

DEL DICHO AL HECHO, HAY MUCHO TRECHO/DON'T TALK THE TALK IF YOU CAN'T WALK THE WALK:

FEMINISTA SCHOLARS NAVIGATING THE HEIGHTENED HORRORS OF ACADEMIA IN A MULTIPLE PANDEMIC REALITY

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Abstract

Employing the method of pláticas (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016), we, feminista Scholars of Color, share our experiences of exacerbated inequities during a historic moment of multiple, intersecting pandemics—COVID-19 and systemic oppression—at a land-grant, Hispanic Serving Institution located in the southwest borderlands. The first two authors are Mexicanas and first-generation students and scholars. The third author is Arabyya Palestinian feminist. We had pláticas to engage with the anti-racist calls on the streets. The prompts for our pláticas revolved around the “current condition” of our lives in these pandemics and our responses to them on the personal, the professional and the political. We reflected on our responses. Our testimonios surfaced in our pláticas. They revealed the heightened horrors of academia. They also revealed our understanding of our collective selves and politics, and curriculum studies. We co-created a collective testimonio text

(Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012) to weave and theorize ourselves within the multiple intersecting pandemics of this moment. We situated ourselves in our specific workplace and drew on testimonio scholarship and Critical Race Theories to contextualize the micro/macro systemic oppression that continues to heighten in academia and society. As feminists of Color, we experienced firsthand how to strengthen our solidarity and compassionate activism. We enacted the Mexican proverb, “del dicho al hecho, hay mucho trecho” as a praxis that opened the possibilities for pedagogical and curricular change—a change that keeps us less fractured and re/membered.

Keywords: Testimonio, pláticas, assaultive speech, spirit murdering, pandemic, solidarity

DEL DICHO AL HECHO, HAY MUCHO TRECHO/ DON'T TALK THE TALK, IF YOU CAN'T WALK THE WALK: FEMINISTA SCHOLARS NAVIGATING THE HEIGHTENED HORRORS OF ACADEMIA IN A MUL- TIPLE PANDEMIC REALITY

As the Latina Feminist Group (2001) asserts: Our body “re/members” the “agravios, the assaults—our bodies chronicle what they endure... marked by a history of raced-gendered violence, persecution, and subjugation,” and yet, “our bodies give testimony, our bodies awaken” as we begin to heal (p. 263). In this article, we offer our testimonios that surfaced as we employed the method of pláticas (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016)—we, feminista Scholars of Color. We share our experiences of exacerbated inequities during a historic moment of multiple intersecting pandemics—COVID-19 and systemic oppression—at a land-grant, Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) in the southwest borderlands. We bear witness to how we navigated academia’s heightened horrors in a multiple pandemic reality. We also share how even though we work at an HSI, there are policies and practices that remain as talk—as folks do not or cannot walk the walk. Through pláticas, we engaged with the anti-racist calls on the streets. The prompts for our pláticas revolved around the “current condition” of our lives in these pandemics and our responses to them on the personal, the professional, the epistemic, and the political levels. These testimonios that surfaced in the pláticas are about academia’s heightened horrors, living in a multiple pandemic reality. They are also about how, through our understanding of our collective selves and politics, and curriculum studies, we enacted the proverb, “del dicho al hecho, hay mucho trecho.” This collective enactment was our praxis that opened the possibilities for pedagogical and curricular change—a change that keeps us less fractured and re/membered. In *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios* (Latina Feminist Group, 2001), section three is titled “The Body Re/members,” and it includes how “Our bodies document how women’s bodies are damaged,” (p. 263), metaphorically fractured, broken, dismembered.

We first discuss our methodology of pláticas~testimonios (Flores Carmona, et al., 2018). We then describe the process that moved the three of us to have pláticas that led to the sharing of our testimonios. Having pláticas about how we came together and sharing our positionalities was essential to our writing process and to how we experience academia's horrors. After that, we draw on testimonio scholarship and Critical Race Theories (CRT) to contextualize the micro/macro systemic oppression that continues to heighten in academia and society. We then share a collective testimonio text (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012), that weaved our pláticas and allowed us to theorize ourselves. We conclude by offering consejos/advice on strengthening our solidarity and compassionate activism and how our collective enactment of the proverb, "del dicho al hecho, hay mucho trecho" is a praxis for possibilities and pedagogical and curricular change.

