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"Live Through This": Feminist Care of the Self 2.0

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ABSTRACT

This article takes *Rookie*, an interactive website for teenage girls, as a case study for theorizing the constitution and care of the female self in the digital realm. While critical media scholars have discussed new forms of interactivity, sharing and self-representation as a cultural dimension of neoliberalism, we feel that this overarching framework overlooks the extent to which digital technologies can also be harnessed to engage in everyday practices of feminist self-making and care. Drawing on Foucault's work on ethics and care of the self, we situate the *Rookie* website, its social media extensions, and particularly the "Live Through This" column, as a collaborative practice of self-making and mutual care.

> *Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare*
> — Audre Lorde

> *Rookie. n. A new recruit, esp. in an army or police force*
> — Oxford English Dictionary

In 2011, a fifteen-year-old blogger named Tavi Gevinson launched *Rookie*, an interactive website for teenage girls. Conceived as an alternative to corporate-produced girls' media, the site combines first-person writing about the experiences of girlhood with photographs, illustrations, playlists, videos, advice, and commentary about sex, dating, popular culture, music, and fashion; much of the content is generated by users themselves. *Rookie* remediates the print magazine by organizing content around monthly themes, but the site also encourages the use of tags and links to explore an extensive archive of writing and visual material by and for girls and maintains a real-time presence synced to the daily routines of teenaged users by updating three times a day: "after school, after dinner, and when it's really late and you should be writing a paper but are Facebook stalking instead." *Rookie* posts are also integrated into the wider circulatory loops and feedback practices of digital media via *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Instagram*, *Tumbler*, *Snapchat*, *Pinterest* and other social networks on which *Rookie* users maintain a robust presence. Through the website and social media, the *Rookie* project invites teenagers to share their knowledge, strategies, and resources for navigating identity and everyday life, or "making the best of the beautiful pain and cringe-worthy awkwardness of being an adolescent girl" (Tavi, "Editor's Letter").

This essay situates *Rookie* as a digital platform for performing "care of the self," and considers how the mediation of ethical self-making overlaps with feminist critique and social change. Drawing from the late work of Michel Foucault, we conceptualize ethics as the self's relationship to the self. Ethics in this sense does not refer to a moral code (thou shall not do this or that), but to the "relationship one ought to have with oneself," and the guidelines one sets for "conducting oneself in the world of one's everyday existence" (Rose 135). We use the term

care of the self to refer to the process of attending to ourselves as ethical subjects, which entails reflecting upon and accounting for our thoughts, behaviors, experiences, actions, habits, and relationships, often through personal writing, mentorship, tutorials, and practical exercises. While Foucault focused on the ethical practices of privileged white men in antiquity, we explore a virtual network of mutual self-care among a historically marginalized population: teenaged girls. By circulating subjugated knowledges and ethical frameworks for accounting for oneself (Butler, "Giving an Account") and connecting young female subjects who mentor and care for each other, *Rookie* connects the process of ethical self-fashioning to feminist politics.

Importantly, we are not suggesting that forms of digital media are *inherently* feminist. If new media technologies provide unprecedented access to and opportunities for self-representation, personal reflection, and sharing, these activities do not by themselves disrupt dominant gender norms or challenge existing power dynamics. Compared to the pre-digital era when the feminist slogan "the personal is political" had a particular salience, the contemporary mediascape is increasingly dominated by dynamics of interactivity, personal revelation, and self-display, such that the explosion of blogs, webcams, social networks, *YouTube* and other "media-generated 'confession culture' presents a real challenge to those who believe that sharing personal experience is still a political act," writes feminist scholar Theresa Senft (3). Indeed, there is plenty of media scholarship to suggest that girls and young women use new digital technologies and platforms to "express themselves" in sync with postfeminist sensibilities that emphasize individual choice and the neoliberal incitement to self-branding (Senft; Banet-Weiser; Marwick). But these dominant tendencies are not written into digital media, nor are they totalizing. By enabling care of the self as a collaborative ethical project, *Rookie* points to other possibilities for fashioning selfhood in the digital realm.

