

HOW CONSUMERS ARE FOCUSING ON SELF-CARE IN COVID-TIMES

Syren | discover.ai



Syren & Discover.ai have pooled their resources to bring you this latest multi-methodology thoughtpiece on self-care.

Discover.ai

A deep-dive into online sources to discover rich human stories and cultural insights using AI technology to accelerate human expertise.

Syren

A best in qualitative insight team connecting directly with consumers and digging for insights in our online community.

We have chosen to pool the best of presight + insight + cultural foresight resources. We began the process with a hypothesis-driven brainstorm, then used the Discover.ai platform to validate the territories, both visually and verbally. Finally, we stress tested the platforms with consumers in Syren's online community, with respondents drawn from the UK, US & Far East.

The results were rich and could have populated a much longer report, but we've triangulated our sources + distilled our findings to identify those shifts that will be important for clients to re-engineer their businesses around, as well as identifying the green shoots of more emergent territories to keep a watchful eye on in the near future...

We hope you enjoy reading!

A key shift has been from an outer to an inner world

Some of this was due to enforced simplicity and a need to stay at home (in some markets).

For many, this focus on interior lives rather than exterior lives – whether that was getting all glammed up or worrying about the next swipe-up must-have on Instagram – has given people the ability to breathe again and recalibrate what's truly important.

This has all added up to a key shift away from the need to look after oneself for external validation...



And this has led to consumers prioritising mental fitness over physical perfection

Many people have turned to exercise as a way to look after their minds as well as their bodies.

With the shift away from external validation, the benefit of exercise – in whatever form that takes – has been the mental over the physical – with the positive effects snowballing throughout the day.

Exercise is a way in which people can keep a sense of control over their lives in these uncertain times.

Self care now occupies a much narrower space, with this focus primarily on inner and mental benefits.



1.

Mindset as Project

The first theme clusters together different mindsets people have adopted to how they look after themselves during Covid.



Gently Joyful

Life is measured out in the smaller joyful breaths rather than the big moments

----- Gentle & lighthearted -----



Giving Fewer F***s

Covid has freed people up to say what they really think, and be who they truly are: it has prescribed a healthy dose of what truly matters.