PLÁTICAS AND TESTIMONIO METHODOLOGY

PLÁTICAS

Pláticas are "informal conversations that take place in one-on-one or group spaces" (Fierros & Delgado Bernal 2016, p. 117). Something is always learned from the pláticas as we bear witness and learn from shared "experiences, stories . . . and interpretations that impart us with the knowledge connected to personal, familial, and cultural history" (Fierros & Delgado Bernal 2016, p. 99). Plática methodology asserts the platicadoras (those doing the pláticas) as co-creators or "co-constructors of knowledge" (Fierros & Delgado Bernal 2016, p. 111). The prompts for our pláticas revolved around the "current condition" of our lives facing these pandemics and our responses to them on the personal, the professional, the epistemic, and the political levels. Testimonios then surfaced in the pláticas.

TESTIMONIO

Testimonio is a feminista approach that "entails a first person oral or written account, drawing on experiential, self-conscious, narrative practice to articulate an urgent voicing of something to which one bears witness" (Blackmer Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012, p. 525).

Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, and Flores Carmona (2012) state that to testimoniar is “the act of recovering *papelitos guardados*—previous experiences otherwise silenced or untold—and unfolding them into a narrative that conveys personal, political, and social realities” (p. 364). By divulging our realities/experiences, the three of us had *pláticas* about the need to be in solidarity with each other as we navigated the heightened horrors of academia in a multiple pandemic reality. Indeed, *testimonio* telling, according to Hamzeh (2020), is “a spontaneous mode of telling truths to build up collective solidarity” (p. 15).

PLÁTICAS~TESTIMONIOS

Flores Carmona et al. (2018) term the merging of *pláticas* and *testimonio* methodology as *pláticas~testimonios*. Hamzeh (2020) builds on this merging of feminist methodologies by stating that those of us who are “practicing them or invited to act them all bear witness and learn from sharing intimate memories of oppression and ambiguities about daily personal and communal struggles” (p. 14). However, this connection, this bridge between the two methodologies, only happens after having/enacting/engaging with deep, critical *reflexión* (Espino, et al., 2012; Flores Carmona, 2014)—as individuals and as a group (Flores Carmona, et al. 2018). For example, Brenda had to reflect on how she had ended up feeling isolated and marginalized in her department. Brenda’s act of *reflexión* showed its transformative potential and will to right a wrong. She was moved to walk her talk. She moved from “del dicho, al hecho.”

COMING TOGETHER: PRELUDE TO OUR PLÁTICAS~TESTIMONIOS

We, two Mexicanas who are first-generation students and scholars and one Arabyya Palestinian feminist, entered the academy through different doors, at different points in our lives, and into various departments. While we knew that some of our differences helped build our solidarity, we did not know how our endurance of the violence in academia would help us address the call for this paper. We work at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) and Minority Serving Institution (MSI) located on imperial/colonial imposed borders. We are continually maneuvering and negotiating our ways through institutional horrors,

the structural intersecting pandemics of racism, sexism, and colonialism with COVID-19.

An initial honest and vulnerable *plática*, by phone, between Judith and Brenda set us up on the journey of getting to know each other's struggles and resistance—viscerally. When Judith ran into this call for papers, she knew our experiences would be a good fit and invited Manal. We decided to open our first group *plática* by sharing how and why we came together.

Brenda: I am originally from the borderlands area. In the fall of 2018, I achieved a long-time goal of landing a tenure-track position. I came back home. I set out to read my new colleagues' work, and Judith stood out as the scholar whose work most aligned with my own and whose writing most spoke to my heart. I introduced myself to her at a welcome event. Judith responded by immediately inviting me to lunch. At lunch, I was struck by how warm, honest, and supportive she was, so much that I confessed my big secret—I was pregnant.

