Sex tracking apps and sexual self-care

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Abstract
'To-Do List: Masturbate' reads one of the Instagram posts for the fashionable, new Lioness vibrator and tracking app. Lioness is just one of the most publicised of a spate of sex tracking apps principally aimed at women that have emerged over the past 5 years, which asks users to monitor their sexual interactions, and which also offers medical and holistic advice on how to improve one's sex life. This article focuses on how the value of this technology is articulated through the rhetoric of self-care that connects these apps to the increasingly culturally pervasive valorisation of sex as a form of work; and how its connections both to self-care and quantification demonstrate important developments in post- and neoliberal feminism where objectivity and distance become central to the formation to female sexual subjectivity.

Introduction

'To-Do List: Masturbate' reads an Instagram post for the Lioness vibrator and app (LionessHealth). It is one of the most successful of a number of sex tracking apps that have emerged over the past 5 years. Distinguished from fertility, sexually transmitted infections (STI) and period tracking apps, sex tracking apps are focused on recreational sexual pleasure, whether alone or with a partner, and ask users to monitor their sexual experiences; quantify their sensations; and complete daily activities to improve their capacities for pleasure and health. Sex tracking apps demonstrate the importance

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of sexuality to the well-established cultural and academic discourses surrounding the quantified self and raise many questions regarding, for example, the gamification of sexuality and the ways this technology offers new modes of relationality and ways of interacting with and understanding a sexual partner. Some of these apps, such as Sex Keeper, Sex Stamina Tester and Enigma Sex Tracker (n.d.), are aimed at men or have no explicit gender bias, monitoring aspects of sex such as number of thrusts and calories burned or, in the case of Enigma Sex Tracker, providing men with a 'tool that keeps track of how the woman's biological clock is running and gives you more sex, better sex and helps you to have a good relationship, even during periods when she is less sexually receptive'. However, this article grounds its analysis in the fact that the majority of sex tracking apps are aimed at women; this technology therefore poses vital questions regarding the relationship between body tracking technologies and developments in post- and neoliberal feminism. In particular, this article focuses on how the value of this technology for women is articulated through the prominent contemporary rhetoric of self-care. The way in which sex tracking apps utilise the concept of self-care is shown to connect them to the increasingly culturally pervasive valorisation of sex as a form of work. This article considers this neoliberal ideology of productivity in relation to both the medicalisation and quantification which takes place on these apps.

Part one

Sex tracking apps and sexual self-care

The now culturally pervasive concept of self-care has shifted significantly from its initial politicised meaning in the feminist and Black civil rights activism of the 1960s and its continuing radicalism in contemporary Black feminism (Caldera, 2020; Hickson et al., 2021; Kaltefleiter and Alexander, 2019; Michaeli, 2017; Nayak, 2020; Peipzna-Samarasinha, 2018; Scott, 2016, 2017). The industry and discourse of self-care has become essential to post- and neoliberal feminist articulations of female subjectivity. Now, it most prominently describes highly commodified and feminised ways that women should conceptualise and build a relationship with themselves, establishing ideals of optimisation, consumption and (aesthetic) labour (Elias et al., 2017: 3) at the heart of women's subjectivity and self-esteem. Within a context of wealth and Whiteness, self-care encompasses a very broad suite of psychological and physiological attitudes and behaviours that reflexively construct the female subject, blending daily behavioural regimen with lifelong commitments to self-reflection and psychological growth. Self-care practices range from attending therapy for serious psychological issues to daily acts of aesthetic maintenance like establishing 'a skin care routine' (Rearick, 2018), with beautifying activities often linked to good mental health. Women's online magazines and blogs proclaim: 'How Make-Up Became A Powerful Tool In My Mental-Health Journey' (Randhawa, 2018) and 'When Skin Care Is Also Self-Care, A you-time routine could add a glow to your mental health too' (Rearick, 2018). Gwyneth Paltrow's lifestyle company Goop, founded just over 10 years ago and culturally and economically central to self-care's contemporary, mainstream development, similarly blends significant personal growth and self-discovery with beauty rituals and consumption. The company's online

'Wellness' section combines articles, for example, on 'How Easy Beauty Rituals Can Change Your Life (and Your Skin)' and 'The Last Thing I Bought' with 'Antepartum Depression' and 'Tips and Advice for Recovering from Breast Surgery' (Wellness, n.d.). In the company's 2018 'Health Summit' – a 1-day event perhaps most publicised for its admission cost of over one thousand pounds – Paltrow asks celebrity guest Meg Ryan, 'How do you get through life? What's your road map through the day? What do you do to get centred?' Ryan describes her key practice as a 2-hour morning routine she calls 'The Turnout' – a reference to the practice of letting horses roam outside rather than confining them in stables – which involves a mindful engagement with otherwise ordinary morning activities:

> We'll take pictures of the crossword puzzle, the computer, the cup of coffee, the drawings [. . .] all the ways that you're in that part of your brain that imagines that part of your day and your life [. . .] This is your actual time to imagine [. . .] It's imagineering [. . .] We have lists, we have to go go go. This thing about letting there be this little window, even if it has to be 6:30 to 8:30, I do it every day now. (Meg Ryanon on her routines & MeToo Movement with Gwyneth Paltrow, 2018)

This daily 2-hour commitment demonstrates the way in which trivial daily activities are established as cumulatively building the meaning and value of a woman's entire life. Self-care is profoundly connected to ideas of 'being your best self' and 'living your best life' and the tacit promise of the industry is that the correct roster of self-care activities will produce the ultimate experience of female humanness: as worker, partner, parent and as existential being. Self-care, therefore, renders women's most profound meanings and purposes vulnerable to both commodification and an imperative of optimisation that embeds female subjectivity in ideals of discipline and self-improvement.

Ryan's 'Turnout' speaks too of the labour required to engage with self-care. Acts like drawing, imagining and drinking coffee become embedded in necessities of curation and effort that mean any aspect of a woman's life can be reformulated as a type of work. A woman's relationship with friends, children and partners; her enjoyment of any art form; walking; eating; travelling; any therapeutic or spiritual practice and so on, become freighted with requirements of overseeing, routinisation and enhancement. This constant curating and awareness constitutes a profound psychological effort, the prominence of mindfulness in self-care discourse demonstrating its valorisation of a strict, mental discipline that embeds self-care within the 'entrepreneurial subjectivity' (Scharff, 2016: 108) and 'psychological turn' (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020: 7) of neoliberal feminism. The physical activities focused on optimising appearance prized in self-care, such as plastic surgery, strict dieting and gruelling exercise regimes, are similarly labour-intensive and costly. Yet, any unpleasant and painful activity can be repackaged as a vital opportunity for self-care, with a failure to enthusiastically undertake them concomitantly indexing a lack of self-love. The pop culture streaming channel and online magazine SLICE is representative of this framing of any practice labelled as self-care as a gift to women, an article on celebrity self-care routines stating: 'Whether your name is in lights or appears only on a name tag [. . .] you deserve self-care. The art of taking care of yourself' (Palbom, 2019). In a common neoliberal construction, the labour and consumption

required of self-care practices are conceptualised positively as the necessary route to happiness and fulfilment. Self-care practices, infused with notions of productivity and externally verifiable optimisation, become understood as the vital basis on which a woman can build and experience a positive relationship with herself. The conceptualisation of self-care practices as the most important way in which women show their respect for themselves and engagement in their own lives, therefore, powerfully institutes labour and commodification into female subjectivity. Through self-care, a diffuse sense of (temporal) regulation, psychological discipline and improvement pervades women's subjectivity and their experience of all aspects of life.

Sex is a vital node in the self-care 'toolkit' (Schenck, n.d.), its associations with pleasure, love and intimacy making it ripe for self-care's rhetorical emphasis on self-love. Sexual fulfilment and a sexual identity that is carefully and regularly considered are also well-established elements of postfeminism and its emphasis on individualism, empowerment and confidence (Gill, 2007). One cannot therefore practice self-care properly without an attention to one's sexual desires, body and relationships, and self-care articles, blogs and self-help books invariably include an attention to women's sex lives. The Goop website, alongside its recommendations on diet, shopping, exercise and spirituality, features articles, for example, on: 'The Truth About Anal Sex'; 'The Elusive Orgasm – How Women Can Attain Consistent Orgasm' and 'What's Wrong with the Sex You're Having?' (Wellness, n.d.). Kourtney Kardashian's lifestyle company Poosh (n.d.) similarly establishes sex as central to self-care with article such as 'Is Good Sex Mainly Mental?' and 'Sexy Ways to Increase Pleasure in the Bedroom'. What can usefully be called *sexual self-care* therefore describes the ways in which the imperatives of consumption, optimisation, monitoring and psychological and physical disciplining central to the self-care ideology are interpolated in women's sexual subjectivity. A woman's upkeep of her sexual body; her capacity for pleasure; the identitarian and therapeutic consequences of her sexual encounters and relationships; the consumption of pornography, sex toys and particular clothes, food and cosmetics; and the nature of a woman's sexual thoughts and feelings, all become components of sexual self-care. Contemporary, heteronormative pornography has been analysed as a key cultural example of the growing valorisation of work as the basis of 'good' sex (Saunders, 2020). Sexual self-care sees work-related ideals of mental and bodily discipline and optimisation similarly foregrounded in recreational sexual experiences, positively framing these necessities as vital ways in which women demonstrate their love and care for themselves.