Foucault Meets Teenage Girls

Rookie founder Tavi Gevinson began blogging about fashion and style at the tender age of twelve; her way with words and eclectic aesthetic sensibilities generated a flock of young followers and eventually made her the subject of considerable media attention. While journalists positioned Gevinson as the "oracle" of young girls—a digital micro-celebrity with commercial potential (Schulman)—she rejected this narrative. In her founding editor's letter Gevinson refers to her growing discomfort with girlhood as the impetus for *Rookie* as a web project for girls. "I don't have the answers. *Rookie* is not your Guide to Being a Teen," Gevinson explained. But "while there's always danger in generalizing a whole group of people, I do think that some experiences are somewhat universal to being a teenager, specifically a female one." Drawing content from contributors, users, and the occasional musician or celebrity, *Rookie* offers a public forum for discussing historically private and subjective experiences, and for commiserating, advising, and surviving everything girl. Similar to Foucault's understanding of ethics, the point was not to suggest hard and fast rules for teenage femininity, but to circulate shared resources for each user to "write your own handbook."

With advice columns, youthful graphics, and attention to dating, makeup, fashion, TV and film, and do-it-yourself craft projects, *Rookie* shares the surface conventions of mainstream teenage magazines and websites. With an annual "Life Skill" list and plenty of practical and inspirational recommendations for living, the site also overlaps with self-help manuals. But unlike traditional media, *Rookie* recognizes the constructed nature of gender norms and encourages a self-conscious engagement with the ongoing process of identity formation. This critical, self-conscious attitude is exemplified by the tutorial "How to Bitchface," in which Gevinson offers her own carefully posed selfies as a guide to facial expression. "A bitchface is a beauty essential for any true lady—the kind of accessory that says, 'You are a fucking idiot, why am I still talking to you,'" Gevinson writes. "Here, I show you multiple faces for reacting to varying levels of stupidity, including handy step-by-step how-tos." What also sets *Rookie* apart is attention to the micropolitics of girls' everyday experiences. Self-writings take

multiple forms (essays, diary excerpts, checklists), but the overall focus is on sharing memories and knowledge of body image anxiety, depression, sexual harassment, and other common issues. *Rookie* encourages teenage girls to contemplate the everyday ethics of eating, sexual activity, friendship, violence, the body, and other topics defined not by experts, but by girls themselves. Self-writing in the form of essays, diary excerpts, and how-to lists connects first-person experience to survival strategies and recommendations for living the best life possible. Photographs and artwork, such as "It Hurts to be 16," a series of drawings and paintings from a user's sketchbook (Petra) are personal and pedagogical in a similar sense. Users who generate comments, feedback, and content on the *Rookie* site and through social media networks often connect these self-writings and guidelines to their own experiences and informal mentorship of other girls. In this way, *Rookie* challenges the self-policing and relentless self-improvement encouraged by mainstream girls media, and the self-promotional logic that some critics see around blogs and social media.

Foucault offers a useful starting point for theorizing girls' ethical self-fashioning through digital networked technologies. In his late work, Foucault moved away from processes of domination to the practices and techniques through which individuals actively constitute and conduct themselves within ethical frameworks. In the multivolume *History of Sexuality* and in important essays and interviews ("Ethics of Concern"; "Genealogy of Ethics"; "Two Lectures") he framed this work as an alternative theory of subjectivity, one that emphasized the active and technical dimensions of self-fashioning as well as its socially constructed and discursive dimensions. In 1978, Foucault defined "technologies of the self" as sets of practices, or methods, that "permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immorality." Implied by his writing was a model of identity that was shaped less through unconscious processes or ideological manipulations than through everyday actions and practices: the details of these actions and practices are the basis of the self, Foucault suggested, because

"they are you—what you thought, what you felt" ("Technologies of the Self" 29).

