through the three years I had followed them, giving me an opportunity to get their own accounts of their Instagram practices, and personalise questions accordingly. The analysis resulted in the identification of three different tactics employed by the participants, as presented and discussed in what follows. As well as interviews, the data material also included a review of Instagram's user policies; their Community Guidelines and Terms of Use. These shed light upon how the informants relate to and imagine the platform architecture, and also point to reasons for this particular user group's strained relationship with Instagram.

Tactic 1: providing visibility

Instagram states that its mission is "[t]o bring you closer to the people and things you love", and their Terms of Use utilises a care-heavy terminology: "We want to strengthen your relationships through shared experiences you actually care about. So we build systems that try to understand who and what you and others care about, and use that information to help you create, find, join, and share in experiences that matter to you" (Instagram 2022a). Despite this, the feminist activists interviewed and observed for this study expressed strong ambivalence about the platform as a space for politically framed

self-care, and all indicated how the Black Lives Matter movement had made them question Instagram's neutrality to a much larger extent than previous to the protests in the wake of George Floyd's death. Consequently, a more calculated use of the platform was obvious during and in the aftermath of the BLM blackout campaign, with many white Scandinavian feminists speculating around how platform moderation and shadowbanning[4] affected black users and feminists of colour more than themselves. This resulted in the largest feminist accounts realising the power of their reach, utilising their profile for sharing other users' material to a much larger degree than before.

One Swedish informant, Fiona, wrote in an Instagram post about the BLM riots in June 2020: "Yes, I'm using a selfie for attention, posting something ab [*sic*] the riots makes people keep scrolling". Questioned about this, she expressed her frustration over Instagram's "love for good looking selfies" that she believes easier generates visibility and likes, making "more important" written content disappear. Due to this, she—and several other informants—purposely illustrated her texts discussing racism and white privilege with a stereotypical Instagram selfie to optimise its reach. Another tactic utilised by profiled feminists in attempting to help shed light upon the experiences of others during BLM included lending their profile to black activists, entailing that the account in question would be operated entirely by someone whose opinions and images normally would not reach an audience of that calibre for a limited time period. Providing a space for others, less privileged in terms of social media reach, can hence be seen as a central principle of feminist diversity work on Instagram. As the Norwegian respondent, Sandra, put it when discussing the most important responsibility she holds as someone with a large platform: "In order to be a good feminist, you must back others and lift up others who 'do good'."

The majority of the most profiled Scandinavian feminists on the platform also claim to use their own bodies and stories to "embody diversity" (Sara Ahmed 2009). This includes highlighting visually and in writing what is traditionally seen as unfeminine and abject; the "corporeal reality" (Julia Kristeva 1982) of women's bodies and embodied experiences, normally excluded from the public sphere. The informants underlined how these postings were vital to both their popularity and to their own rigorous use of the platform, as they arguably contribute to the well-being of the Instagram sisterhood as a collective. Fiona said:

> I think my posts are as important to me as they are to others. By seeing people that look like yourself, you can find strength to work with yourself, to understand that you are worthy and that you are allowed to exist. Right now, I think Instagram is a good platform for feminism.

This was echoed by a Norwegian informant, Vera, who underlined how important Instagram use has been for her own self-acceptance. Questioned whether the use of the platform had improved her self-esteem, she stated:

> Yes, 100%. Because I get so much exposure of myself. And take so many pictures. See myself in all possible angles and somehow get used to seeing myself. [I've] stopped hating my own appearance. Because I look at myself all the time. So, yes. It's kind of the short version of it. But 100%.

Karin, a Norwegian identifying as a fat activist, shared a similar story of Instagram's significantly positive impact in her battle with eating disorders and self-hatred:

> [Because of my Instagram account] I have gone from hanging blankets over the mirrors and spending all my money on food that I could throw up, to . . . Maybe I'm not completely well, but at least I am well enough now. To have an alright life. Enough to feel comfortable and be content with what I see in the mirror. It's almost a shock to me now when someone thinks I am ugly. Because I think I look good.

Sharing can hence be seen as a way of self-caring, where seeing yourself through the technology, to follow Rettberg (2014), combined with the mere *knowledge of others seeing you* can be experienced as a form of self-care, both individual and collective. "Doing visibility" on Instagram thus entails imaginations of having your embodied self validated and confirmed as mattering through *taking up visual space* otherwise designated for more normative posts. In this vein, diversity work on the platform can be likened to *visibility work;* the ongoing everyday labour of testing out Instagram's functions in order to provide a digital soapbox for marginalised users, including for oneself.

