“Everything I did, I did for this family”: Neoliberal Care in HBO’s *Succession*

Harriet Barton (University of Liverpool)

Abstract

This paper considers representations of care and negligence in HBO’s *Succession*. Focusing on season three, it argues that *Succession* stages a relationship between an oldguard neoliberalism and the generations that succeeded it; this relationship is complicated in the show by having Logan Roy, the Roy patriarch, also the CEO of global media conglomerate Waystar RoyCo. With the decline of Logan’s health introduced in season one, the theme of care is introduced which runs beneath many plotlines in the show. Do the Roy children, who have benefitted from Logan’s success, feel obliged to care for their father whilst also vying for his position as CEO? Caring for Logan equals preserving an order that’s out of touch with contemporary concerns. The essay looks at the children’s care for their father, but also at how Logan represents a particularly neoliberal brand of ‘care’ that is entirely selfinterested, blurring the boundaries between fatherly care and a CEO's financial concerns. Logan’s refrain, “Everything I did, I did for this family” echoes the failed neoliberal promise of generational betterment that’s been present since the 1980s. The paper argues that any care Logan extends towards his children only exists in tandem with the best interests of the company: the division between family and company is a dangerously flimsy one wherein the CEO’s relationships with his children are based on their fear and desire for acceptance.

Keywords: Succession, neoliberalism, neoliberal care, family, generational betterment.

Jesse Armstrong's television show *Succession* (2018-) centres on the Roy family and their billion-dollar media conglomerate, Waystar RoyCo, following the decision of CEO and father Logan Roy (Brian Cox) to not step down and hand over the reins to his son, Kendall (Jeremy Strong). Over three seasons, it traces the desperate scramble by Kendall and his siblings, Roman (Kieran Culkin) and Shiv (Sarah Snook), to gain their father's respect enough to be deserving of the top job. Succession is a biting family drama wherein the most venomous lines are heard not between businessmen but between parent and child, an exploration of family relations diseased by a neoliberal ideology which idolises the 'competitive man, wholly immersed in global competition [...] guided by self-interest,' (Dardot & Laval, 2017, p. 256, emphasis in original). Neoliberal economist Gary Becker argues that a naturalised 'family altruism' stands outside of free-market selfishness and competition (Becker, 1991, p. 277), but I contend that the show exhibits a unique brand of neoliberal family 'care' that is selfish, money-driven, and bolstered by the structure of the family as a system that sees beneficiaries receive 'care' in the form of inherited wealth and status. In a neoliberal society, any redemptive pretence to 'family values' only faintly shrouds the emotionally empty care practices that nurture a collective of individuals.

Armstrong's decision to locate a family drama within the cut-throat sphere of billion-dollar business allows the show to forefront a cynical look at the institutional apathy borne from neoliberal politics. Previous commentators have explored the relationship between neoliberalism and care through the context of state welfare, but I will turn towards what happens to relations within the family unit when each member is infected with the same desire to compete. The Roys are a neoliberal family – a microcosm of neoliberal society at large, a circuitous breeding programme wherein individuals are reared on the ideology and supply-side economics of the father-leader until they realise his nature enough to fight for his position at the top. Through the logic of inherited wealth, the show raises the question: is financial support a form of care? This paper ultimately decides not. *Succession* is a satire in the most extreme sense, a study of severe emotional negligence in a man who is the neoliberal homoeconomicus, the idealised economic man who has climbed his way to the top. Logan is almost a caricature of the neoliberal subject, so absolutely does he embody neoliberalism's society of 'private, highly individualized enterprises locked in competition with each other [...] out to achieve the American Dream for [them]selves, to best [their] peers' (Wilson, 2017, p. 122). Some argue that the Roys are presented as 'not a family at all, just a conglomerate of unintegrated assets,' but it is precisely because they are a family that Succession can so acutely satirise neoliberal sensibilities like individualism, atavism, and the invasion of market practices into every sphere of existence (Mance, 2021; Brown, 2015).