Foucault was particularly interested in the ethical basis of these operations in the classical era prior to Christianity. With the arrival of Christianity, the practice of care of the self was suppressed, and new forms of pastoral power that linked subjectivity to knowing the self through confession and other techniques took hold. In his studies of ancient Rome and Greece, Foucault uncovered a different and (for him) more appealing ethical framework for "living a beautiful life" and caring for the self as a matter of pleasure, autonomy, and self-mastery in the present. Within this framework, the self was neither "given" nor governed by universal laws, but was created and regulated through daily choices and practices. Everyday life took on an "aesthetics of existence": the individual was akin to a work of art, to the extent that care of the self involved a "principle of stylization of conduct for those who wished to give their existence the most graceful and accomplished form possible" (*The Use of Pleasure* 250–51). While he realized that ethical contexts are historically bound, Foucault clearly envisioned affinities between pre-Christian technologies of the self and the process of making oneself as a subject in the late modern era. With the declining influence of traditional institutions and the waning of rigid rules governing sexuality, morality, and everyday life, the 20th century opened up "the freedom, and the challenge" for subjects to fashion themselves and their culture in new ways (Gauntlett 142).

As David Gauntlett notes, Foucault himself recognized lifestyle magazines, which proliferated in the 1970s and into the 1980s, as a platform for mediating technologies of the self, "aesthetics of existence" and alternative ethics for everyday living, particularly among gay men. In interviews, he connected gay magazines to a new "way of life […] not resembling those that are institutionalized […] [that] can yield a culture and an ethics" (Foucault, qtd. in Gauntlett 142). While Foucault died before he was able to develop these ideas, his late work presents a conceptual framework for understanding ethical self-making in an increasingly fragmented and interactive digital media culture. Might it be possible for teenage girls to fashion an alternative culture and ethics of their own, using the new media technologies available to them?

Before we explore this possibility through a closer analysis of *Rookie*, it is important to note the limitations in applying Foucault's work to the contemporary moment. The first is Foucault's own failure to address gender difference, a problem that many feminists have noted (McNay). Because Foucault's most detailed analysis of self-making and care of the self focused on the practices of free white men in ancient Greece and Rome, his method needs to be modified to account for the dynamics of contemporary social differences and inequalities. We will do this in the next section, where we explore *Rookie* in more detail.

The other issue that needs to be considered when extending Foucault's framework is historical context. The explosion of digital media (blogs, mobile phones, social networks, websites) has coincided with the unprecedented visibility of ordinary people in the media. This new visibility intersects with seemingly unlimited opportunities to document, reflect upon, share, and otherwise perform one's identity and personhood. While these practices lend themselves to a discussion of ethics and self-fashioning, they also take place within a particular socio-historical context. This context will impact the discourses and resources available for self-making. As Foucault explained, if the subject constitutes himself in "active fashion, by practices of the self, these practices are nevertheless not something that the subject invents by himself." Rather, they are "patterns that he finds in his culture and which are proposed, suggested and imposed on him by his culture, his society and his social group" ("Ethics of Concern" 291). In the West today, the most pervasive and validated framework for practicing an ethical relationship to oneself is neoliberalism, which encourages the extension of market principles into all dimensions of social life, including subjectivity.

There is enormous encouragement to perform as a self-enterprising subject who embraces market logics and avoids dependency on the state and its diminished services. Neoliberal templates for subjectivity circulate across policy and popular contexts, where they often align with the denial of structural inequalities and the "posting" of feminism, race, and other differences so as to make them seem like historical problems that have already been solved (McRobbie). The incitement to self-enterprising personhood has moreover gained currency alongside

the deregulated media industries' embrace of user interactivity and amateur media production. As many critical media scholars have shown, the growing incitement to post, blog, snap, and participate in digital media is tied to capitalist processes, from sophisticated forms of corporate surveillance (Andrejevic) and the manufacturing and exploitation of ordinary celebrity (Turner), to the harnessing of "immaterial labor" to generate surplus value and build brands (Hearn). For some scholars, the circulation of information and desire through Web 2.0 technologies is built into the infrastructure of what Jodi Dean calls "communicative capitalism." As Sarah Banet-Weiser demonstrates in her analysis of teenage girls "expressing themselves" through *YouTube* videos, technologies of the self can easily fold into corporate profit maximization, and active practices of self-making can easily draw from and reproduce proscribed modes of behavior and conduct.