Although some of these practices hint at parallels with the dominating strand of popular feminism Sarah Banet-Weiser and Laura Portwood-Stacer (2017, 884) refer to as "the individualist feminism of neoliberal consumer culture", contingent on being visible in popular media through slogans and merchandising and thus "lacking a subtext of self-care as political warfare" (884), it was clear that the informants were stringent in taking a stand against the neo-liberal aspect of selfcare. For instance, the one informant —Hanna—that would frequently use her account for advertising purposes, said she declined most offers due to not wanting to "push products" on her followers. Her sponsored posts were thus clearly marked and separate from her feminist postings, yet still "politically correct" and focusing on creative or environmentally-friendly initiatives and collaborations with non-profits. Moreover, only those with "non-normative" bodies would use selfies as a central part of their content, all going lengths in not posting "something that would make my followers feel bad in any way", as Karin put it. Placing the community first instead of their own economic and social capital, hence seeing self-care first and foremost as *collective care* in determining what to make visible on their profiles, thus differentiates these users' content from popular feminist accounts led by profit and fame.

This "contingent, embodied, ongoing interpretative work" (Kitzinger 2000), then, involves acting upon the awareness of their privileges as white women with a large audience of which to influence. Through an intersectional feminist lens, these actions add to what Meredith D Clark (2018) refers to as "white folks' work": Challenging the "selective empathies" (Phipps 2016) that previous to BLM had been allowed to define contemporary feminism online, especially prominent during the #metoo autumn of 2017.

Tactic 2: stepping back

The case of #metoo is interesting in this regard, and was mentioned by several of the informants as a movement they see differently in light of the #blacklivesmatter campaign. Some mentioned that they would be more cautious now to work for the inclusion of more voices in the sexual harassment debate, had a new hashtag in the vein of #metoo started trending. In hindsight, Vera refers to #metoo as a "white feminism thing":

> That's why it became a thing, because all the whites joined in. Everyone got engaged because this was something also concerning white, privileged women. And because of that, the media listened.

Learning from this, what Vera and many other Scandinavian feminist activists did during BLM was a digital "stepping back" in order to—allegedly—provide space for black people's stories instead of their own interpretations of the events. Sandra put it like this:

> During BLM, I "sat on the fence" and was occupied with watching, learning and educating myself. Reading up [on the subject]. And realising that there's a lot I haven't had enough understanding of, or haven't realised the seriousness of. So after that I have been more diligent by *regramming*, or posting in [Instagram] Stories. So, it's like, a time for everything. I feel it has been more important to promote others instead of sitting there, like, "I recognise my privileges, but . . . "

This "sitting on the fence", however, did not mean *not using* Instagram, but rather using it in a different way. Instead of posting a regular post with image and text that will be part of her account's feed when scrolling through her profile, Sandra, and others with her, rather focused on reposting the material of other—mainly black—activists, and utilising the Stories function, where content disappears after 24 hours, combined with following, reading and "liking" the posts on other accounts speaking on first-hand experiences with racism. Avoiding posting own material also meant they avoided the potential pitfall of saying something they could be "called out" for: With the opacity of social media algorithms (e.g. Bucher 2017; Pasquale 2015), rigorous users with some knowledge of how social media platforms operate, such as those included in the present analysis, know that there always might be someone seeing their every move on the platform. Hence, their personal practices are always performed—and perceived —as political, as every post, every like, every regram and meme sent from the profile of this user group are potentially visible to others, and are hence scrutinised and judged for whether or not it is definable as feminist actions. As an example, a Swedish feminist was in 2019 called out by several other feminists for clicking "like" on a post satirising over a fellow activist, resulting in the Instagram community splitting into two camps arguing over the matter.

Attentively managing and monitoring their Instagram persona for their imagined audiences (Leaver, Highfield, and Abidin 2020, 103) is inevitable for profiled feminist activists in order to avoid being "cancelled". And although stopping posting own material does not automatically mean others' voices are heard more clearly, the informants were seemingly guided by expectations of devoting their time and designated space of visibility to posting about BLM. In imagining how one's own actions were perceived and judged had they continued posting—thus acting—"as normal", it appeared as if they also saw themselves as designated jurors of how other profiled Instagram users chose to utilise their accounts for performing allyship. Sandra elaborated on this, after seeing other white Instagrammers attempting to centralise themselves in the racism debates, intentional or not. This had been an eye-opener for her, she said, realising that her supposedly internalised intersectional values were not as ingrained in her and her peers' Instagram practices as she previously had thought:

> It has been very interesting to see everyone posting about BLM, all the "non-melanin-rich", or white people. You can count the amounts of "I" or "me" in the caption. It was a shock for me then to see … To count all the times people write "I". But then you have in a way not understood that this is not about you, this is about someone else.