One of the main contentions in the show is the children's struggle to reconcile care and love in the face of their father's declining health and business declension. The problem for the Roys is that their father is also their CEO: a problem that impacts Logan's version of care towards his children as much as their care towards him. In the Roy world, there is no care without expected return on investment, and there is certainly no unconditional, parental love. It is a type of care that emerges thanks to neoliberal ideology of wealth accumulation, which as Melinda Cooper (2017, p. 246) says, sees parents act as 'private investors in the future capital of their children,' capital that should start showing returns in a specific version of family obligation towards the

parent. By using a family business, Succession explores how the apathy borne from individualist, neoliberal ideology is a pathological disease that no one can overcome. Garrett et al write that:

> [t]o take care of oneself and one's family in the neoliberal sense means to create a realm of invulnerability, a denial of mutual interdependence, a dis-engaged engagement with one's psyche and the world. (2016, p. x-xi)

'Care' here is solely monetary, and latent in these words is a recognition that a neoliberal sensibility is critically at odds with inter-family relationships and emotional care by virtue of its 'dis-engaged engagement,' 'denial of mutual interdependence,' and 'invulnerability'. To the emotional damage of the Roy children, in Logan's reality care is functional and purely loveless. For new generations bred on neoliberalism –an infected progeny– optics of care are captured to attend to the changing rules of the business game. To close this paper, I will examine questions for further study: if neoliberalism's atomised individualism can disregard family bonds and brew rivalry in the bloodline, what does this indicate for any care towards the wider world? And, how is the influential weight of Shiv's position as a woman in business compromised by her politics of care?

It is necessary to briefly summarise the events of the first two seasons to contextualise the theme of care in *Succession*. Two plotlines run parallel from the pilot episode: the decline of Logan's health, and the declining relevance of Waystar RoyCo as it strays out of touch with the rise of Big Tech. The two are overtly and irrevocably linked in the show, with Logan's stroke in the pilot coinciding with son Kendall's plans to acquire rising tech start-up Vaulter. Kendall's acquisition of the tech company would be an action taken in the service of his own growing success as a legitimate rival to his father's power. There is thus a clear antagonism between an old-guard business ideology and a new fleet that seeks to maintain some relevance in a world of social media and online news, with the former being perpetuated so long as Logan is healthy and in power.

The show sees Kendall's failed attempt at a vote of no confidence in his father, his support for a private equity fund to 'bear-hug' Waystar and force a loss of control, and Shiv's failed aspirations to take over. All the while, Big Tech is growing and Waystar need to move to keep their stock value steady and prevent the bank from pursuing a historical debt of $3 billion. We learn that the Roy children's entire inheritance is held up in stock, and that their financial future is directly affected by the success of the company — which they do not see as sustainable with their ageing father at the helm. This is what the Roys care for, in the sense that they have an interest in the outcome: the continued financial success of Waystar. It is a trait inherited from their father, who, when needing a 'blood sacrifice' following a sexual assault scandal in Waystar's cruise division, was willing to send Kendall to jail to protect the company.

The Care Ethics of Logan Roy

It would be remiss to examine the Roy patriarch's brand of care towards his children without first considering what the show reveals of Logan's childhood. The total of his history is as such: he was

born in Dundee to a working-class mother, who sent him and his brother Ewan (James Cromwell) to live in the US on a farm with their Uncle Noah. Between then and the present, Logan has headed the fifth-largest media conglomerate in the world. In a season one episode, 'Austerlitz,' the Roys have joined at eldest Connor's (Alan Ruck) ranch to undertake family therapy, ostensibly set up by Logan as a PR move. It goes in typical Roy fashion: deflections, humour, nothing truly being addressed. The Roys are never together in frame, a cinematographic decision which sees them isolated in claustrophobic close and medium shots, despite being metres from each other. We receive some insight in the last scene of the episode as Logan emerges from a swimming pool where his wife Marcia (Hiam Abbas) has been teaching him how to swim — a weakness that his children poked fun at earlier. We are shown scars across Logan's back, just one fragment of his mostly withheld history that the show's writers scatter amidst the quips and business jargon. Taken with earlier allusions to his Uncle Noah's temper, we make the reasonable assumption that Logan was physically abused as a child. Logan is all too aware of this reality: he was not so much raised with love than reared with fear, and still, he has succeeded. What, then, does this mean for his own relationships with his children?