Sex tracking apps are central to this developing culture of sexual self-care. The apps analysed in this article are Coral (Coral, n.d.), Emjoy, Rosy, Lioness and Sex Keeper. The first three require users to monitor their sexual thoughts and bodily responses in less starkly numerical ways, completing guided daily activities such as diarising sexual thoughts and memories and listening to erotic stories to train the body and mind for an increased interest in sex and greater pleasure. The latter two are focused on quantifying sexual experiences and sensations through monitoring physiology responses such as pelvic floor movements and the number, frequency and speed of sexual interactions. Founded in 2013, the Lioness app works in conjunction with a vibrator containing biosensors in order to generate physiological data principally about pelvic floor contractions, which is then presented to the user in cosmically coloured line graphs and tables it

calls the 'Session Analysis'. Users are encouraged to reconceptualise their intimacy, desire and orgasms in numerical terms, parsing their sexual experiences into quantified data to be entered after 'sessions'. Through downloading the Emjoy and Coral apps and analysing the Rosy and Lioness websites and user reviews from both the websites and women's magazines, the rhetoric and affordances of these four apps are explored in relation to the ideology of sexual self-care.

Part two

'As long as you cross the finish line of pleasure, then you've come in first'

Key to the cultural significance of these apps is their utilisation of the rhetoric of sexual self-care in elucidating their objectives and intended effects on users. The Rosy app, founded in 2017 by Dr Lyndsey Harper (n.d.) proclaims: 'exercise, healthy eating, and meditation are common activities we can all find in our self-care toolboxes [. . .] Self-care is the ultimate demonstration of self-love. Your sensual self is essential to your wellbeing and deserves to be cared for too!' (Reba the Diva). The Emjoy app, created in 2018 by venture capitalist Andrea Oliver Garcia, similarly declares to first time users:

> Take a second to congratulate yourself: you reserved some time during the day just for you. That's what it's all about [. . .] feel how you deserve pleasure, you deserve the love and attention you are going to give to yourself. (Emjoy)

The app invites users on an 'Emjoy journey' that links sex to common self-care concepts of empowerment and self-reflection: users are asked to choose from guides, for example, on how to 'Boost Self-Esteem', 'Gain confidence in your sex life', 'Discover your body' and 'Discover Yourself'. These promises of greater sexual fulfilment and awareness justify the construction of sexual pleasures and relationships as a responsibility, with attendant requirements of discipline and curation. Emjoy continues,

> This [erotic] garden is your sexuality and you need to treat it accordingly. Plant a seed, water it regularly, take care of it [. . .] if you've got this far, there is at least one plant in your garden that has been neglected. Irregular care of this garden results in weeds growing in the place of flowers [. . .] this is a life-long commitment to yourself, to reach fulfilment and a deeper understanding of your own body, your wants, your needs. [. . .] don't forget you are the one who has to take care of it [. . .] 'good sex' [requires] accountability and [. . .] a self-care routine, build[ing] a healthy habit [of] daily pleasures [. . .] [and] make time for self-pleasure on a regular basis. (Emjoy)

Although couched in the gentle, holistic terms of the 'erotic garden' and 'self-pleasure', having 'good sex' becomes linked to scheduled effort and 'accountability'.

Through the app, the need for the routinised upkeep and regularity germane to self-care also becomes linked to the normative constancy of checking in with one's digital devices. One user of Sex Keeper (2021) gestures towards the expected extent of integration of sex and app use, bemoaning 'It's not convenient or realistic to try and track on your phone when trying to be in the moment'. These apps establish sexuality and

relationships as another area through which individuals can be connected to their devices, whether to complete a required training activity, record some information about a sexual sensation or analyse data visualisations about a sexual experience. Daily engagement with a sex tracking app indexes women's commitment to their sexual self, the constant upkeep and ambient awareness required of self-care becoming linked to an app's ability to instal the requisite habits and sense of accountability. Emjoy tells users, for example, in relation to particular 'Challenges', 'If you're serious, set a daily reminder'. An alarm clock goes off at particular times of the day, announcing: 'Reminder! Become body positive in 30 days'. The discipline and scheduling proffered by Emjoy therefore becomes the route to self-respect and psychosexual fulfilment; sexual subjectivity becomes established as something which is at its richest and most meaningful when it involves (digital) curation and effort. These apps therefore move away from unexamined pleasure and sexual intimacy for their own sake. Enjoyment of sex is not considered enough in itself to reflexively demonstrate to women their sexual fulfilment. In a review of the Coral app, lifestyle journalist Gabrielle Moss (2020) states: 'While for the past decade, my husband and I have remained satisfied and happy with our nothing-new-to-see-here sexcapades, I am aware that we rarely task ourselves with seeking out new, unique sexual experiences'. She laments the fact that she had not previously 'dedicate[d] significant thought to how I get turned on or how my sexuality worked. I felt good about dedicating intention and effort to thinking and learning about sex'. The effort of reflection and the sense of accountability that these apps demand and produce therefore becomes the sign of a woman's self-love, rather than, in Moss's words, sexual satisfaction or happiness themselves.