In the Instagram sphere, a central part of feminist work is learning by listening and looking at others', more marginalised voices' experiences, realising exactly what Sandra points at: It is not—always—about themselves. An imaginative stepping back from posting own material that predominantly surrounds own self-care, then, is, according to the interviewees, vital feminist work for the digital age post-BLM. But with social media's individualised architecture so embedded into user practices, online-based feminist activism has become intrinsically person-focused, and hence seen the personal and the political become, if possible, even more intertwined. When the focus is politics that *are not about oneself*, then, tensions ignite between the political and the personal. So when the two are two sides of the same coin, as the case is for Instagram-based feminist activism, doing right is practically impossible—even if this doing means "doing nothing". Karin articulated this issue the following way:

> With the body stuff, it's much easier. Because, like, here I am, I know what I'm talking about. While [being an ally] is a completely different role to take on. And you don't want to take someone else's place, and it's a bit like, you don't have the same knowledge since I have never experienced and will never experience it on my body.

The dilemma of speaking for—or help give voice to—others while simultaneously living your own feminist life (Ahmed 2017) through the use of the Instagram platform was voiced by all those I interviewed for the study. The reluctancy in going back to posting their typical, personal material was prominent in the summer of 2020, where the usually radical act of posting "non-normative" selfies and discussing issues rooted in own experiences had become an act of selfishness in light of George Floyd's murder. Vera explains this dilemma as such:

> [During the #blacklivesmatter markings] I did not post anything because … What can you post after that? […] Every day I think, like: "Hey, look at this big problem, but it's not my problem, so; look, here I am bathing!"

The quote further exemplifies how the responsibility experienced by white, Scandinavian feminists constantly are guided by their imagined audiences and how these might perceive their postings as "white feminist issues". However, this non-posting, too, compromised the well-being of some followers, seeing that their daily diet of feminist material had disappeared from their social media feeds: A few informants pointed at how being an ally in the racism debate, providing politicised care for non-white people with other experiences by avoiding posting their usual material, made them feel like they were letting down the followers that rely on their usual, everyday posts for guidance and, ultimately, performing self-care. In explaining how her followers had expressed feelings of lower self-confidence during the BLM campaigns, when many body and fat activists had stopped posting own content in their attempt to "make space" for the racism case, Vera told me how she was asked by a friend to please get back to posting her usual body positive material, as the friend in question had noticed how it had affected her negatively to *not* see them on an everyday basis. Vera said:

> I also notice[d] this myself, when other body positivists or activists stopped posting their bikini photos because, or out of respect for, the [BLM] case. I saw that my self-image just [*gestures with finger downwards*]. And I did not realise that I was so dependent on . . . But it's not *those people*, it's seeing fat bodies every day and that it becomes normal in everyday life.

This illustrates the complexities of intersectionality in the digital sphere, where doing right by some followers almost always means letting down others. Interestingly, the informants whose accounts are less personal and more focused on, for instance, creative expressions, who post less selfies and private details, were less weighed down by this dilemma, and felt less pressure to "do right" in this respect. This might point to that stakes are higher the more personal your account is: The more personal the account, the more is expected of you politically. It is also plausible to assume, then, that politicising the personal (Clark-Parsons 2019) is tied up with embodied self-expressions, which on Instagram first and foremost is tied up with the posting of selfies.

Tactic 3: feminist echo chambers as digital safe spaces

The Instagram Community Guidelines FAQ (Instagram 2022b) state: "We want Instagram to continue to be a safe place for inspiration and expression. Our Community Guidelines set out our policies for what we do and don't allow on Instagram in order to achieve this." Despite of this, all informants interviewed reported that they had felt harassed and received hateful, sexist and threatening comments weekly—sometimes daily, if they had recently been outspoken about specific feminist issues in the media. "Instagram doesn't care about women" is a common line posted by feminist activists on the platform, often accompanied by a screenshot of a message from Instagram declining to act upon reported sexual harassment in DMs, Instagram's personal mailbox, or showing material taken down due to being "offensive". Sandra had reported offensive DMs many times, but said it never seemed to have had any consequences for the person uttering them. The common automated message she received from Instagram was "This does not violate our Community Guidelines". She elaborated:

> The problem is the private messages, you know? They don't give a shit about those. [. . .] But sometimes, in the comment sections, [harassment] has sometimes been removed, and I feel like many of my followers report when they see . . . I don't [report these] because I think, like, "for God's sake, let them stay". To show the outside world what is happening.