Logan chooses a particular version of care, which is first and foremost seen through the medium of money followed up with small, transparent encouragements which are ultimately for his own financial gain. Melanie Richards writing on care ethics and power, has argued that:

> caring for one's own offspring is at the forefront of a person's moral concerns. This is because the ethics of care emphasises the responsibility to respond to the needs of those dependent on us. (2022, p. 4)

Logan, who lacked connection with parental figures and did not depend on them for affection or care, and regardless became successful, ostensibly finds no use for an ethics of care when raising his own children. The 'responsibility,' to the 'needs of those dependent' was surely outsourced to nannies and other carers through Logan's access to money: this kind of care was not one of Logan's 'moral concerns,' if he has such things at all. If we view Logan as a caricature of neoliberal individualism, then his lack of historical family interdependence makes perfect sense to his success: he has only ever been responsible for himself. What the ethics of care can say for Logan Roy is that '[his] relations are part of what constitutes [his] identity,' (Richards, 2022, p. 5) thereby confirming that damaged relations, or complete lack thereof, constitutes an identity which he wants to instil in his own children. Yet, Logan does employ some version of care – one that sees his children remain dependent on him for money and power, one that ultimately benefits himself through his children's dedication to their own success, which is the success of the company. It is a version of care that is absent of love or connection. What is most harrowing in Succession is how much of his fathering Logan has taken from the neoliberal handbook, how much the philosophy of 'caring' for his children and the philosophy of building a business are the same things to him.

By the beginning of season three, we know what parental care looks like for Logan: sacrificing Kendall; convincing Shiv she will get the CEO position before revoking the offer; hitting Roman and pitting all three against each other for blood sport. Whether he behaves this

way to harden them in his own self-image and thus destine them for the same success is ambiguous, so inextricable is the children's success in the company from the success of the company itself and therefore the success of Logan's legacy. Care for Logan is, if present at all (through money or the proffering of powerful roles in the company), only a vested interest in his children as shareholders, employees, threats, and players in his game. Basic care is an uncomplicated trickle-down economic policy by virtue of his own success, and the optics of love can be conjured if and when the children need it to be pulled back on track.

The source of Logan's conflicted relationship with his children, which they finally come to realise in season three, is that the wealthy environment in which they grew up means they can never truly be like him. All the division, neglect and competition has been Logan's fruitless attempt to mould the Roys into some ersatz version of himself. What Logan knows, and reminds his children, is that they never had anything that he did not give them whereas he never depended on a parent in this way. Therefore, he emotionally cripples his children and their familial relationship with him in an imitation of his own family relationship which leaves only a business relationship. If he gives them the emotional care they long for, Logan knows this will make them 'soft' and not the 'killers' he wants them to be. In episode three, 'The Disruption,' Logan mocks his most emotionally traumatised child, Roman, for having an interview about family memories and the distance between them. At this point in the season, he is silently grooming Roman to be his successor. The two speak on Logan's turf, the office, and he jibes Roman: 'Ow… I want my Daddy; I never figured you for a f****t'. However, the children cannot forego the emotional weight of him being their father, and the more he beats them down, the more they want to destroy him. They may be hardened to the world, but in season three they direct their spite towards him specifically.

Kendall Roy, who has chased his father for years and exists in the muddy area between wanting to destroy him and wanting to be him, finally appears to resign in a telling scene in 'Chiantishire'. He asks Logan to buy him out of the business and cut all ties. The seven-minute scene, a dinner between father and son, pointedly depicts Kendall's damaged emotional state, Logan's lack of parental morality and just what a lack of care in the pursuit of success has done to their relationship. In a dramatic opening, Logan suspects Kendall has poisoned his meal. If Logan had successfully reared his child in his own ruthless image, it would be feasible for Kendall to go to these lengths to secure his potential succession in the company. And so, in a chilling act, Logan calls out Kendall's son Iverson to try his food, eyes fixed on Kendall. In the ongoing 'game' of savagery between Logan and Kendall, Logan proves that he is irreparably worse: he would happily sacrifice an innocent to show his stripes. Kendall, a touch incredulous but mostly numb, replies, 'You think I want you dead? I'll be broken when you die,' which in this business-talk context an audience cannot entirely believe. For the Roys, every context is a business context, without room for family emotion despite Logan's protestations that everything he did was 'for the family'.