----- Confident & Rebellious -----



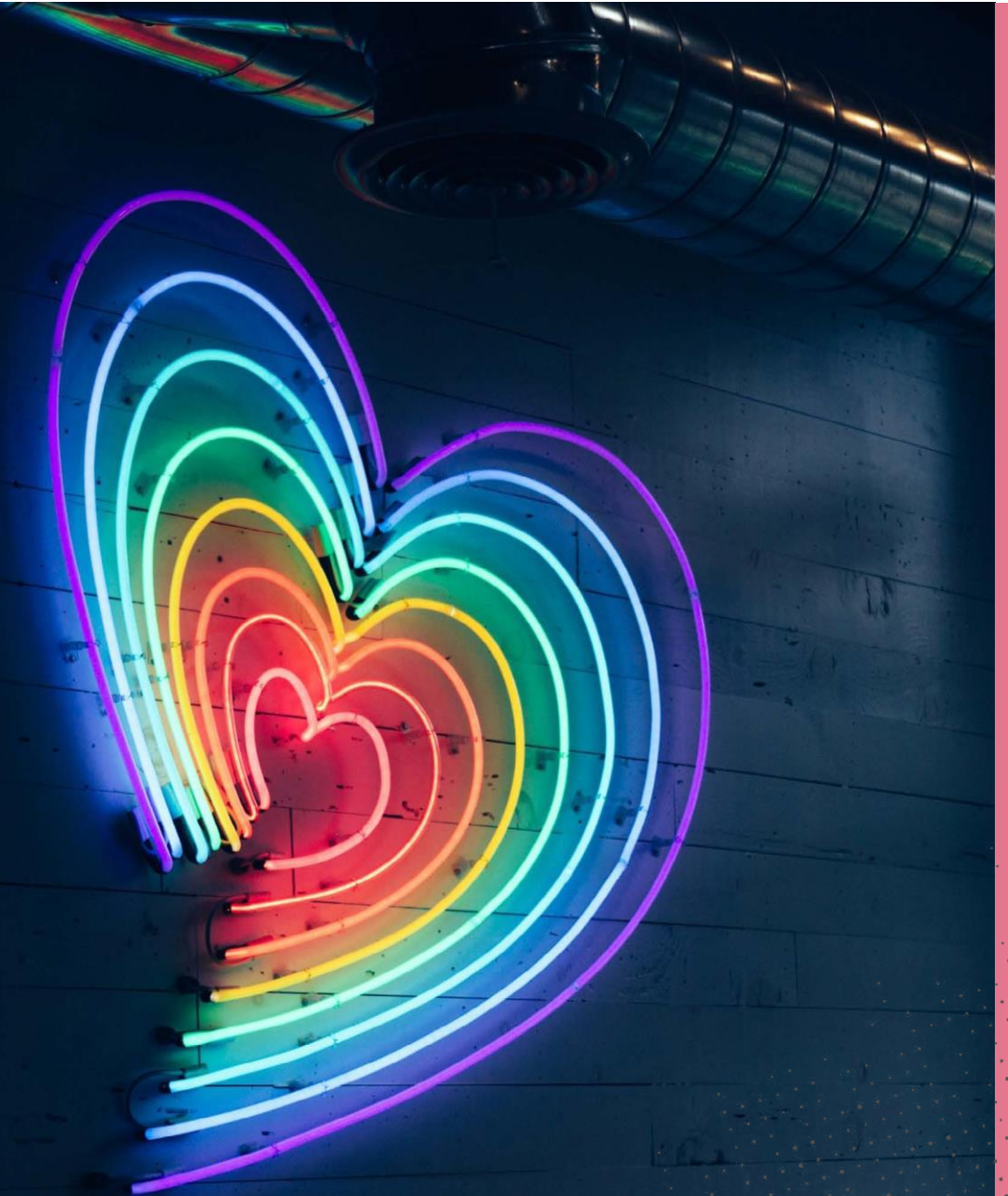
Love Thyself

Living your life with confidence and individuality, and feeling free in the skin you're in.

----- Celebratory & Free -----

Gently Joyful

Lockdown has made us realise that life is measured out in the smaller joyful breaths rather than the big moments.



Gently Joyful: More Detail

Key Themes

- Lockdown has made us realise that life is measured out in the smaller joyful breaths rather than the big moments: the little things that make you catch your breath and stop – not the big instagrammable moments
- There's a gentle energy that we can draw from this theme – the positivity that can be harnessed from taking a pause out of our busy lives.
- Importantly, there is also a strand of humour to this theme as well- not taking life too seriously and actively seeking the fun in difficult times!
- Don't Sweat the Small Stuff
- Seize the Day / appreciating the here & now
- Ripples of gentle energy

Values & Traits

- Gentleness
- Tactility
- Spirituality
- Freedom
- Light-heartedness
- Positivity & Optimism
- A touch of silliness



“

I use effective products that keep my skin looking hydrated and happy”

The Cut



“

The make up category has scope to target on-point make up looks that work with protective face masks or enabled consumers to achieve a 'stay home professional' look. There's also an opportunity to encourage self-care by delivering indulgent experiences that relax and reconnect consumers to themselves in a stressful and anxiety-filled period”

Cosmetics Design Europe

Gently Joyful: Visual / Verbal World

“

Light Relief-I like the saying “don’t sweat the small stuff” which has seemed odd in these times as everything seems so massive and important but I’ve really tried to keep check on my mood by lightening the mood in friendship groups and online chats when things are becoming too negative or worrying. It helps me to look on the bright side of life and remember the good out there for example I’ve focused on local charities and good news stories following their efforts.”

Female, UK



#HelloToKindness
CLICK TO JOIN OUR MOVEMENT



“

When This Is Over, I plan to live life to the fullest. I’m a victim of saying “I’ll do it tomorrow” or “I’ll go next time.” No more. I plan to seize the day and live the life I wanted. Take the trips I wanted even if I run up my credit card. Go to the gym and eat better because I know it’s better for me in the long run. Go out on a work night (which I NEVER did). Spend more time with family and those I love. Continue to read and take care of my apartment. Make more time for ME. It’s important that I focus on me because I’m all I’ve got.”

Female, US

“

As a key lesson from Covid, I realize the basis of life is far more important than the accumulation of fancy stuff on top of it. Stay well informed, think critically, be kind, stay alert, be helpful, and always enjoy life at present. I have many friends who did very well in their career and are very successful in many aspects. But these achievements are made on the sacrifice of intimacy with love ones.”

Female, China



Small things that brighten your day



Giving Fewer F***s!

Covid has freed people up to say what they really think, and be who they truly are: it has prescribed a healthy dose of what truly matters.



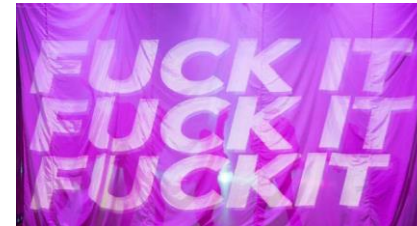
Giving Fewer F***s!: More Detail

Key Themes

- Relishing Transgression
- Accepting I am not going to fit in
- Shunning the epitome of beauty
- Non-binary approach to life in broadest sense of term
- Refusing to be slotted into boxes, pronouns, genders etc
- Forging a connection between beauty & magic/supernatural/energy
- Strip away the sass
- A healthy dose of perspective on what truly matters