These feelings of not being safeguarded by the platform have led profiled feminists to taking matter into their own hands, going to great lengths in taking responsibility for their followers' safety. Interestingly, the informants consistently talk about their profile pages as "here"; as if a space managed and facilitated by themselves where followers are allowed to exist, resist and share own experiences without the repercussions they might meet elsewhere in their everyday lives. Pointing back to Lorde's (1988) quote, it appears as though this user group regards their profiles as spaces of self-preservation; safe spaces where they are the gatekeepers looking after participants' wellness. Yet, as Sandra pointed to, although her followers also feel responsible for looking after each other and her through e.g. reporting offensive, sexist comments, informants simultaneously see the need for actually showcasing comments from outside their community, proving the need for the existence of such feminist safe spaces in the first place. Following Ealasaid Munro

(2013), the use of the term echo chamber is an example of how doing diversity on Instagram is also reshaping activist terminologies, as the term, usually awaking negative connotations, within feminist groupings is utilised as an expression for providing collective self-care.

All informants discussed the formations of echo chambers in one way or another, and seemed to acknowledge how these seemingly are a mix of algorithmic constructs and self-constructs. This, in turn, plays a vital part in producing the social realities for the actors involved, informing their senses of how, although they do their best in providing safety for their community, there is always an invisible puppeteer involved in everything taking place on the platform. A common conception seemed to be that although they wanted to avoid their online sphere being an echo chamber, their followers' safety—and not their own—led their decisions of whether or not to block, report and delete comments visible to their peers. Karin explained how she paid particular attention to the comment section in the days after she had been visible in mainstream media:

> They [*users posting offensive comments*] gather like flies then. I block some. But I do want to avoid [my profile] being an echo chamber. Everyone's opinions should be listened to. But when there is a debate about my body, I find it uncomfortable. I block them when they start harassing my followers.

Another self-care tactic employed by the informants if they had been in the media limelight and feeling overwhelmed by the amounts of—negative—messages coming their way, is to close off the messaging function and the comment section for a limited amount of time. This is usually followed by a post declaring they are "back" after some days, upon followers will write encouraging messages in the comment section, welcoming them back to the platform and their shared sphere.

One Swedish informant, Anna, was open about how she deliberately curated her own echo chamber on Instagram. As she was "on" the platform "literally, all the time", she said she wants her Instagram experience to be positive, describing the decision as a form of self-care:

> I want a nice, inspiring feed. [. . .] If I want a breadth of opinions, I use Twitter. There, I have two accounts, where one is for [following those with other political opinions]. On Instagram, I treat myself to having my own bubble.

The curation of such "bubbles", however, are debated amongst the feminist profiles. Some have expressed concern over how even other feminist opinions are censored on certain accounts, making little room for constructive discussions and the possible evolvement of a more diverse, hard-hitting feminist movement. This might again point to how the intertwining of personal and political creates dilemmas on Instagram, as a critique of someone's politics is often, especially if presented under a selfie of the activist in question, hard to distinguish from a personal attack of the profile owner.

The quest for creating a community around their profiles and providing care for their feminist Instagram sisterhood can however also mean compromising their own well-being. All informants told me about the ethical conflicts they are faced with daily, when attempting to avoid "letting down" followers who write to them asking for advice. The Swedish informant Marie had experienced first-hand how the imagined community-building she attempted to facilitate for had turned out to be a forced "Instagram detox"

for her, due to the negative consequences it had for her personally. She told me how she was normally reluctant to use hashtags, as she found them too "advertising-like", but that she had made up specific hashtags a handful of times in order to create a community around specific feminist issues. In that way, those with similar experiences could find each other easier, and she would share others' use of the hashtags on her profile to showcase the structural problems of the experiences. In the wake of #metoo, she created a hashtag referencing women's encounters with domestic violence, and had in advance told her followers she would share others' postings labelled with her hashtag. But after receiving 250–300 stories, often describing horrible abuse, Marie had to ask her followers to please stop sending, in order to look after her own wellness:

> I asked people to share, but I was not prepared for how much it would be and how awful [the stories were]. I then felt like I should have done it differently, or not at all. But at the same time, it was important. But it put too much anxiety over on me.