As Emjoy's language of routines, healthy habits and accountability suggest, sex tracking apps establish sex as a form of both psychological and physical work. Although ideas of self-acceptance, relaxation and spirituality are frequently deployed as a more gentle counterpoint to explicit demands to measure and improve, they become themselves necessities that require extensive psychological disciplining. Rosy counsels users, for example, to '[s]tay focused on the goal', not of orgasm but of relaxation as this is 'the key for pleasure and orgasm':

> You will be more likely to experience sensations as pleasurable if you can stay present and avoid distractions [. . .] There's no need to soak up all the tips and tricks to try to be the best of the best at sex. As long as you cross the finish line of pleasure, then you've come in first. (Litner)

Emjoy similarly instructs users to hone 'Sexfulness', a combination of 'mindfulness with masturbation to find a new height of bliss', with its various 'Challenges' ensuring users establish a 'routine to identify, question, and neutralize those damaging thoughts that hold you back from living as the very best version of yourself'. One challenge aimed at teaching users how to 'Arouse your Mind', for instance, requires 'ritual[s] of noticing' to 'identify triggers' of arousal through detecting and writing down every exciting sexual memory the user can recall, any scenes from TV shows that have ever turned them on and all significant sensory experiences from a single day. The apps, therefore, inculcate a significant psychological training that is mediated through regular engagement with

one's digital device. This training is linked to the construction of an optimal 'amount' of desire. Once sex has become embedded in a landscape of daily, digital routines, the promise of a maximum pleasure beckons. If users complete Emjoy's 'Challenges' to 'Boost your Turn-Ons in 30 days' or 'Increase your Daily Pleasures in 30 Days', '[y]our garden will [. . .] become a whole universe, a multiverse, a multiple orgasm sexverse' (Emjoy). Fulfilling sex, therefore, needs to be linked to effort and improvement; the fact that masturbation and sexual desire become embedded in expectations of practice and improvement become the sign that fulfilling sex is taking place.

This sense of a correct and healthy 'amount' of desire is strongly linked to the idea, prominent across all of the apps considered here, that using a sex tracking app is an important component of health. Deborah Lupton (2015) notes the parallels between sex tracking apps and other wearable, health tracking devices on the basis of their shared quantifying rationale, but sex tracking apps also construct a broader sense of healthiness that links app use to good mental health and an amorphous sense of 'sexual wellness' (Rosy Starts With You). A 2020 Cosmopolitan review of the best sex tracking apps states matter-of-factly that '[h]aving a healthy sex life can have a huge impact on your overall wellbeing, so it's worth putting time into looking after your sexual wellness, as well as all other aspects of your health' (Gulla, 2020). The Lioness (n.d.) app describes itself as 'Loved by Doctors and Sex Therapists' with reviewers often mentioning that the app was recommended by their therapist as a way of dealing with significant psychosexual problems. Rosy similarly describes itself as

> Designed by doctors and psychologists for the 43% of women who have sexual problems [. . .] the first-of-its-kind platform offering women a holistic approach to sexual health and wellness [. . .] connecting the 84 million women who have sexual problems to the experts and treatment they deserve. (Our Mission, n.d.; Sexual Wellness (Solutions) Women Deserve, n.d.)

Rosy blends advice on sex after cancer, childbirth and endometriosis with cheeky 'top ten'-type advice on sexual positions, erotic stories and vibrator reviews in a way that blends sexual pleasure and serious health issues. All aspects of female sexual experience are therefore reframed as potentially pathological. Problematic 'sexual functioning' and 'low libido' (About Rosy, n.d.) refer at once to the impact serious illnesses have on the ability and desire to have sex and to a necessary way in which all women should conceptualise and monitor their desire 'levels' and intensity. Rosy's assertion that its users 'showed improvement in not only sexual desire but also orgasm, lubrication and arousal', (Blog, n.d.) establish these measurable and medicalised ways of relating to the female sexual body as universal, constructing an urgent responsibility to ensure 'sexual wellness' through the app's proffered treatments. Illness, sexual trauma and child abuse are seen as obstacles to a maximum libido and 'sexualness' that users need to work to overcome, demonstrating the necessity of positive thinking Christina Scharff (2016) describes as central to neoliberal subjectivity (p. 113). Women's desire – its 'amount', frequency, quality – is constructed as a health problem, with Rosy offering 'treatment' for 'decreased sexual desire and other sexual problems' (Meet Rosy) and 'simple behavioral interventions' to ensure they 'regain their desire for sex' (Harper, n.d.) and 'becom[e] Cliterate' (Harper, n.d.). This construction of sex tracking apps as an important health technology

