

When self care is ugly

by [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

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Aaron Billard posted [this article](#) to Twitter yesterday, as he chatted with someone on his timeline. It's written by Kristi Coulter, a "First World Woman" living through her first summer of sobriety. She's annoyed with how many times people shove drinks into her face—and she's irritated with just about everything else along with that fact.

I'm fascinated by the article, because Coulter writes about a bevy of drunk women who describe their time out as "self-care." They are miserable and *need* drinks. I know these women well. I am one of them. Not that I'm drunk in public all the time... but I can relate on so many levels.

I wonder about them—about us. Why do people who have it all seem so desolate? The article goes into detail as to the why—the microaggressions, the mansplaining, the working around the clock—but still. People are rude. It's exhausting. But why would their rude make us down-to-the-core miserable?

I close the article and surf to a mommy-blogger who talks about getting up in the morning like it's a bold superhero move. And in the comments, moms like me pat one another on the shoulder for being *so* courageous for peeling those sheets back, planting our feet on the ground, and shoving some cold cereal into our kids. I agree that all of this is quite spectacular, if you're severely depressed. But if you're not, then why would we need a gold medal for getting in the shower? That's not an Olympic sport. That's just life. Or are we all *just that depressed*?

Studies show that money buys happiness, up to a point. Not being able to meet basic needs can be really stressful. Then, the more money we have, the more depressed and anxious we can become. Could this be it? Could we be victims of our own success?

We also know that people are pretty lonely in our society. When we have more money, we buy isolation—bigger houses, bigger yards, personal transportation,

more room on the airplane, vacations to deserted islands, and (most importantly) less dependence on people.

But the cruel, twisted irony is that we belong to one another. That's how God designed us. We not only need one another, but we need to be needed. We have these ever-sucking vacuums within our souls, that can't help but pick up sharp and brutal edges, until we become one tangled up mass of humanity, with all of our rudeness and aggressions. And the more we buy isolation, the more anxious and depressed we become.

When we are miserable, we can numb our feelings with drinks. Or prescription drugs. Or religion. Or sex. Or whatever addiction might entice us. The things that we use to blunt the pain are endless. And that's where the difficulty sets in.

"Self care" is often ugly. We like to think of self care as taking a Lilly-funded sabbatical to some exotic place, or getting a pedicure, or maybe even getting super drunk with people we love. But sometimes it means that we have to deal with those sharp edges. When we numb ourselves, we never feel the pain of the relationships. We don't experience the ache of fear for our children. We cannot burn with rejection from our spouse. We cannot grieve and feel deep sorrow with our friend. Then we rob ourselves, because when we hurt deeply, it is because we love deeply.

I am not saying that relationships should cause pain and I'm certainly not condoning abusive relationships. But I am saying that in healthy, loving relationships, pain is inevitable, and happiness happens as a release from anger, fear, and sadness.

So, let's go out with our friends. And if we need a medal to get out of bed, then go for that gold. But then we need to admit our problems and realize that numbing our pain is not self-care. Living through the dark nights of our soul--it's ugly, but that's often what it looks like.