When reaching out a hand through the digital sphere, it is thus impossible to foresee and plan the personal consequences. Despite the anxiety it caused her personally, however, her conclusion was that, as it seemingly impacted some of her followers in a positive way, it was worth her enduring the anxiety as it benefited her followers—and hence the greater, feminist good:

> A month ago, one of the women who sent her story that time wrote me again, telling me she had left her husband. It was such a trip to hear that. Incredibly cool. So then it was maybe worth it after all.

Concluding remarks: Instagram feminist activism as self-indulgence or political warfare?

This article has explored how profiled Norwegian and Swedish feminist activists utilise Instagram to provide care for themselves and their diverse community, and how these tactics are guided by particular platform imaginaries. In summary, the findings display a complex picture, pinpointing the contradictions connected to Instagram as platform for intersectional feminist activism.

As I have shown, practicing care for others through Instagram means providing space; lifting experiences and facilitating for the visibility of those lacking the privilege of social media reach. Yet, it may seem as if individual self-care and collective self-care are not always compatible on Instagram, and the dilemma is partly bound, to point back to Audre Lorde's quote, to how intersectional thinking may relate self-care to either self-indulgence or political warfare, and how the line between the two oftentimes is blurry.

The three tactics identified by the analysis show how the #blacklivesmatter campaign functioned as a kind of white feminist "snap" (Ahmed 2017), a wake-up call making the activists in question confront their supposedly internalised intersectional analyses and rethink ways to utilise their own visibility to perform allyship as collective self-care. The embodied resistance available for users appropriating Instagram's technology successfully may however prove to be a "cruel optimism" (Lauren Berlant 2011) for feminist activists, as conflicts arise both between users, between users and the Instagram technology and within each user's moral compass regarding whether individual or collective visibility is

most important, and how this is best performed. The informants for this study can be said to inhabit a double role: Although seeing themselves as representing diversity through challenging patriarchal norms both outside and within the Instagram sphere, and thus arguably being targeted by both misogynistic "trolls" and the platform's content moderation efforts (see e.g. Ysabel Gerrard 2020, Sarah Myers-West 2018), their advantages as white, Scandinavian women with a large audience also mean that they occupy a privileged position as opinion leaders and personifications of contemporary feminism. Challenging one's own privilege and comfort thus means asking: How far am I willing step out of my own comfort zone in providing care for others in the name of intersectional feminism?

As Sara Ahmed argues, doing diversity work also means generating knowledge about the institutions of which the work takes place. As such, practicing diversity on Instagram requires knowledge about the technology at hand, imagining and, through trial and error, get an idea of how the platform systems provide possibilities for visibility. Performing self-care while simultaneously revolting against the (platform) system nevertheless means balancing a fine line, as the risk of challenging the platform's rules also means the possibility of losing access to the platform altogether. With *care* so subtly built into social media platforms' architecture—and Facebook recently launching a specific "like" button for caring—it is in platforms' interest that we show care, feminist or otherwise. Hence, even "counter-political" care performed on and through the Instagram platform runs errands for Facebook Inc. in the sense that it promotes *more use*, and consequently more financial gain for the platform in question.

Despite this, however, the findings also point to how Instagram can be a vital space for practicing self-care for the informants; a place of which to feel accepted, both by oneself and one's digital peers. Yet, to understand the full picture, future research should also pursue an inquiry into how non-white, non-cis Instagram activists experience the allyship of white feminists, as they are the ones who best can judge whether the diversity work of the latter group is perceived as performed—or as performative.

Notes

1. This has also been voiced by #metoo's original founder, Tarana Burke: https://time.com/5574163/tarana-burke-metoo-time-100-summit.
2. The hashtag #blackouttuesday was started by music industry insiders in an attempt to shed light upon racism. The initiative was however criticised for hiding other important posts on the topic, see e.g. https://www.vulture.com/2020/06/dont-use-black-lives-matter-on-blackout-tuesday-instagrams.html.
3. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q1cHoL4vaBs.
4. Shadowbanning implies that a user's content is completely or partly hidden from others, without the user in question being notified about this by the platform.

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