imbues other activities, such as learning '111 Kamasutra Positions', 'Keep[ing] notes and pictures of your sexual acts' (Sex Keeper, 2021) or painting pictures of one's vulva (Emjoy) with a quasi-medical significance, sex tracking apps depicted as offering a more official, scientific form of sexual self-care. These are, in Rosy's terms, 'Sexual Wellness (Solutions) Women Deserve' and, as with self-care more broadly, practices that are considered necessary or a gift to one's self are closely associated. What Lupton (2016) calls the 'ethical project of selfhood' (p. 47) at work in wearable health tracking technologies, here becomes linked to female sexual subjectivity. Just as wearables invoke an 'ideal citizen' who 'takes charge' of their health, in opposition to the 'inferior and morally deficient' citizen who 'lack[s] self responsibility' (Lupton, 2013: 397; Rottenberg, 2014: 420), so sex tracking apps inculcate a sexual ethics. The ideal female sexual citizen fosters sexually adventurous experiences that always involve looking for new and better positions and sensations; they harness their libido in the pursuit of bodily health; they overcome psychological and physical traumas that are impediments to healthy levels of desire. Concomitantly, insufficient pleasure, libido and effort are ethical problems that index a lack of self-love and a moral failure to engage in one's health and happiness. Through these apps, focus, effort and attitudinal striving become inculcated in female sexual subjectivity.

The framing of sex tracking apps as a vital health device also refigures recreational sex as an area of physical fitness and bodily discipline. Emjoy's guides to 'Find the Deep Orgasm', 'Get in the mood', 'Increase Libido', 'Climax Consistently', 'Learn New Techniques', 'G-Zone Exploration' and 'How to Showergasm' become labour-intensive physical imperatives focused on disciplining the sexual body. Sex Keeper similarly asks users to monitor the sexual body's appearance and sexual interactions through creating pornified visual records. Paul Du Gay's description of the late 20th century imperative to be 'always at it' (Du Gay, 1996: 193) takes on a new meaning in relation to this technology. Sex tracking apps have become a significant new component in the broader cultural valorisation of recreational sex as a type of hard work, as principally an effortful, physical activity to be used in conjunction with weight management and exercise routines. This linking of sexual fulfilment and a necessary, maximum sexualness to ideas of the improved and optimised body conjures to an ideal, able-bodied female subject. Where sickness, slowness or a lack of flexibility are presented as problems which require training to remedy, a fundamentally able-bodied and athletic sexuality is naturalised and celebrated. The idea of the perfectible sexual body demands further consideration in relation to 'compulsory able-bodiedness' (McRuer, 2006: 2). The quantifying aspect of apps like Sex Keeper also link these apps to self-care's broader emphasis on strict fitness regimes and diet control, and locate sex tracking apps on a continuum with the behavioural rationalisation of pornographic sex, where sex is literally work and where heteronormative pornography increasingly valorises sex that foregrounds efficiency and demonstrable physical effort (Saunders, 2020: 107; Schaschek, 2014: 60). Sex tracking apps become part of a broader cultural necessity of working and training the body to requisite levels of thinness and fitness. Sex Keeper (2021) uncritically blends fitness and sex, declaring: 'Spice up your sex life and keep your body in good shape. Just turn on the timer and start your activity'. Users are asked to 'Track your heartbeat during sex activity'; 'Check the calories that

you burned during the sex'; 'Count the duration of sex'; 'Track the number and quality of orgasms'; and 'Connect with Apple Health'. Users of the Lioness app similarly describe it as 'Like a gym membership for your vagina' and a 'fitbit for my vag' (Lioness Reviews, n.d.) and the company synonymises its quantification of the vulva with increased sexual gratification:

> This is your better, smarter orgasm. Lioness is the only vibrator in the world that can show you your own orgasms so you can learn how to make them better. Track Your Orgasms and Make Them Better. Consider approaching your orgasms like a Sex Scientist by keeping track of what you're trying, how it feels, and the data (read, orgasms) each experience produces [. . .] as the old saying goes, 'never measured, never improved!' :) (Lioness, n.d.)

The measurability of pleasure is asserted as the basis of sexual gratification, so that quantification becomes instituted as necessary for sexual fulfilment. The 'sexual datafication' (Saunders, 2020: 57) which takes place on these apps clearly establishes the female sexual body as a site of management and improvement, demonstrating the connection between the 'quantified self' (Lupton, 2016; Van Dijck 2014) and the construction of the neoliberal subject. The data visualisations produced on the Lioness app suggest the ability to identify optimal moments of 'sexualness', at once connected to ideas of maximum sexual fulfilment and of pleasure as a form of productivity. The numerical 'externalisation' (Ruckenstein, 2014: 69) of the self inserts individuals into the economised rationales of productivity and temporal regulation (Lupton, 2013: 396), using notions of individualism, agency and empowerment to produce a subject who willingly measures, monitors and manages themselves. Sex tracking apps typify the way in which these requirements of neoliberalism in the digital age become deeply inculcated in the individual, forging a subjectivity where the constant 'reflexive monitoring' (Lupton, 2014: 11) on which quantification relies is naturalised and willingly entered into and where numerical epistemologies and efficiencies of the self are valued by the individual. Where Catherine Rottenberg (2014) describes neoliberalism as 'a dominant political rationality that moves from the management of the state to the inner workings of the subject' (p. 420), the Lioness vibrator brings the requirements of the rationalised, datafied subject literally inside the woman's body as it refigures the vagina as a necessary site to be monitored and numericized. These apps establish another area of life where the neoliberal subject is produced, normalising numerical self-surveillance and regular self-evaluation.