Values & Traits

- Individuality
- Creativity
- Rebellion
- Spirituality
- Hedonism
- Creativity / Play / Ludic
- Freedom / Liberation
- Beauty & Glamour- but by my rules not someone else's version



“

It's almost as if the part of me that cared what people thought has been shut off, locked away – we're all experiencing something that's new so who's to say how we should react. I used to care so much about what people thought, but... why? This experience has taught me that nothing really matters. Everything I've been waiting on and planning for has been shot to hell”

Female, USA

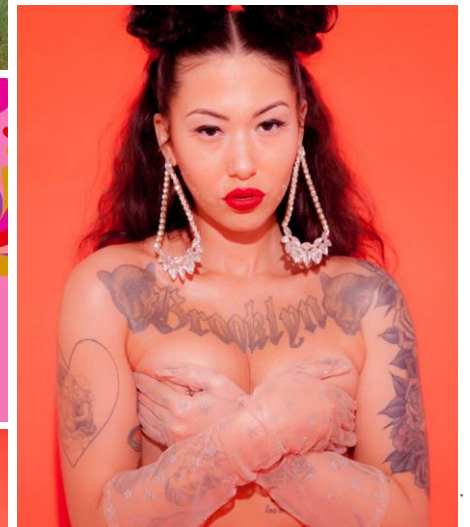
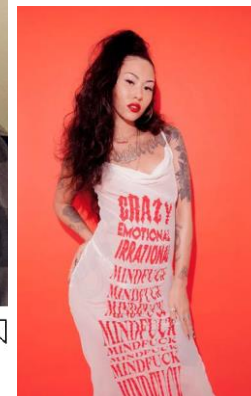
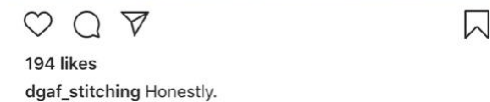
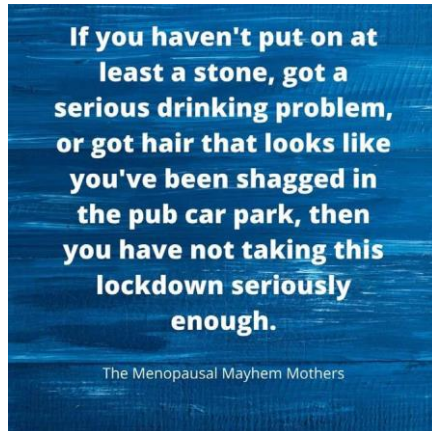
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What I never understood was, why can't I do things as I'm compelled to do them? If that is my most authentic self, and I'm being honest and I'm being truthful and there's love behind my actions? Why do I gotta dress myself up as like some other person?”

Salty World



Giving Fewer F***s!: Visual / Verbal World



Love Thyself

Living your life with confidence and individuality, and feeling free in the skin you're in.



Love Thyself: More Detail

Key Themes

- Cherishing the skin I am in
- Pleasure in comfort
- Doing things that make you feel good: dancing, fresh air, reading, masturbation
- Feeling good in your heart and belly
- Happy Fat / Love My Rolls
(but NB this isn't all about larger women nor is it a solely female area)
- Refusing not to “take up space”
- Taking pleasure in comfort eating

Values & Traits

- Inner Confidence
- Individuality
- Authenticity
- Rebellion
- Freedom / Liberation
- Camaraderie & community
- Fun & celebration
- Abundance
- Care and kindness



“

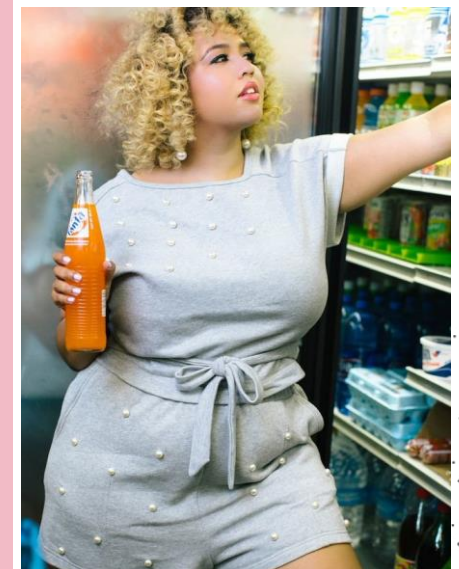
Jay is a total babe. But it's undeniable that her beauty does not fit in within the eurocentric, fatphobic societal norms. Nevertheless, that has never hindered Jay from being a self-described “flirtatious ass person” and owning any room she walks into — and why should it?”