While it is important to acknowledge the dominant context for self-making, it is equally crucial to account for practices that fall outside these parameters, as Sara Ahmed points out. In her recent discussion of care of the self as a form of warfare, Ahmed draws from the radical feminist poet Audre Lorde to reclaim self-care as a mode of self-preservation and survival strategy for marginalized groups. While self-care can reproduce neoliberal reasoning and become an "obscurant" that leads one away from "engaging in certain kinds of political struggle," it can also be conceptualized as a form of warfare that is not only or even primarily about "one's own happiness," fulfillment or success. Self-care can also be about "finding ways to exist in a world that is diminishing." In the present moment, care of the self has been woven into the highly commercialized, post-feminist, and post-racial self-help mantras associated with neoliberalism, but this need not be the case. "Neoliberalism sweeps up too much when all forms of self-care become symptoms of neoliberalism," Ahmed reminds ("Self Care as Warfare"). In the hands of women, queers, people of color, youth, and the economically disenfranchised, attending to and caring for oneself can become a strategy for coping with and managing a racist, sexist, and homophobic society and for fashioning and re-fashioning resilient selves for the *longue durée* of social change. This is how care of the self often operates through the *Rookie* project.

While *Rookie* allows teenage girls to immerse themselves in the "aesthetics of existence" through eclectic makeup tutorials, fashion advice, music reviews, and other writings that are not explicitly political, the site also frames care of the self as a form of warfare. Sometimes this is as simple as sharing subversive tactics that register, but do not necessarily challenge, unfair power dynamics. Under the section "Fun," for example, a collection of "Tiny Rebellions" highlight "subtle acts of defiance," or "ways to push back against the jerk-itude, mundanity, and unfairness we encounter on a daily basis" (Anna et al.). Suzy, who regrets attempting to lighten her brown skin when she was 13, tells of hiding all the bleach creams at the local pharmacy. Meredith writes that she wears her earbuds when she is listening to music so "people will leave her alone." Meagan shares the fact that she often wears men's fragrances as a statement about her ambiguous gender identity. With these small acts of rebellion, *Rookie* users politicize gender norms and teach other teenage girls how to resist dominant expectations associated with female self-fashioning.

"Live Through This": Survival Strategies

One segment of the *Rookie* site—the "Live Through This" column—is especially tied to care of the self as a survival mechanism and a collaborative intervention. In the column, contributors talk about difficult and traumatic experiences so as to help others who might be going through something similar. Growing up as a teenage girl comes with a whole host of risks including sexual assault, abuse, body dysmorphia, and eating disorders, along with limited access to support to address these issues. *Rookie* takes advantage of the open architecture of the Internet and the opportunity for interaction that digital technologies afford to encourage users to speak with each other about their personal experiences. Building on the structure and popularity of online support groups such as *LiveJournal*, and fueled by teen girls' desire to document and share their experiences, the "Live Through This" column is crucial for creating networked communities that foster care of the self as a political project.

It is worth emphasizing that *Rookie*'s feminist uptake of care of the self departs from earlier ethical models discussed by Foucault, which focused on white free men and valued and encouraged self-mastery. In the 4th and 5th century BC, care of the self required constant vigilance to master ones' passions and basic appetites. It was often through exercises of abstinence and self-control that one came to know oneself and to achieve "ethical" forms of freedom (Foucault, *The Care of the Self* 65). Establishing mastery over oneself involved forms of self-examination that measured one's ability to regulate one's pleasures, and regular testing procedures such as physical exertion to stimulate hunger followed by a spread of tempting foods (*The Care of the Self* 59). While mastery during the ancient era was based on modulating one's appetites and desires, contemporary neoliberal ethics are about finding fulfillment through lifestyle and security and success through self-enterprising. In this context, self-mastery is closely associated with one's ability to maximize his or her value within advanced capitalism. For young people, one such avenue of self-mastery is the generation of value (social and economic) through the performance of the self as a commodity. The interactive nature of digital media allows users to strategically construct a branded persona and put it into commercial circulation. Many teens use blogging platforms, *YouTube*, and social networks to produce branded versions of themselves within an attention economy and, in some cases, to reap financial benefits through advertisements and endorsements. On *Rookie*, however, ethical practices are not subsumed by the call to branding or self-enterprise. The anonymity of the posts (both authors and users often use their first names only or pseudonyms) undermines the presentation of the self as a brand, and the content is less about advancing oneself in a competitive social environment than it is about sharing resources for surviving the social impacts of racism, sexism, homophobia, and the everyday awkwardness of adolescence, particularly for girls.