Forging the sexual self through data locates recreational sex within the world of work, sexual datafication embedding pleasure and intimacy in the 'neoliberal rationality' (Rottenberg, 2014: 420) of monitored and quantified bodies and subjectivities. Analysing graphs and charts also instantiates in a new way the 'statistical skills and confident numeracy' (Hill and Kennedy, 2018, 831) required of the digital worker. Female sexual subjectivity is therefore interpolated into the ken of business management, sex tracking apps addressing and producing an entrepreneurial female sexual subjectivity. Promises of greater sexual pleasure also become blended with various forms of aesthetic labour. One blog post on the Rosy website called '5 Self-Care Rituals to Nourish Your Sensual Self' demonstrates how the idea of 'sensual self-care' merges with expectations of

physical upkeep – as well as the medicalised responsibility of monitoring the female body for signs of illness:

> Here are five rituals you can start incorporating into your self-care routine to help you tune into your sensual self [. . .] Looking and feeling good is all a part of sensual self-care [. . .] doing some 'ladyscaping' [. . .] buying a new razor or scheduling that overdue waxing [. . .] Examine yourself [for signs of infection or cancer] [. . .] How will you regularly stimulate your sexual self? Use a journal to capture these thoughts [. . .] self-care can't be a one-time endeavor [. . .] Creat[e] a sensual self-care routine of your own!' (Reba the Diva)

The holistic and positive language of sexual self-care paradoxically disavows unpleasant associations with work, depicting this technology as an antidote to work while it demands the strict curation of sexual thoughts and the datafication of sensations. Apps frequently reference tiredness and overwork as a cause of women's problematic lack of libido. Rosy (n.d.) features 'Confessions' from women with low libido, with reasons such as 'the cult of busy', 'stress' and 'fatigue'. Emjoy similarly asks: 'Do you feel uninspired? Tired? Need an extra kick of energy? Let's practice transforming our sexual energy into creative energy' by, for example, 'add[ing] "date night" to your to-do lists?' (Emjoy). Yet, this notion of properly utilising libido so that it can function as an intentional relaxation and restoration method as well as another area of life in which control and optimisation operate, locates sex within the landscape of work. The neoliberal feminist effectively uses sex as another way to effectively manage and parse out their time and energy. Where Sarah Banet-Weiser et al. (2020) explore 'affective capitalism' (p. 8) and Rosalind Gill and Akane Kanai (2018) describe the way 'feelings also constitute a vital part of a functioning capitalist framework' (p. 319), sex tracking apps constitute a new technological mode of harnessing sexual affect – as pleasure, love, trauma, intimacy or bodily sensations – to neoliberal imperatives of productivity. Notions of personal sexual development become expressed through labour-infused ideas of bodily discipline and psychological management and work becomes established as normatively central to an empowered and fulfilled female sexuality. In a post-feminist sleight of hand, this refiguring of sex as hard work becomes itself proof of sexual fulfilment.

Part three

Sexual subjectivity and objectivisation

The relevance of post- and neoliberal feminism to sex tracking apps derives not only from the ways they inculcate productivity into women's sexual lives. They also demonstrate, through their embeddedness both in the ideology of self-care and in (quantified) self-monitoring, a valorisation of objectivisation. Where Rosalind Gill (2007) defined postfeminism in part as 'the shift from objectification to subjectification', (p. 149) where women are disciplined for capitalism and heteropatriarchal society through the imperative to ostensibly become full subjects, sex tracking apps show how the objectification of women has become an important new element of contemporary female subjectivity. Elias and Gill have noted ways in which digital tracking technologies have intersected

with postfeminism, deepening its 'emphasis upon self-surveillance, self-monitoring and self-discipline' (Gill, 2017: 149). This takes place through 'ever more fine-grained, met-ricized and forensic scrutiny of the female body' that are also strategically 'construct[ed] as 'useful, pleasurable and "fun"' (Elias and Gill, 2018: 60, 63). Sex tracking demon-strates how, through datafication and in conjunction with self-care, objectivity becomes central to female subjectivity and ideas of female empowerment and fulfilment. Sexual datafication is established as a vital way in which women need to relate to, give attention to and cherish their sexual selves. Through the rhetoric of self-care, objectification through quantification becomes the most valuable way of experiencing and understand-ing sexual pleasure and interactions.