Salty World

“

How do you KNOW you're loveable, acceptable, likeable?? Because you dare to love, accept and like yourself. Everyone else's feelings are just an affirmation of that truth, not a dictator of it”

Source



Love Thyself: Visual / Verbal World

“

Every woman I know would say ‘oh I’d like to loose half a stone’ or ‘drop a dress size’ and I’m among them, but actually through this I’ve learnt what really matters and if I want the chocolate bar then I won’t deprive myself... but I’ve also got to not be annoyed at myself if the top button of my jeans doesn’t do up- it doesn’t mean I’m a pig or greedy it just means I was having a day when I felt I needed that extra sugar fix and that’s fine, there’s worse things to worry about than size 10 or 12 jeans.”

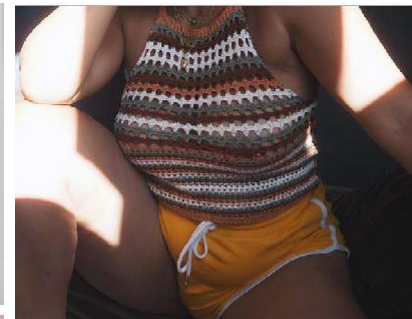
Salty World



2,761 likes

girlgaze Constraints on women 🍷 Self-portrait by @charlihoward #girlgaze

IT'S OKAY IF YOUR BODY CHANGES BECAUSE YOUR ROUTINE HAS
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Liked by izzypugh and 4,037 others

stylemesunday This morning, after a restless nights sleep, I shared with you a snippet of my life. I spoke of feelings of not being good enough and shame, related to my race. Now, it's time to celebrate and amplify black voices and show you another side of me that is strong, powerful, successful and someone who has that post-wank glow. 🍷
P.S. Masturbation is great for mental health. As is



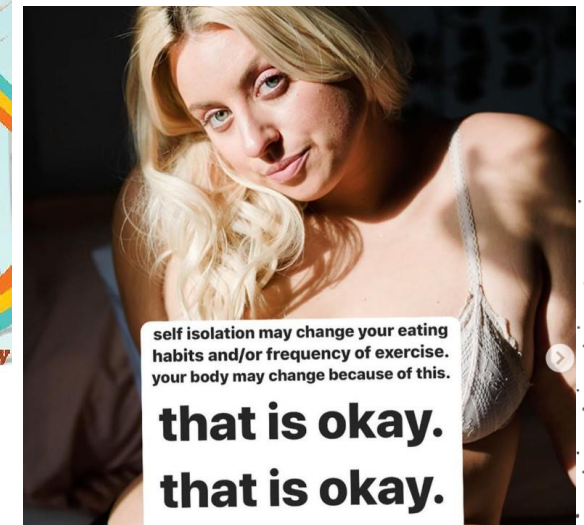
Liked by dresslikeamum and 128 others

stylemesunday I've been super organised (not like me at all) and I've set the themes for the next few weeks for #SundaySelfWorship where we take some time to honour ourselves and push to ourselves outside our comfort zone to increase confidence

by Jessica Sanders illustrated by Carol Rossetti

LEARNING TO LOVE YOUR BODY

An empowering guide for girls to support the development of positive body image



self isolation may change your eating habits and/or frequency of exercise. your body may change because of this.

**that is okay.
that is okay.**

2.

Mental Fitness

The second theme brings together the different behaviours people have adopted to help with mental fitness & agility.



Front Foot Forwards

Developing healthy habits/morning routines: Just a few minutes doing something you love helps set you up for the day ahead, keeping your mind healthy and positive.

----- Purposeful & Positive -----



Gratitude & Reflection

Taking time out to appreciate the little things. Being thankful for what you have and the world that surrounds you.

----- Introspective & Compassionate -----



Self Care Symbiosis

Investing in the self as part of the wider ecosystem around you: I can't truly care for myself if I do not care about others.

----- Altruism & Connectedness -----

Front Foot Fowards

Developing healthy habits/morning routines: Just a few minutes doing something you love helps set you up for the day ahead, keeping your mind healthy and positive.



Front Foot Forwards: More Detail

Key Themes

- During Lockdown we have created new routines and rituals to help us keep sane and going throughout the day
- With the morning-commute no longer a part of most of our lives we have made the most of the time to do things that help set us up for the day
- These haven't been big things, it's often been as simple as finally embarking on the couch to 5k or making time to enjoy a healthy breakfast
- We have realised that we can fit in time for ourselves and what we personally chose to fill this time-out with helps to keep us focused, clear minded and able to get through each day
- Guilt-free time to yourself; taking time out isn't a bad thing

Values & Traits

- Kindness
- Being active
- Routine/control/structure
- Little wins
- Space & time



“

I feel like it is one of the only things that I can actually have some control over,” she explains. “As a result I’ve been watching what I eat and trying to get in multiple forms of at-home exercise each day: at least one HIIT video followed by yoga”

Refinery 29

“

I have to be honest that without the very simple semblance of a morning routine that I cling to during these trying periods, I’d be even more of a mess. “If you take the first few minutes of your morning to do something really positive for yourself, you’ll see the benefits snowball throughout the day”