Judith: I met Brenda in the fall of 2018 while I was on sabbatical. We met for lunch and connected across our shared struggles with pregnancy loss. We didn't end up having a follow-up lunch as I had suggested. I thought I had said or done something wrong. Upon my return from sabbatical in spring 2019—I began encountering bullying and was pushed out of the college where Brenda and I were colleagues. When Brenda reached out to me in March 2020, I was hesitant to reconnect but realized it was the same perpetrators going after Brenda who had forced me out, and I refused to reproduce injustice. I knew first-hand how isolation feels, how lonely I was. I refused to do the same to Brenda.

Manal: I didn't know Brenda. Judith called me and said, "Can we talk? This Chicana faculty just reached out to me. I don't know what her intentions are. Do you think they sent her to do something to me?" I was worried that Judith would be re-traumatized in one way or another, even by hearing the name of that person who pushed her out. Judith told me that her heart was beating fast when this faculty called her. She was scared and

worried, but at the same time, Judith needed to find out what this faculty [Brenda] wanted. I encouraged her to give this faculty a chance and that I would be close by if she needed me.

Brenda: When Judith contacted Manal to get advice on connecting with me, it was an opportunity not only to find out what was going on but also to reconnect. Once we talked, the three of us decided that injustice should not prevail. We came together to fight back intentionally and to enact a collective solidarity.

Judith: Once we had our pláticas, recorded and transcribed, we realized we had pláticas~testimonios. We shared the context and the micro and macro systemic oppression that we have endured; we theorized our revealed testimonios. The result of our theorizing brought together our theories, methodologies, and pedagogical strategies and here, enunciated our collective experiences of oppression in academia.

Brenda: It was one month into the COVID-19 pandemic when I decided to reach out to Judith. I had ghosted her nearly a year earlier after senior faculty in leadership at my institution had pressured me into ceasing all communication with her, but I had found myself in the same position as her, isolated and alienated, trying to make sense of the aggressions I was experiencing. Now I know that she was hesitant to reconnect with me and that she called Manal to consult on responding to me or not. I understood that my actions had had an indelible impact on the three of us. The Latina Feminist Group (2001) describe how our bodies endure aggressions—an onslaught of assaultive speech and actions that have a lasting impact on us (Delgado, 1989). The pandemic aggravated the impact of the institutional violence that we each already faced.

This is how we came together.

TESTIMONIO TEXT: MULTIPLE PANDEMICS AND THE HEIGHTENED HORRORS OF THE ACADEMY

Since March 2020, COVID-19 has rampaged the world and disproportionately impacted colonized people/People of Color. White

supremacy has been tolerated and encouraged to counter-protest the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. The current U.S. administration has attempted to silence and censor Critical Race Theories, and critical pedagogies in higher education via an executive order and university administrations have enforced unprecedented austerity measures. Locally, the U.S.-Mexico border has been closed since March 2020, and the university campus where we work also went online. The COVID-19 pandemic has accentuated inequities because of these “borders” not only in society but in higher education. With this context, the group pláticas, between the three of us, opened the space for testimonios about multiple pandemics, COVID-19 and systemic oppression, and the resulting heightened horrors of academia which we have endured and continue experiencing. For us to get to this collaboration, we had “to initiate the pláticas that move[d] us to testimonio sharing and [enacting] reflexión throughout, a personal connection ... [was] essential and a level of trust among us [was] foundational” (Flores Carmona et al., 2018, p. 45).

To theorize our pláticas~testimonios, we employ the concepts of “intersectionality” (Crenshaw, 1993), m(other)work, being in Brenda’s case a m(other) scholar, (Caballero, et al., 2019), assaultive speech, and spirit murdering (Williams, 1991). These are the consequences of higher education institutions replicating injustice and inequities through policies and practices disguised as social justice. Our pláticas~testimonios demonstrate how our collective solidarity and compassionate activism during this multiple pandemic reality opened possibilities of urgent pedagogical change and kept us less fractured and “re/membered” (Latina Feminist Group, 2001). The three of us theorize from multiple identity axes. We also drew on Critical Race Theories to unpack how we have specifically experienced “assaultive speech,” “words that wound,” and “microaggressions” in the context of an HSI/MSI on the México-U.S. border.