The quantification offered by apps such as Lioness and Sex Keeper demonstrate a stark objectivity, the transferal and reconceptualisation of sexual experiences and sensa-tions into numbers valorised precisely on the basis of the distance it affords. The value of having an objective view of one's sexual subjectivity is bound up with the reflexive self-control required in a neoliberal economy and culture. The relationship between objectiv-ity and self- management and improvement which renders quantification central to neoliberal subjectivisation is similarly central to self-care. Distance is a prerequisite in self-care for a detached appraisal, disciplining and possession of one's 'best self', the construction of routines and the surveying of one's body and mind a necessary and often itself quantified means of conceptualising the self as an object to enrich and perfect. Self-care's emphasis on meditation, mindfulness and spirituality also prizes the evacuation of ego and the inherent value of attaining distance from one's own consciousness. Just as governing through big data and algorithms (Ajana, 2013; Davies, 2014; Rouvroy and Stiegler, 2016) 'displaces [power] onto seemingly neutral systems or algorithms that govern at a distance' (Elias and Gill, 2018: 64), so these sex tracking apps' datafication and abstraction of the self through temporal management, routinisation, mindfulness and so on, ask women to view and constitute their sexual selves from the outside.

This distance is clearly valued in users' articulations of the utility of sexual datafica-tion. Objectivity through datafication becomes synonymous with sexual fulfilment, with data itself taking on a new, libidinal meaning. In establishing sexual datafication as an unproblematic means to greater sexual pleasure and knowledge, data visualisations and processes of datafication become understood as sources of sexual pleasure in themselves. One Lioness user describes the way datafication becomes integrated into sexual sensa-tions and arousal: 'while doing several mindful masturbation exercises [. . .] I also tracked one of my orgasms with the Lioness' (Lioness Reviews, n.d.). Another user ges-tures towards the excitement of the data itself: 'I am big on data, so I loved to see and track my orgasms. It makes me excited to have a 'session'. I am not just doing it to fall asleep anymore' (Lioness Reviews, n.d.). Here, engaging with the data generated by sexual pleasure becomes as or more important than the physical experience itself. Although user reviews demonstrate new modes of sexual feeling about numbers, users describing being turned on, freed from shame and so on, through seeing numerical pat-terns and being able to numerically visualise their sexual behaviour, the capacity to *not* feel is often clearly useful. Lioness users often describe the value of quantification on the basis of the depersonalisation it allows. One Lioness user states,

> Just having the data and seeing that my pleasure is like any other health metric has [. . .] got me through some shit I've been dealing with. My sexuality is not something to shut down about. I see it. I'm getting comfortable with myself. (Lioness Reviews, n.d.)

Another user explains,

> My therapist recommended this to me as a way to explore and get in touch with my sexuality. Seeing my orgasm as data has been refreshing. It helps me get out of my head and realize that sex is healthy and natural that all bodies do and is part of my health! (Lioness Reviews, sic)

Sex tracking apps encourage a depersonalised way of understanding and relating to one's sexuality. User reviews also suggest that the mediation of numbers provides a better way for partners to understand each other sexually. A reviewer of the Lioness app for Glamor magazine states, for example, that

> Hearing my partner point to a chart and say, 'Is that your orgasm?' broke down a barrier for us. The fact that it was charted out made it more accessible and allowed for a clinical distance, like looking at a math problem rather than analyzing something so deeply personal. (Weiss, 2017)

It is precisely the objectivity of the data visualisations, the fact that it is numerical rather than personal, that is understood to produce a better basis for sexual communication. What Hill and Kennedy describe as the way 'the rhetoric of quantification [. . .] [p] rivileg[es] the rational over the emotional' (Hill and Kennedy, 2018: 845) is prized on these apps as a new, controlled and unemotional way of conceptualising sex. Sexual feelings and experiences become something that requires numerical rationalisation *especially* because of its intimacy, contingency and emotional 'messiness'. Processes of quantification, data visualisation, the creation of averages and so on insert numerous removes between the embodied female subject and the 'dividual' (Deleuze, 1992: 5). Sex tracking apps offer a move away from subjective, affectively intense ways of understanding sex. Where quantification constitutes a 'technology of distance' (Porter, 1995: ix) and self-care insists on a detached appraisal of the self, their combination in sex tracking apps sees this technology celebrate a sexual subjectivity defined by detachment and precisely *not feeling*. Just as Jill Walker Rettberg (2014) describes how '[t]he data gathered about us by our devices becomes an artifact that is separate from us and can be viewed at a distance' (p. 68), so sex tracking apps partly ask women to conceptualise their sexual identity, body and relationships as apart from them, as numerical and decontextualised. An objective view of the sexual self becomes central to the post-feminist subject produced through these apps.