[Source](#)

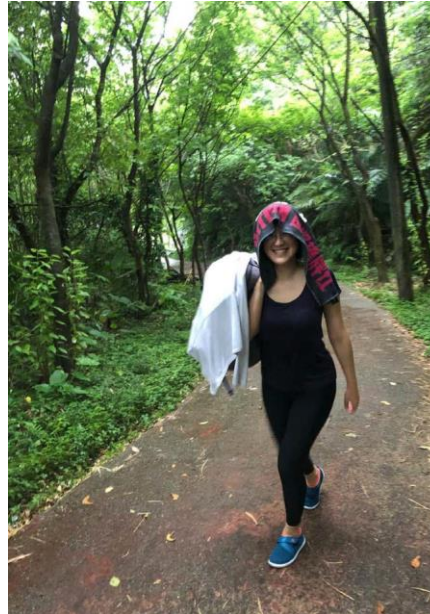


Front Foot Forwards: Visual / Verbal World

“

Making the best of everyday has been a challenge but became easier as I got used to new normal in this Covid world. Simple things like having a more relaxed and substantial breakfast rather than previously rushed affair has sustained me better through the day. Getting out on my bike has given me a degree of exercise and a chance to appreciate the local woods, parks and river as nature unfolded before me.”

Male, UK



“

Mums and friends with children of similar ages I think I have been quite selfish in my approach on this and taken necessary steps to keep myself in check and ok. I've definitely put myself first in some situations to include myself in the process of the day too and not just only considered my kids and put myself at the bottom of the list as I would've done before this Covid lockdown. For example letting them sort their own breakfast whilst I stay in bed watching the news or catching up on emails-something I'd never have done before this.”

Female, UU



COUCH TO 5K

“

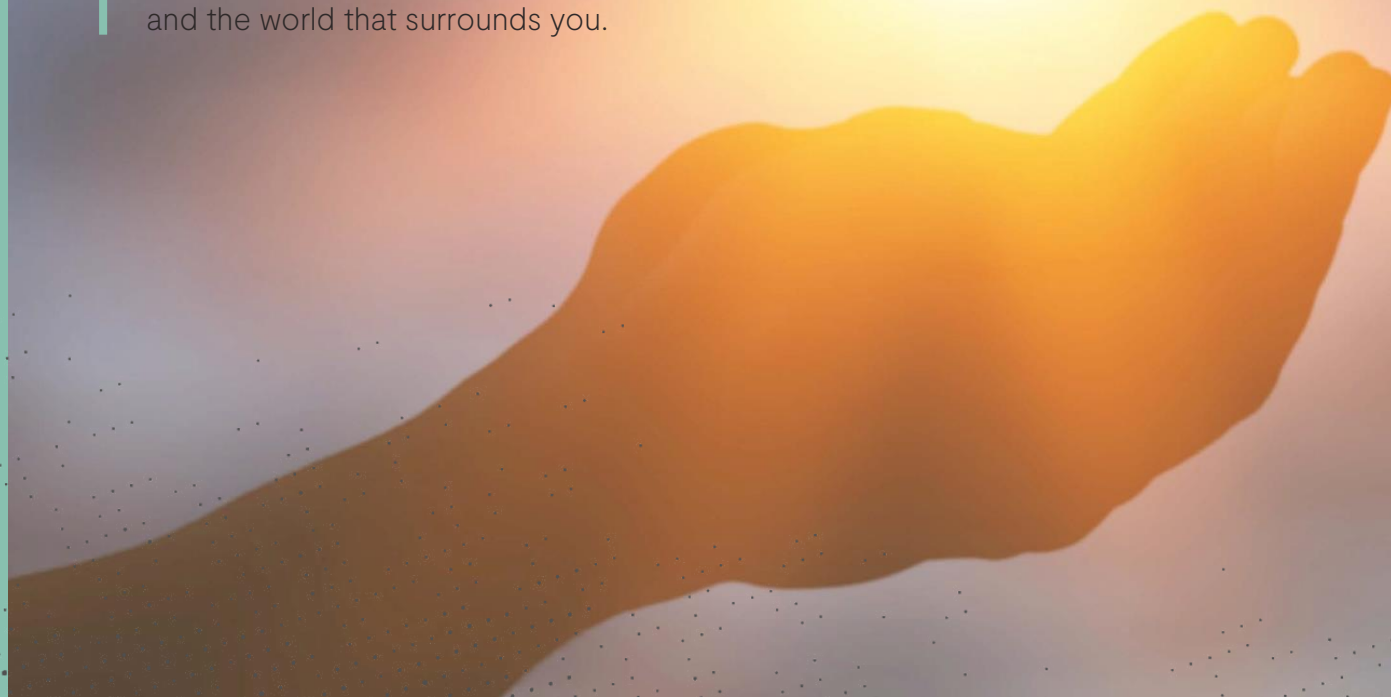
I try to take a few minutes out of my day to do something really positive for myself – simple routines such as go for a run, do some yoga, read a book – and the benefits of this snowball throughout the day.”