INTERSECTIONALITY AND M(OTHER)WORK

Kimberlé Crenshaw (1993), a critical legal scholar, coined the concept of intersectionality. Intersectionality allows us to see how Women of Color, especially first-generation students and scholars, experience higher education within interlocked and overlapping subordination

structures, such as racism, sexism, and classism. In Brenda's case, the identity of being a mother scholar also compounded her multiple identity reality since "the university is seldom held accountable for the institutional violence and exploitation faced by first-generation, low-income, and working-class Mother-Scholars of Color." (Caballero et al., 2019, p. 6).

Judith: I just read an article in the New York Times that described "issues that women in academia are now facing" (Kramer, 2020, n. p.). The article goes on to say that the pandemic has heightened the "severe versions of longstanding gender gaps that already cause universities to hemorrhage female faculty, particularly women of color" (Kramer, 2020, para #). I add that these exacerbated inequities also require that the experiences of women of Color not be juxtaposed vis-a-vis their male counterparts or with the "archetypical expectation for a college professor" (Lugo Lugo, 2012, p. 43).

Brenda: Right. I speak and write as a Chicana, Mexicana mother scholar. When I revealed to my department that I was pregnant and was told to meet with a senior colleague who had adopted a toddler two decades prior—because she would know about the university policies related to my "situation." She did not know. However, she did go on to ask if I was the type of woman who would stop caring about her career once the baby was born. It became clear that there are gendered and comparative aspects of parenting. The common response to my questions regarding university policies and support was that my male colleague was fine and "he had two" babies when he started the tenure track.

Manal: That logic is very much heteronormative. Casting you as an unproductive scholar because you are a new mother while elevating your male colleague. Your supervisors were not capable of seeing the nuances of gender discrimination in this case. Your supervisors did not have the experience of parenting or bearing children; yet, they felt they could advise you how to balance your parenting and academic responsibilities. They evaluated your performance using the same standard as a new male father who did not bear the child and did not have the same duties as a

new mother. I read this as internalized sexism, but it's more nuanced than that. I cannot assume that because those who evaluated your performance were two women of Color and a lesbian, they can understand your positionalities as a Chicana/fronteriza or can see how your intersecting experiences inform your pedagogy and research.

Brenda: As I continued to insist on information on the tenure-clock extension policy, the tone shifted to an increasingly angry response, "if he didn't need an extension, why do you?" Each time, I wanted to ask if anyone had advice on their experience healing from a traumatic emotional, physical wound of a cesarean surgery or managing the demands of breastfeeding a newborn every three hours while trying to teach and publish.

Judith: When I lost my pregnancy, I went right back to work, and it was applauded. I bounced right back, but they didn't know all the sh** that I was experiencing, emotionally, psychologically, and physically. They didn't care.... The New York Times article (Kramer, 2020) goes on to say that many women academics find it hard to balance work and family responsibilities. When impossible, many of them leave their faculty positions.

Manal: So, there is a lack of institutional support for parents, especially mothers.

Brenda: I never took a day off, I continued teaching through my hospital stay. At no moment did I stop working. I had no leave of absence. Nonetheless, I was "failed" on my faculty review the year my son was born, and my workload was raised for 2020 to "make up for it," despite having an approved extension. I wasn't even upset about this because, knowing I didn't qualify for FMLA and being new to the profession, I didn't know what a fair evaluation would entail. I just wanted to understand the policy but asking for this information was received as the ultimate act of disobedience. How dare I question them when "they've had faculty with cancer who didn't need the extension." It was heightened to the point that I was told the department could

move towards a “non-renewal of contract” if I failed a second time.