After Kendall admits he could not shape the company how he liked, Logan sharply reminds him there is no family-friendly, 'knights on horseback' narrative to the business of 'this life': it is a 'scramble for a knife in the mud'. The jump, then, from Kendall's aversion to Logan's death to

promising 'I won't even speak at your memorial,' is not so jarring when we realise this is a code-switch the Roy children have navigated their whole lives. It is subconscious: a way to manoeuvre a biological desire for a parent's love and care that is suffocated by the ideology of competition and individualism. So too, is this how the Roys reconcile the merger of CEO and father: they clip their emotion. Kendall wants out, now, admitting 'I don't wanna be you,' and it is obvious he means as both a father and a businessman. Logan, though, sees his moral superiority as false – how can Kendall be a good person when he learned everything from Logan, when Logan has cleaned up his mess? So, when Logan ignores Kendall's request for a buy-out, replying 'fuck off, kiddo,' to his claim that Logan is a bad person, the score rolls back in with stirring, imposing strings and we know that 'kiddo' is nothing more than an infantilising moniker: in the Waystar reality, Kendall is both a bad investment and an opponent that has walked from the game, and there is no family relationship to return to either.

Throughout season three as Logan pursues his own desires and decisions, looping each child in when he sees fit, he overlooks their own interests. If Logan plans to sell the company and his brand of care can no longer be explained away as rearing the Roys to take the top position, the children can turn and are quick to feel the effects of a well-worn emotion: neglect. If Logan truly had an ethics of care, he would accept partiality in moral judgements and consider his children (Richards, 2022). But, because Logan sees his children as players in his game without any emotional connection, he does not have the capacity to make a judgement influenced by their best interests. Logan's self-interest ultimately curates a coalition intent, at the final episode, to stop him.

Conflicts of Interest: The Roy Children

Succession presents the Roy children as struggling with a changing cultural and business landscape and questioning whether they owe their father anything. Matters are further complicated by his declining health and the new capacity they are forced to view him in: a man vulnerable to human decay in his twilight years. The unanswerable question of whether they view Logan as a monolith or as a father governs many of their half-hearted attempts to challenge him, or help him, or destroy him completely. When he is delirious with a UTI at the shareholders' meeting, Shiv is deeply uncomfortable and does not know how to act. More pressingly, she needs him to present as healthy on stage. It seems that generally, however, they still expect some level of care from Logan as a father – to their own detriment. But what duty of care do the Roys have towards Logan?

It is largely implied that the Roys' best childhood memories are with each other, not Logan. Roman refuses to support Shiv's smear campaign against Kendall because 'he taught [him] how to aim [his] pee-pee in the toilet,' not his father. The fishing trip that Roman brought up in the interview was with Connor, not Logan. Logan has (directly or not) given the children a lavish lifestyle and billions in inheritance packets: this is not care, but do the children 'owe' him for the finance he provided? And is this debt obligation financial, or emotional? Two scenes between parent and children in season three depict how this perceived family obligation is stuck in a spider's web of conflicting interests.

In episode four, 'Lion in the Meadow,' swing-vote minority shareholder Josh Aronson (Adrien Brody) invites Logan and Kendall to meet at his house to discuss whether their conflict might affect his investment. It is a revealing sequence that studies the power conflict between Logan and Kendall, a meeting set up 'where father and son will have to be in each other's presence and act like they care,' because conflict is bad for returns (Sepinwall, 2021, np.). Aronson walks the Roys through the sand dunes of his private island, and it quickly becomes apparent that Logan is not physically capable. He wheezes, winces, and slows down. Multiple pantomimes are happening simultaneously on the walk: Kendall and Logan must appear united to prevent Aronson backing a hostile takeover bid; Logan must appear physically and mentally sound enough to be in a position of power; Logan floats the potential of Kendall taking over (which is a foregone conclusion by now), and Kendall finds himself in the strange position of having to care for his father. This is a business meeting with three players, but the chinks in Logan's health remind Kendall that this is his father, and he is not sure which role he should be playing – shrewd businessman, or supportive son? At first he jibes, 'You want me to run back and get you a banana […]?', undermining Logan's authority within the realms of jest, calling him 'old geezer'. Clearly, though, something is very wrong. Kendall cannot believe that Logan is keeping up the charade, asking 'Can't you even fucking tell him you need a breather? […] Just catch your breath,' and wanting desperately to drop the act, helplessly feeling empathy for a father who reveals to him 'I'd rather get fucked by a sp*c in a shower bloc than see you have [the job]'. Kendall wants his father to allow him to care, to finally admit some vulnerability, and no longer wants the pantomime to be the reality.