Male, US



Gratitude & Reflection

Taking time out to appreciate the little things. Being thankful for what you have and the world that surrounds you.



Gratitude & Reflection: More Detail

Key Themes

- Mind and body relationship – especially powerful at times of illness to be reminded of / grateful for our bodies
- Be gentle and kind to yourself. Practice gratitude, thankfulness .
- Journaling – keeping a Lockdown Diary .
- Gratefulness for others, especially with social isolation – family but more broadly society, e.g. NHS, key workers
- An appreciation of the natural world, from the birds in your garden to the broader world climate healing itself.
- Above all, learning to be present, in the moment

Values & Traits

- Introspection
- Acceptance
- Compassion
- Consciousness
- Connection



“

When This Is Over, I plan to live life to the fullest...I plan to seize the day and live the life I wanted. Take the trips I wanted even if I run up my credit card. Spend more time with family and those I love. Continue to read and take care of my apartment. Make more time for ME. It's important that I focus on me because I'm all I've got.”

Female, US

“

I have tried to incorporate mindful activities – such as yoga, t'ai chi, meditation, gratitude journaling etc – into my daily life as a strategy to cope during Covid and 13. I've been taking the time to try and nourish, recharge and revitalise myself, whether that's through skincare, treatments, exercise or massage. It's about feeding the soul – not just polishing what's on the outside. Which I will label as #EARLY BIRD'S MORNING YOGA and #MY CHINESE STYLE DIY SPA”