Judith: I am reminded of a quote I read by Crittenden (2001) that states that “The ideal worker is ‘unencumbered,’ that is, free of all ties other than those to his job. Anyone who can’t devote all his or her energies to paid work is barred from the best jobs” (pp. 87-99). You, Brenda, were barred from doing your best under the circumstances and you were chastised for it.

Brenda: Right. My male colleague had had two babies and was moving toward becoming an associate professor. I am reminded of Trinh Võ (2012), who stated; “An institution that permits their colleagues to be mistreated instills doubt among faculty of Color that they will be treated fairly when it is their turn to be evaluated” (p. 108). I had doubts and fears.

Judith: Yes, even if one does not have a child, the evaluation process needs to be equitable, not compare your mothering experiences the same as your male counterpart. Since you have three women of Color and a lesbian evaluate you, in that case, according to the policy, they are not discriminating against you—because they are also women.

Manal: That also reveals that when supervisors try to evaluate junior faculty, they are using their power, uncritically and unreflexively, like “oh, I’m a lesbian, that means that I am very much in tune with gender issues” rather than “I’m a lesbian but I’m a different kind of parent” or “I’m not a parent, or “I was not pregnant with a baby or had to nurse them.” They don’t see the complexities or the intersectionality of each faculty’s experiences. They need to intentionally value those faculty’s complex experiences and find ways to support and nourish their teaching and their scholarship. Not looking at each faculty’s positionalities and their intersecting experiences of marginality in society and academia shows that academia’s evaluation of performance is rigged, structurally racist and sexist. At the same time, those who are in positions of power to evaluate junior faculty may also be embodying internal colonialism or be complicit, intentionally

or unintentionally, with systems of oppression. We see that this plática clearly shows that critical, anti-racist feminist scholars routinely withstand the “ravages of institutionalized racism, by the patriarchal structures that accord privilege based on gender and class, and by ... sexism and heterosexism...” (Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 263). Indeed, institutions of higher education cannot engage, nuance or problematize the concept of intersectionality and m(other)work like Brenda’s experience.

In the next section, we share our plática~testimonio about how we experienced microaggressions, assaultive speech, and simultaneous oppression and how these experiences led to what Patricia J. Williams (1991) terms as “spirit murdering.”

ASSAULTIVE SPEECH LEADS TO SPIRIT MURDERING

Assaultive speech is words that wound and are manifested as microassaults or microaggressions. Chester Pierce (1995) asserts that; “Probably the most grievous of offensive mechanisms spewed at victims of racism and sexism are microaggressions” (p. 281). He goes on to say that, “These are subtle, innocuous, preconscious, or unconscious degradations, and putdowns” (p. 281). The microassaults’ cumulative impact can “contribute to diminished mortality, augmented morbidity, and flattened confidence” (p. 281). Flores Niemann (2012) concurs that “Women of color face harsh realities in their professional lives as university faculty members...the quadruple threat of racism, sexism, homophobia, and class-based subordination. This combination of ‘isms’ can be lethal to their careers, bodies, and spirits...” (p. 446). Indeed, these ‘isms’ and microassaults/aggressions can lead to “spirit murdering”.

Critical race and legal scholar Patricia J. Williams (1991) coined the term “spirit murdering” to argue that racism is more than just physical pain. Indeed, racism takes People of Color’s humanity and dignity and leaves them/us with personal, psychological, and spiritual injuries—thus, fracturing our minds, bodies, and spirits.

Judith: In *Presumed Incompetent* (Gutierrez y Muhs, et al., 2012), Trinh Vĩ (2012) reminds us that “Academic institutions are not neutral racial and gender spaces” (p. 94).

Brenda: That's correct! I attended this institution as an undergraduate student. I experienced gender violence as a Mexican immigrant woman. I mostly had White male professors. Now I experience violence as a scholar. Returning to a space of pain and fear, I am most vulnerable. If I'm not docile enough, I will face aggressions. Microassaults and aggressions have been spewed by the leadership in my department. I was told that if I chose to have a second child, I would be risking my career. I was advised to use the breaks, unpaid time to work ahead before considering another pregnancy. There was a dissonance between what I expected from my self-described social-justice, feminist leadership and the actual response I received.