Logan eventually collapses, and we see a shot of Kendall, the son, and Aronson, the shareholder, supporting Logan to a resting spot in a symbolic triad that sees Aronson encouraging Logan amid Kendall's silence. In a reality which is all business and no family life, the care and maintenance of Logan Roy is reliance on shareholders and his uneasy children who cannot place themselves in the role of child, employee, or competitor comfortably. Kendall knows that ultimately this kind of care is not reciprocated. We may too soon forget that Logan pulled Kendall out of rehab after 48 hours in season two to go on television to show his support for his father: any care that Logan may have shown through putting Kendall in rehab was immediately displaced by the needs of the business, and Kendall's (blackmailed) obligations to support his father. Still ever desperate to impress Logan, Kendall soon starts trying to talk shop again with Aronson who reminds him: 'why don't you just think about your Dad now?' For Kendall, an impossible task.

Mary V. Wrenn and William Waller (2017, p. 501) pose the definition of 'care' as an activity that is 'the action […] that lead[s] to the development, recovery, and maintenance of autonomy'. All three Roy children know whilst Logan has power and autonomy, things will not change in their favour at Waystar. However, the filial relationship confuses this: they do not ostensibly want their father to actually die to achieve their own ascendency. Often their language merges the two spheres anyway: 'Kill the company, kill Dad'. Only when the Roys stop seeing their father as their father can they effectively act, as the expected care ethic that they falsely ascribe to their relationship leaves them feeling obligated to maintain Logan's health and power and keep his

interests met. The audience feels a strange sense of pride for the Roy children as they speed across Tuscany together, finally abandoning their life-long attempts to bridge the father/CEO chasm. They learn that Logan is planning to sell the company without their input, exiting with a settlement and handing over control to tech giant GoJo, thus jeopardising their chances of succession. Their journey is ultimately to remind him that he is dependent on them: in the divorce settlement, Logan's ex-wife Caroline (Harriet Walter) secured the children a majority in the holding company, meaning that they have a vote in any change of company control.

By banding together, they form a supermajority which would block Waystar's sale and protect their own interests. Shiv asks, 'How do we feel about killing Dad?' to which Kendall replies, 'Pass me the fucking shot gun'. They head to the Tuscan villa by abandoning any attempt at care or love that would influence their actions against Logan. This, an exact embodiment of what their father has been reminding them their whole lives; they were dependent on him, but he would never grant them sufficient emotional care to develop a partiality (Richards, 2022). To beat Logan, they must abandon care for Logan, and realise that the self-interest he has raised them on is a mutual interest that could finally see them ascend the ranks.

The last scene of season three sees the Roy children finally come together in a quasi-collective that ultimately aims to continue their breathless fight for succession under the guise of wanting to keep Logan in the business. It is clear at the season's climax, though, that this change of tack is too late and we see a cynical reaffirmation of Logan's self-serving power. Shiv coaxes him: 'With you at the top, we can take over; without you, we're fucked'. This is a desperately transparent pretention to care for his legacy in the business. All is laid bare now, with the children's own interest clashing with Logan's plan to exit with $5 billion and leave them no control. Logan's disappointment in his children is blatant, with Cox's pained expression letting the audience know before he tells his children that he is already one step ahead, they just could not see. Kendall asks what Logan would do with this settlement, 'put it on your pile?', to which Logan confirms, yes. Logan has dropped all pretence to care for the future of his children, telling them to 'make [their] own pile' and experience 'adversity, like me'. His resentment for the life he provided is such that he is intent on removing all assurances for them in his company, and with the phone on speaker he imparts the death blow: he and their mother have revised the terms of the divorce agreement, removing the children's veto power.

Powerless in the company, their futures in limbo, and any loyalty to a parental bond severed, the Roys are floored. This was the final act from Logan, joining with their mother in a reassertion of the legitimacy of financial self-interest over parental care in Succession. Logan lays it out plainly: this was the better plan for him, no-one else mattered. In a crushing exchange, Logan asks Roman, 'What've you got in your fucking hand?' to which Roman, eternally desperate for his father's love, replies, 'I dunno, fucking, love?' The subtext here is clear: 'why should I secure your futures?' 'I don't know, because we're your children?' If their family bond does not matter to Logan, it cannot matter to the children. But Roman has for too long been naïve on this point, failing to see that family obligation to care will never matter to Logan. Logan bellows, 'you come for me…with love?' and the silence rings out for a beat, registering the weight of the word, its persistent irrelevance within the room, within the Roy family. The Roys' world is a cut-throat

scramble to the top alone, where the person beside you making their own pile of billions and killing their competitors may feasibly be your own father.