Among *Rookie*'s extensive archive of personal stories are tactics for surviving physical, mental, and sexual abuse. In these reflections, contributors often weave together their own stories of survival with strategies for taking care of one's self. A "Live Through This" column entitled "Heart Labor" (Stephanie) exemplifies this tendency. While

attending a domestic violence training, Stephanie realized she had recently been in an abusive relationship. Embedded in the article is the "Power and Control Wheel" of abuse indicators that prompted Stephanie's realization, along with her personal narrative that links her experience to the themes of the chart. After identifying the abuse, Stephanie writes, she began a long and arduous healing process that involved ongoing emotional work on her self. She explains, "Emotional work is about self-care, but it's not always about pampering yourself. Emotional work is hard. It means being honest with yourself and taking care of yourself even when you don't want to." Stephanie goes on to describe strategies for self-care including how to face self-doubt (find a supportive feminist community online) and how to deal with anger (use "mosh pits, screaming into a microphone, punching pillows, and even breaking stuff as an outlet"). Stephanie suggests that "healing doesn't mean 'getting over it' but caring for the self through therapy, meditation, and supportive friends can help girls to move on." This advice for surviving trauma offers recommendations for conduct (for oneself and others) and suggests practices that can contribute to ethical self-making. Assuming that subjectivity is formed through the details, these contributors offer concrete tools for teen girls to work on their self-image within the context of everyday girlhood.

Another strategy for survival elaborated on *Rookie* is cultivating a positive self-image. "Live Through This" writings often share resources for recognizing and taking concrete steps to dismantle imposter syndrome and other insecurities (Brodie, "You Can't Fake Real"). Many other "Live Through This" articles address body image issues as a particular mode of oppression for teenage girls. In "Approval Plan: Loving Your Own Body," Brodie chronicles her own journey through the Fat Acceptance Movement and comes to the realization that all women are at risk: "It took time for me to understand that no women are safe from having their bodies policed, and that it's not thin women who are the adversaries of the fat acceptance movement, but rather the structures that enforce ideas about what bodies are 'good' or 'right,'" she told *Rookie* users, before offering concrete tips, from "tuning out" to "avoiding conversations about dieting" in order to protect oneself from negative body image.

In the column "Too Fat To Swim," Ragini writes about the ridicule she faced as a young girl who wanted to play sports. Despite her parents' insistence that she was "too fat," Ragini took up basketball and cricket and reveled in the physical power her body wielded on the court. As she went through puberty, Ragini felt pressure to conform to narrow definitions of femininity; deemed "too female" to play sports and "too big" to be "feminine," she felt "like a freak." To recuperate her femininity, Ragini turned to bulimia in an effort to transform her body into a thin, frail feminine form. Ragini's personal narrative articulates a critique of femininity; she characterizes the "strict narratives of girlhood" that limit their desires and ambitions as a form of violence. Unlike practices of self-mastery that require controlling one's appetites, teen girls have found that their desires are already inhibited by their proscribed gender identity and their bodies. Creating an ethical relationship to oneself is therefore premised upon the acceptance of one's desires and one's body. In this sense, teen girls' claims to self-determination on *Rookie* are distinct from what Angela McRobbie deems the regulation of "subjects of capacity," where the attribution of capacity engages girls in "a range of specified practices which are understood to be both progressive but also consummately and reassuringly feminine" (721). Rather than using digital tools to craft the self as an "ideal" female subject or an enterprising brand, the *Rookie* community uses their interactive platform to "undo" gender norms (Butler, "Undoing Gender").

Sisterhood: Caring for Others

While sharing personal stories on *Rookie*, contributors not only provide concrete tactics for survival, they constitute care of the self as a collaborative ethical project. In this way, digital self-writing functions as a shared community resource for surviving the conditions of femininity. In "Live Through This" articles, writers reveal the intimate details of their personal struggles to create a body of shared knowledge and to help others "live through" similar experiences. This content helps connect users to each other to form networks of mutual self-care, as evidenced by the comments section, where members

of the *Rookie* community respond with their own related experiences and offer additional guidance and support. This feedback extends into social media when users share *Rookie* content with others, sometimes generating another round of commentary. The digital architecture of the interactive *Rookie* site allows users to publicize and circulate their specialized knowledge and to build an archive of experiences and resources that can be searched and saved.