Manal: And, "We know that academic culture notably relies on women to do the bulk of the invisible labor (service work) while at the same time denying them authority [and] credibility" (Cole & Hassle, 2017, p. xii).

Brenda: Since the evaluation and the microaggressions, all I could think of was that I was on the chopping block. When the university looked into this, they did not help me. They condoned and perpetuated the discrimination and institutional violence. According to them, I was afforded accommodations. A reduced course load! But, that was part of a standard job offer, negotiated when I was first hired and before I got pregnant.

Manal: Brenda, you also told us that you were being approached by students who had experienced violence in the classroom. Clearly, this abuse of power was beyond you and was part of the normative practice in the department.

Brenda: Many were students I never had in class, some are going to professors from other institutions for support and then referred back to me by these colleagues. These students have their own stories of reporting and lack of institutional response. They were seeking me out, desperate for support and validation, seeking hope. For example, I was asked to serve as a committee member for a seventh-year doctoral student who was about to defend. This dissertation cited offensive, deficit literature about

the Latinx community in the first chapter. Yet, they went on to draw from critical Chicana scholars to develop the framework and literature review for the second chapter. Like with us, the majority of the senior faculty were complicit in alienating this student during her time in the program. The student explained, “the first chapter is what they are making me write; the second chapter is what’s in my heart. I don’t agree with the first chapter but, at this point, I’ll write whatever they want just to get out.” The student burst into tears of joy when I told them I would not be signing off on their dissertation unless the damaging language was removed.

Judith: How awful. bell hooks (2000) reminds us that “Patriarchal violence....is based on the belief that it is acceptable for a more powerful individual to control others through various forms of coercive force” (p. 61). These acts murder our spirits and, therefore, our will to fight back.

Manal: Many faculty of Color, mostly critical women of Color, have denounced retaliation and, therefore, alienation. I know that the system is broken and does not support claims of multiple oppressions. It’s too much for those in Human Resources (HR) to comprehend.

Brenda: The response from HR was, “your concerns have been appropriately addressed.”

Judith: When I experienced bullying and being pushed out, I filed a grievance and went to HR and to the office of institutional equity. Nothing was done--the structure became complicit. The assaultive speech and spirit murdering are a systemic issue at this HSI, perpetuated by the university leadership. This is part of the multiple pandemic reality we were and continue to experience.

Manal: At the same time, you both were experiencing the systemic injustices/inequities at the university, the Executive Order M-20-34 (2020) from 45’s office was being circulated. The Executive Order states,

...employees across the Executive Branch have been required to attend trainings where they are told that ‘virtually all White people contribute to racism’ ...these trainings have further claimed that there is racism embedded in the belief that America is the land of opportunity. (para. 2)

The Executive Order (2020) goes on,

These types of ‘trainings’ not only run counter to the fundamental beliefs for which our Nation has stood since its inception, but they also engender division and resentment...the Federal government has employees of all races, ethnicities, and religions...we cannot accept our employees receiving training that seeks to undercut our core values as Americans and drive division within our workforce. (para. 3)

The institution failed to take a stand, to take a position against this executive order. Only one of our university leaders publicly stated his opposition to the order. This white-supremacist narrative wants to silence the voices and disregard the experiences of people of color. The inconsistencies and lack of clear communication from the university leadership seemed to suggest that we should “keep doing the social justice work but don’t say you’re doing it.” That leads to the spirit murdering.

Judith: Right, if we don’t comply--we are targets.

Manal: The attacks on critical scholars are part of the pandemics. I’ve been in meetings where somebody is talking about the racial uprising as if it’s not happening as if it was just a minor reaction to George Floyd who was killed, a small protest out of historical context. I’m sorry, but we’re in the midst of racial war. They don’t see it physically in this city. They don’t see its impact and the urgency to act within the university. They are detached from it. They are focused on COVID and budget cuts. Their approach and myopia only instigate inequities.