The crucial takeaway from the final scene, though, is that in acting against their father, the Roys act like their father. And it might have worked, had Shiv's erstwhile-harmless husband Tom Wambsgans (Matthew Macfadyen) not pursued his own interests and betrayed his wife by telling Logan of their planned coup, inciting Logan's decision to revise the agreement. In a scene before the confrontation, we see Tom ask cousin Greg (Nicholas Braun) – source of comedic relief and a comparative tonic to the Roys – if he wants a 'deal with the devil'. Tom previously doted on Shiv, and Greg bumbled around between the cousins, but it is clear now that they are choosing their own path over previous loyalties. The fall of Tom and Greg is *Succession*'s resounding message: this is a poisonous mindset that none in the domain can escape. Moreover, the fact of Tom's betrayal being what re-affirmed Logan's superiority confirms that the homoeconomicus may be an outdated, prehistoric ideology, a neoliberal ghost story (Fleming, 2017) that cannot stand against the human need for connection, but it always wins. It is a ghost story that haunts down the generations, severing family loyalties, and ethics of care and love, to pursue solitary success. In the scope of Succession, at least, which Armstrong works hard to confine to the Roy's upper strata of boardrooms and private jets, economic self-interest perpetuates because it is an inherited, diseased mindset — the only thing that binds the Roy members together.

Corporate Care

Succession uses family relationships as a prism through which to explore the place of care and obligation on the journey to economic success. The resonant message is that even within the confines of family, the neoliberal subject will always act in self-interest: care towards family members is captured as a necessary aspect of rearing a useful asset. With family ties mostly severed in the final episode of season three, we can reflect on the show's relationship to aged neoliberal ideologies. So too can we consider how corporations use care in the twenty-first century. What place is there for love and care in society? At its most misanthropic, *Succession* suggests that, like the optics of the Roy children coming together only to eventually fight it out for the top spot, care is something captured in contemporary neoliberalism for perpetual personal gain.

At the close of season three, it appears that the brand of care one may expect between family members has been abandoned. The fact that Logan 'won' points to the pervasiveness of the self-interested mindset. That the children and other extended family members act on the very same instinct as Logan under the guise of care suggests it is being repackaged. But family care could not continue in *Succession*: it is too messy, it gets in the way of progression, it ties characters too tightly to a myth of human connectedness and family obligation that stands at odds with competition, the lifeblood of the Roy family. Armstrong writes into the background of the show the near impossibility of any redemptive arc to the Roy family's apathy: Roman is suggested to be impotent; Shiv resists having children with Tom, and Kendall's relationship to his children is non-existent. There will be no next generation of Roys to elicit genuine care or to require the Roys to act in parental roles, therefore we can view the Roys as purely economic beings.

The Roys are products of a neoliberal system which their father has headed, and their stories are a marked reflection on the mutation of neoliberal care ethics in the modern age. As Rebecca Mead (2021, np.) notes, 'all the Roys have been poisoned by the toxic nature of the family fortune, and Armstrong refuses to impose on them the kind of artificial personal growth that fosters an easy bond with the audience'. Armstrong writes not an opposition to Logan as the neoliberal kingpin, but a re-assertion of its power, a chilling growing into neoliberalism, exploring its potential to capture even care rhetoric with the goal of self-betterment. What do these subjects do with the ideology that bore them, that set them up with millions? How do they care at all, without self-interest? They cover our eyes, *Succession* suggests, and make the reality of their apathy more palatable.