It is significant that young women are carving out a public online forum to account for their personal experiences. Not only have young women historically been excluded from public spaces, they have been marginalized in the technological realm and delegitimized as media producers (Banet-Weiser, "Branding the Postfeminist Self" 5). Anita Harris explains that when young women share their experiences with one another they are building subjugated knowledges, defined by Foucault as a "whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low on the hierarchy, below the required level of cognition or scientificity" ("Two Lectures" 82). As narratives about teen girls increasingly center on their capacity to be feminine, sexually empowered, and self-enterprising, and girls are incited to perform these subjectivities through digital media, other forms of knowledge are crucial for generating alternative practices. Subjugated knowledges allow members of marginalized groups, including teenage girls, to consider different explanations and explore different possibilities for themselves. On *Rookie*, girls' own stories, drawings, and anecdotes about eating disorders, racism, harassment, body image anxiety, sexual violence, and economic hardship challenge the legitimacy of recognized knowledges. As Harris argues, constructing a public forum to share subjugated knowledge redefines private, local knowledges as political (164).

In their expression of local, marginalized knowledges, teen girls are building links between their personal experiences to form a broader critique of dominant constructions of girlhood. It is through their stories that teen girls are developing a feminist ethics for caring for the self and others who have experienced (or may experience) something similar, particularly young women and girls. In "Girl-on-Girl Crime," Brodie explores her history as a "chronic girl-hater" that she associates with

gender socialization; she explains that girls "are encouraged to look down on women we think are 'sluts,' to see every other female as a threat to our relationships and self-worth, to disparage the looks of women we disagree with politically or intellectually, and to regard successful women as 'bitches.'" While Brodie reformed her girl-hating ways after discovering intersectional feminism, she argues that in order to "really learn and move on from our experiences, we need to admit to them and understand why they're problematic." If striving for self-reflection and improvement form the basis of ethical relations with others, the authors and users on *Rookie* model a political form of caring for others that acknowledges and rejects gender discrimination. By publishing their stories online, contributors recuperate the power of women's voices and elaborate a feminist politics that encourages teen girls to develop ethical relations with themselves and others.

A key dimension of caring for others is establishing an ethics for care of the self. Foucault explains that in ancient Greek political thought, care of others was conceptualized as an art of governing guided by the same rationality that men used to govern themselves ("Care of the Self" 89). By prioritizing self-reflection, individuals are able to develop a model for self-care that they can use to forge ethical relations with others. On *Rookie*, writing about personal experiences is a strategy that is used by writers to learn how to better care for and conduct themselves, and develop strategies to share with others. In the article entitled "In My Diary," Hazel explains, "the physical act of writing down how I feel has helped me articulate in conversations what I feel, like some phantom rehearsal of confidence I've practiced with my diary beforehand." She elaborates:

> I'm only beginning to accept and claim spaces for myself where I can be a vulnerable girl and not feel ashamed for doing so. There is a stigma associated with unbridled young female emotion: People think the girl speaking about her feelings is doing so for attention, that she's vain, that she's childish. But the mere act of a girl speaking or writing about her feelings (or, in this case, putting them in a book) is powerful, because it creates that space where she is free to speak as she pleases without fear of reproach, and these spaces are few and far between.

For Hazel, the writing process encouraged her to take her emotions seriously and to express her desires. By prioritizing her feelings, Hazel encourages others to do the same and fosters an ethics of care that values teen girls' subjugated experiences. This practice is related to feminist self-making because, as Helen O'Grady explains, "in women's general training the establishment of ethical relations with others frequently has entailed forsaking oneself as a person deserving equal consideration" (83). In other words, women are expected to care for others (including family and children) as a moral obligation that requires their own selflessness. Alternatively, the form of caring for the self that is practiced on *Rookie* is a reciprocal practice rooted in the idea that self-reflection and self-knowledge can provide insights to help others care for themselves. "Live Through This" writings constitute self-reflection as a feminist practice that in turn builds a community resource of specialized knowledge and fosters networks of mutual self-care.