Female, Asia

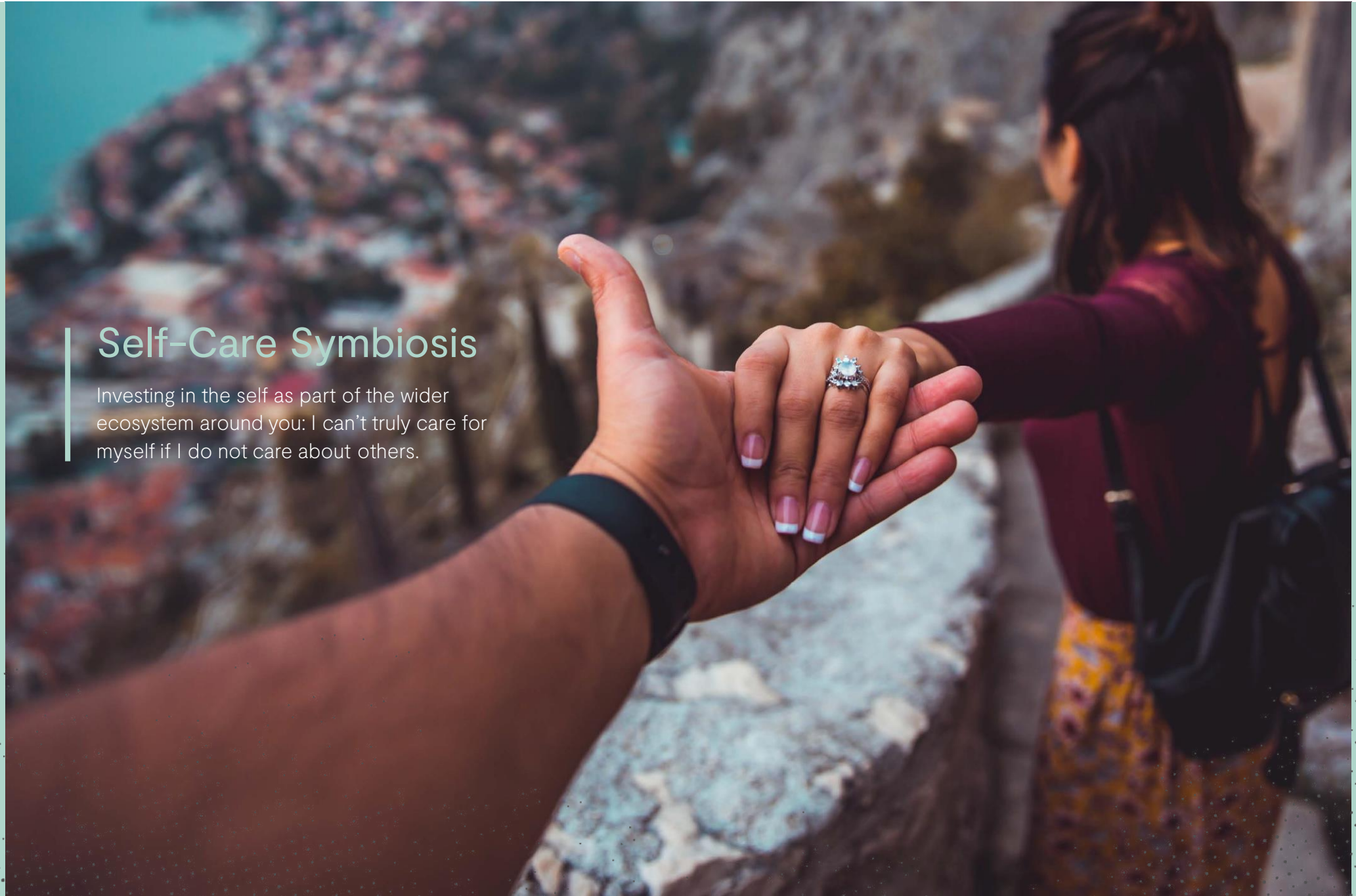


Gratitude & Reflection: Visual / Verbal World



Self-Care Symbiosis

Investing in the self as part of the wider ecosystem around you: I can't truly care for myself if I do not care about others.



Self-Care Symbiosis: More Detail

Key Themes

- Awareness of our interconnectedness with others: “I am who I am because of others”
- Building each other up – and feeding your own energy via supporting others
- Although experiences due to Covid are of course different, in some ways it is a great leveller: no one is immune (eg UK Prime Minister in intensive care)
- An appreciation of the collective over the individual
- It is also connected to the role of the environment: the benefits of slowing down on the world around us
- Appreciation of things that are naturally produced

Values & Traits

- Altruism
- Personal Responsibility
- Sustainability & Environmentalism
- Collectivism
- Interconnectedness
- Supportive

“

My increased appreciation of nature is a form of self care – that slowing down and observing spring and early summer. The rebirth of plants and animal feeding and reproduction has been uplifting.”

Male, UK

“

I am trying to do Traditional Chinese Medical Massage and Moxibustion at home myself. The intention is to warm and invigorate the flow of Qi in the body and dispel certain pathogenic influences”

Female, China

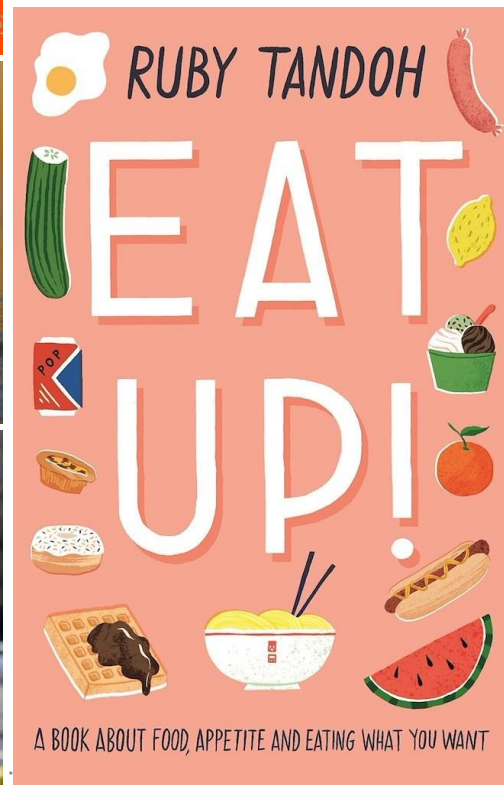
“

This slowdown has given me more time to appreciate who I am and how I interact with the wider world. The importance of good health and looking after myself has increased importance and cycling and long walks have been great.”

Male, US



Self-Care Symbiosis: Visual / Verbal World



3.

Body As Project

The final set of themes bring together the different ways people have invested in their appearance & beauty regimes.



Be Strong

At the more physical end of the spectrum, some consumers have focussed on achieving goals and building physical strength to give them an outlet and sense of focus against a back drop of constraint and restrictions.

----- Resilient & Fitness -----



Letting Beauty Breathe

A fresh focus on self-care with radiance at its core: stripping back layers of fakery & filter.

----- Simplicity & Liberation -----



Project Me

Beauty is one of the daily rituals that give me a reason not to give up on myself in lockdown. No-body is going to see me so it's a chance to try something new, be bold, experiment.

----- Individuality & Experimentation -----

Be Strong

At the more physical end of the spectrum, some consumers have found focusing on achieving goals and building physical strength has given them a much needed outlet and sense of focus against a back drop of being quite literally, locked in.