This valorisation of objectivity derives in part from the history of female sexuality and the female body. The way in which tracking technologies 'direct the gaze directly at the body' (Lupton, 2013: 396) and proffer, as Kate Crawford et al. (2015) states, 'numerical accuracy, truth and self-knowledge' (p. 489) gains an especial potency in relation to the female sexual body, historically freighted with notions of dangerous unknowability and hiddenness (Jordanova, 2013: 21; Spurgas, 2020; Williams, 1989: 4). Where apps like Lioness offer ways of observing 'hidden' and measurable bodily phenomena like the

velocity of pulsing muscles, this technology lies on a continuum with medical, judicial and religious imperatives to uncover and 'know' the female body. What Lupton calls '[t]he lure of the 'numbers' ' in biometric self-tracking, where the 'body/self' is 'both subject and product of 'scientific' measurement and interpretation', (Lupton, 2013: 399) therefore holds a particular significance in relation to the female sexual body. Concomitantly, patriarchal epistemologies of female bodies of which datafication is a recent example have a deeply ingrained status as superior and essential. Users articulate the value of datafication in terms of superior epistemologies of the sexual self. One Lioness user states, for instance, 'The Lioness has given me more confidence in my sexuality and my orgasms. During sex and during masturbation I have always doubted if what I was feeling was an orgasm or not' (Lioness). But the ability to 'see the orgasm', one of the company's key taglines, becomes the basis of a new certainty for women that a pleasurable feeling is definitely an orgasm. Another user states of reading their partner's data,

> The data nerd in me loves being able to track and visualize all the good feels [. . .] I also now really know what her orgasm feels like. She showed me where it was on a graph [. . .] like looking at a strava run route but it's your girlfriend's orgasms. I know exactly what to look for now. (Lioness)

The data visualisation is presented here as offering a truer, more definitive insight into a woman's sexual pleasure than could be learned through verbal communication and socio-sexual interaction. Sex tracking apps, imbued with the factual associations of the quasi-medical, proffer abstracted and numerical conceptualisations of the sexual self as generative of the most significant self-knowledge; datafied objectivity is understood as producing a better and more meaningful understanding of female pleasure than can be achieved through women's embodied, subjective ways of understanding and communicating their own sexual desires. In its epitomisation of naturalness and wildness, the female sexual body is particularly vulnerable to the valorised objectivity of data and the imperative to make the body visible, knowable and controllable through the 'sexual science' (Lioness) of datafication. That sex tracking apps offer women the chance to brandish this tool of self-knowledge themselves becomes an important basis of empowerment: intelligent, affluent women committed to sexual self-care can master these datafication processes and visualisations and possess a superior knowledge of their sexuality. Objectivity therefore becomes a vital new tenet of post- and neoliberal feminist sexual subjectivity, cast as the basis of maximal sexual gratification, definitive self-knowledge and sexual self-care.

However, the reassuring certainty proffered by these sex tracking apps arguably constructs a reductive female sexual subjectivity, sexual datafication potentially evacuating complexity and subtlety from sexual experiences and identities. Melissa Gregg (2015) describes productivity apps as 'facilitat[ing] [. . .] the pleasure of control' through 'offer[ing] strategies for closure and containment', and Jill Walker Rettberg (2014) similarly states that the self-representation offered by self-tracking's tools 'present images of us [. . .] that are both very accurate and very narrow' (p. 62; Mau, 2019, 13). Sex tracking apps' reassuring promise of objectivity is always simultaneously a

'containment'. The objectivisation of sexuality offers the enticing possibility of control over the ambiguity, complexity and unpredictability of sexual interactions and feelings. Numerical objectivity proffers a safely simplified sexual self. Users repeatedly articulate the seductiveness of being able to capture a sexual experience or the nature of their sexual self in its entirety, often echoing Lioness' emphasis on the ability to see and possess your orgasm, with references to being able to 'hold my orgasm in my hand' (Lioness Reviews, n.d.). Where Arlie Hochschild states in a 2017 interview that '[a]s we analyze neoliberalism, we need to add questions about the changing feeling rules around us and the selves we are asked to "hold"' (Gill and Kanai 2018: 324), sex tracking apps demonstrate the new significance of (numerical) objectivity to female sexual subjectivity. The sexual subjectivity constructed by sex tracking apps is one that is quantifiable and simple, that can be held away from the subject and held easily within the border of one's phone, to be known immediately and unproblematically. Through the intertwined ideologies of sexual self-care and datafication, these apps offer the tantalising possibility of uncomplicated and finite self-possession. Sex tracking apps are therefore an important new technology (of self) in which developments in post- and neoliberal feminism in relation to sexuality can be read. The evolution of these dominant modes of female subjectivisation through the culture of biometric tracking is shown here to both infuse female sexual subjectivity with work and to establish sexual datafication as an essential new basis of sexual self-care. Through the intertwined ideologies of self-care and quantification, sex tracking apps also inculcate objectivity and distance into female sexual subjectivity, so that a controlled and numerical unemotionality become the contemporary proofs of female sexual fulfilment, self-knowledge and self-love.

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