Radical Confession

The constant demand to share personal information online and through social media directs users toward particular modes of digital identity formation. Within neoliberal cultural formations, fashioning the self often involves crafting one's experiences into a "saleable" performance of femininity. The contemporary environment encourages teen girls to use self-disclosure for self-promotion, to make visible their private lives to create the self as an enterprise and a brand. At the same time, teen girls' disclosures on public forums are increasingly under surveillance by their parents, media companies, and even the welfare and justice system (Harris 130). Anita Harris explains that the mediated culture of confession works to scrutinize young women's private thoughts and practices in order to produce self-regulating subjects (126). While "Live Though This" articles are premised upon confession, the *Rookie* site actively resists the incitement to self-brand and self-police by maintaining user anonymity and privileging experience over expertise.

On *Rookie*, contributors and users are only identified by their first names; in fact last names, addresses, and other distinguishing

information is actively disallowed to safeguard the anonymity of users. The affordances of the online forum protect user identity and create a space to disclose personal experiences without fear of identification. *Rookie* contributor Gabi explains that the anonymity of digital interactions helps teens feel "comfortable sharing their secrets and insecurities, without fear of judgment" ("Actual Size"). This atmosphere engenders confession for the purpose of self-reflection and develops strategies for survival rather than self-promotion.

In addition to providing anonymity, *Rookie* promotes a non-hierarchical approach to care of the self. By encouraging readers to add to the body of subjugated knowledge through article contributions and comments, *Rookie* challenges the model of confession that requires the presence of a professional expert (such as a therapist) or an institutionalized authority figure. While *Rookie* does have regular staff writers, the link between writers and readers is not always clear, and users are invited to submit articles, questions, images, and other content. Often, reader-submitted pieces are nearly indistinguishable from other works. *Rookie* contributors are teen girls and young women, and while they function as mentors in that they offer strategies for self-care, the advice they share emerges out of their own experiences and subjugated knowledges about gender, femininity, and feminism. This practice represents a significant departure from the function of confession Foucault describes during the ancient Greco-Roman era, where care of the self had involved detailed self-examination that one would document and report to an authority figure. The pupil learned self-care practices by inspecting his own behavior, receiving evaluation from a mentor, and implementing the mentor's advice (Foucault, *The Care of the Self* 62). Without the presence of an authority, teenage girls actively create their own ethical practices based on their personal experiences and the experiences of their peers.

In this context, there are no obligations for teen girls to "reform" their behavior. Instead, the open structure of the website encourages all users to participate in a networked form of ethical self-examination. Whereas confession operated in the early Christian tradition as a form of self-examination "directed toward obedience and constant verbalization and policing of thoughts" (Bakardjieva and Gaden 156), *Rookie* values

confession as tool for introspection meant to incite self-reflexivity in others. For instance, in the article "Safety Closet," Krista recounts her experience of coming out as a lesbian as a point of consideration for teens considering when and how to disclose their sexual orientation. While her own experience was "terrible at first, then gradually better," she tells queer/trans *Rookie*s "If you suspect your parents will be violent towards you in *any* way […] please, please, do not come out." In the comment section, users share their own coming out stories and express their fears about coming out, while others reply offering support and advice. This dialogue exemplifies the way that confession functions to empower users to rely upon their own self-knowledge and experiences to develop an ethics of care of the self.

In sum, *Rookie* offers self-writing, imagery, suggestions, and how-to advice to teenage girls seeking to fashion an "art of existence," to use Foucault's terminology. This interactive content relies on experiential and subjugated knowledges to question hetero-normative assumptions and neoliberal ideals, and encourages users to self-consciously engage with their own thoughts and behaviors. At a moment when public structures of support are diminishing, *Rookie* teaches girls to practice care of the self as an ethical obligation to oneself, as a form of resistance, as a survival strategy, and as a way of forging non-hierarchical support networks with others. This does not so much buttress dominant trends as it nourishes a generation of young women for wellness and, perhaps, political action. As Ahmed insists, we need to be careful about collapsing all forms of self-care under the banner of neoliberalism and recognize the spaces where self-care operates as warfare. As Tyler wrote in "Live Through This": "The possibilities seem endless" ("Neither/Both").

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