Be Strong: More Detail

Key Themes

- Setting yourself exercise goals to provide a sense of focus and give yourself something to aim for
- Train for an endurance event taking place in 2021 or extreme goals during lockdown, e.g. running a marathon on your balcony
- Building strength and endurance – getting physically fit as a means to escape and ensure mental wellness, ultimately making you feeling more confident in day to day living
- Personal sense of achievement, e.g. The kudos of being awarded Strava KOM, and Strava recently launching Local Legends as a way to reward effort as well as speed

Values & Traits

- Achievement
- Goals
- Power
- Determination
- Self Improvement
- Confidence

“

I spent more time exercising and introduced mountain biking into the routine. Unexpectedly it made the constraints of lock down easier. It gave me freedom and I cycled tracks and part of the South Downs I have never been before. You can cover a lot more miles on a bike than you can running. I now cycle 20+ miles on a Wednesday evening”

Female, UK



“

But the biggest, unexpected benefit was around the conversion of actual strength into mental strength.... Getting stronger made me feel that there was one small corner of my life that I could positively change, even if all around me was wreckage.”

Poorna Bell, Interview in Stylist

“

Recently I take TRX class once a week, go jogging once a week and go hiking 2-3 times a month. Hiking is really popular among 30+ yrs old people recently. At first beginning, I just accompanied my friend, but now I really fall in love with hiking. When I finish a route, I feel a sense of accomplishment and something in control”

Female, Asia

Be Strong: Visual / Verbal World



Letting Beauty Breathe

A fresh focus on self-care with radiance at its core: stripping back layers of fakery & filter.



Letting Beauty Breathe: More Detail

Key Themes

- Self-care with several layers of 'fakery' removed....a new focus on regeneration.... (hair masks not weaves, cuticle oil not gel manicure)
- Going back to and re-learning the fundamental building blocks of care (dads doing braiding, haircuts)
- Getting the basics right: paring back routines to the fundamentals that make the difference
- Going au naturel + with added lens of 'sanitation / hygiene / avoidance'
- Skincare products focus on benefits of natural radiance & freshness ("looking fresh not looking lived-in")

Values & Traits

- Integrity
- Honesty
- Simplicity
- Liberation
- Release
- Kindness



“

At Kiehl's, I realized my skin needed to be my makeup," she says. "It's okay for skin to have a healthy sheen. The whole glow idea was a trend we started. The face doesn't have to be a matte canvas."

The Cut, article on Kiehl's



“

The effects of being stuck indoors can be felt (and seen) on our faces. We're dubbing it, 'indoor face'... We consulted two pro dermatologists to diagnose what's going on with our skin Consider this the ELLE guide on how to get your outdoor glow back"

Elle, UK

“

I've learned to stop caring because if the world's ending, why does it matter? Going to get groceries without my hair and makeup done was unheard of before quarantine. Now, I seldom blowdry my hair, let alone put on makeup."

Female, US

Letting Beauty Breathe: Visual / Verbal World



Project Me

Beauty is one of the daily rituals that give me a reason not to give up on myself in lockdown. No-body is going to see me so it's a chance to try something new, be bold, experiment.



Project Me: More Detail

Key Themes

- Keeping your shit together by maintaining the status quo in beauty regimes – familiar, soothing rituals
- Finding the acceptable space between self-affirming care and adornment / beauty / glamour
- An opportunity to experiment, with nobody looking – step out of the space you usually occupy and try a new you
- Beauty that's for the self
- Products and remedies that take time to use
- DIY Body Hair Removal, experimenting with colour, treating yourself to face masks you'd never normally have the time to use...

Values & Traits

- Individuality
- Self-expression
- Self-indulgence
- Confidence
- Assertion
- Commitment

“

Hanging out at home is the perfect time to experiment and play with your makeup stash without dealing with the sweat and oil that comes from being outdoors”

“

Waxing, like my balayage, regular manicures, and Botox, is just one of the many extras I'm happy to live without during self-isolation as we try to keep COVID-19 in check. (Although I may invest in a bikini trimmer, per the excellent advice of one woman I spoke to.)”

[Source](#)

“

Hair masks are usually something you let yourself have just for a little while, as a treat. But if you're spending more time at home, why not really indulge by leaving a hair mask on for longer than you ever imagined possible...If you're looking for a true treat-to-self moment at home, this luxurious hair mask is like the icing on a self-care cake”

[Source](#)

Project Me: Visual / Verbal World





We have concluded our self-care journey with the thought that themes occupy a more reflective inner space currently. Brands that want to connect with today's current consumer will want to bear this in mind in their communication, innovation & targeting strategies.

As we move out of Covid, some of the more emergent themes will take hold.

It's impossible to say how this will end, and how we will be different on the other side. It's likely that some of the cultural eccentricities we pick up now will become firmly ingrained: the necessities and proclivities of social isolation will cause behavioural change across society, while how and what we consume will be correspondingly altered. All we can positively observe is that people are still enjoying themselves and finding creative and compelling ways to do so. And that gives us hope.

They say that time flies when you are enjoying yourself, after all.

Please get in touch for any comments,
questions or requests:

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Syren | **discover.ai**