Commentators note that, in an allegorical turn which reflects US politics more broadly, it is unclear what Waystar stands for in the third season 'beyond its own preservation' (Bastani, 2021, np.). Aaron Bastani writes that 'the passing of power between Logan and his children is a totem for boomers and millennials – and their phoney war at the level of the elite,' a war 'phoney' because, ultimately, the elite interests will always serve the elite, regardless of generational difference. The interests of the Roys are the same, namely preserving the success of oneself. Preservation of an aged neoliberal ideology in *Succession* is tapping into whatever is currently fashionable, politically speaking. And that, in contemporary society, is care-washing: corporations commodifying care and empathy to stay relevant and improve their market capitalisation. Shiv and Kendall, most notably in their turn away from family formulations of care, indulge in what Andreas Chatzidakis and Jo Littler call:

> practices in which companies try to cleanse themselves from the connotations of corporate exploitation, and instead cathect their brand to a mood, an affect, an ethos, an idea of care. (2021, p. 2)

For the self-interested Roys, if corporate care is now *en vogue,* then they will adapt their business practices to reflect the body politic.

This type of care has only been emergent in brief flashes in *Succession*, so focused as it is on the inter-Roy relationships rather than those between the corporation and the wider world. As the children fracture from the company and therefore the family reality as defined by Logan, we see how they re-package care to remain relevant. One of the biggest storylines of season two, the reveal of a broad sexual assault scandal in the cruises division, is largely weaponised by Kendall early in season three as he brands himself a steward of the silenced. He shouts 'fuck the patriarchy' just in time for a paparazzi shot and appropriates the language of the politically engaged to appeal to the disenfranchised. This, however, is short-lived. At Shiv's Waystar town-hall to address the sexual assault allegations, Kendall orchestrates an interruption which sees Nirvana's 'Rape Me' playing out of loudspeakers, revealing his insincerity and poor taste. Like Logan, for Kendall this is all a game: who can care the most? He even admits that he is 'not a suicide bomber' – he would not go so far in his Waystar smear campaign as to impact the shareholder vote, and his place on the board. At his birthday party, he has a breakdown over the

façade of it all, admitting, 'this is pathetic…I wish I was home,' and his crusade to care fades once again into a more general antipathy towards Logan. Further avenues of thought could be dedicated to this kind of surface-level corporate care in the show.

As a final thought, I turn briefly to an aspect of *Succession* with lucrative potential that this paper has not explored due to the scope of my study: the obligation of the successful woman within a male-dominated family business. Shiv is all too aware of her position and potential to exploit the commodification of female bosses in corporate firms. Logan is aware of this too, dangling the CEO position in front of her, but can never seem to commit himself to the optics of care if it also means giving his daughter something that she wants. When Shiv refuses to side with Kendall in episode two, he reveals he wanted her only because '[she's] the girl, girls count double now,' saying that people see her as a 'token woman, wonk, woke snowflake – I don't think that but the market does'. All the Roys are aware of how they can use the optics of social responsibility and inclusivity to boost their market capitalisation, not for any sincere care for the future of the corporate landscape. *Succession* uses Shiv's pre-supposed moral superiority, though, only to paint a bleaker picture of the renewal of capitalist self-interest: the worst of the neoliberal elite will use sympathetic aspects of their identity that speak to a burgeoning social justice movement and market them to further their own prospects. Bastani highlights that:

> like Kendall, Shiv isn't that different to her father; it's simply the done thing for their generation to appeal outwardly to progressive sensibilities. (2021, np.)

Shiv's sympathies with social justice (working as a political advisor in season two for Gill Eavis, a Bernie Sanders stand-in) are an empty vessel without any care. Once she discovers that the company were spying on Kendall's children for sellable gossip, she professes, 'that's disgusting […] there's a line'. Yet, Shiv personally paid one of the cruise victims off to not testify against the company, thus pleasing Logan and saving her own back. Care can only go so far: it is down to the whims of the new breed homoeconomicus and their current business move to dictate its limits.

Succession presents a claustrophobic corporate environment wherein 'winning' is the end that justifies any means. This icy landscape is the Roys' all-consuming reality, crafted by a CEO that has never allowed himself to be seen as a father. The children struggle with their father's apathy before embodying it themselves to advance their own careers. If we do see any care or empathy in Succession, like the Roy children we must be quick to remind ourselves that in a larger world crafted by Logan Roy, there is always a bigger picture, a play, a game, to further one's own success. The moment this is forgotten, and one indulges in the myth of family connection, one misses the next move. In a relentless battle to the top, care optics are co-opted by father and children alike. Kendall tells his siblings that at Waystar, 'the milk's going sour,' but the institutional apathy is genetic: they have all drunk the milk.

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