Judith: These tactics also make people turn against each other. I think there’s something about having access to power that changes people. Divide and conquer only maintains the struc-

ture, maintains the systems in place. This doesn't allow me or you to be seen and heard.

Brenda: This is a multiple pandemic reality. My students are practicing educators and leaders who are dealing with life or death decisions and consequences. They are worried about keeping a campus open which could mean virus spread and death, while a campus closure could mean starving children left further behind or, worse, unsupervised in the hands of abusers. They're trying to be responsive to issues of equity while also trying to avoid becoming targets themselves for doing so, to avoid being labelled radical.

Manal: They go to you for advice and support.

Brenda: Yes. I'm trying to adapt my research and grant writing in response to the horrors we're seeing with the deaths of our people, all while trying to figure out how to protect my own family from this virus and financial ruin, how to protect my career and reputation, how to do all this without childcare for my toddler or a single ally in my college. As a mother scholar, don't forget to wash the laundry and order groceries. The pressure was and continues to be immense.

Judith: I don't know how you do it. Sounds stressful.

Brenda: Frankly, my partner and I feel I have nothing left to lose, and I don't have much left to give. If I'm not fired, I'm likely to quit any day. He desperately wants me to quit for the sake of our family.

Manal: Unpacking multiple pandemics and how it looks in our relationships and families, in our pedagogy, and in our solidarity is why we came together. Our experiences at the university have exacerbated the actual COVID-19 pandemic as well as racism in the university.

COLLECTIVE SOLIDARITY AND COMPASSIONATE ACTIVISM: THOUGHTS AND CONSEJOS

Our piece is titled, *Del Dicho al Hecho, Hay Mucho Trecho/Don't Talk the Talk, if You Can't Walk the Walk: Feminista Scholars Navi-*

gating the Heightened Horrors of Academia in a Multiple Pandemic Reality, because we wanted to highlight the increased violence we are experiencing working within an HSI that clamors “diversity and inclusion” while simultaneously upholding policies and practices that replicate injustice and inequities. That is an apparent contradiction. The title also speaks about our coming together in sisterhood and solidarity (Burciaga & Tavares, 2006) after experiencing microassaults/aggressions, structural violence, and this time of the COVID pandemic. As feminista scholars, we navigated these horrors by employing *plática* methodology that led us to divulge our testimonios—hence *pláticas~testimonios*. Our *pláticas~testimonios* show how collective solidarity and compassionate activism opened possibilities of urgent pedagogical change and kept us less fractured and re/membered. In fact, it has been our friendship, our exposed vulnerabilities, our actions, and enacting “del dicho al hecho” praxis that allow us to conclude by offering *consejos/advice* as feministas of Color. We hope to strengthen our solidarity and compassionate activism in order to open possibilities for change--a change that has kept us united.

CONSEJOS/ADVICE

For me, Brenda, this process has been cathartic and empowering. I came into this collaboration with bottled up, unchanneled pain and anger. I was beginning to internalize it. This was affecting my health and my relationships, familial and communal. Then, I was reminded of Audre Lorde’s (1981) powerful speech about the uses of anger. She states that,

[Our] response to racism is anger. [Living] with that anger, ignoring it, feeding upon it, learning to use it before it laid my visions to waste, for most of [our] life... Anger of exclusion, of unquestioned privilege, of racial distortions, of silence, ill-use, stereotyping, defensiveness, misnaming, betrayal, and co-optation. (BlackPast, 2012, n. p.)

As we learned from Pierce (1995), the cumulative impact of these microassaults/aggressions and stressors from simultaneous oppression could lead to augmented morbidity.

Lorde (1981) goes on to say that, “[Our] anger and... fears are spotlights that can be used for growth in the same way I have used learning to express anger for my growth. But for corrective surgery, not guilt. Guilt and defensiveness are bricks in a wall against which we all flounder; they serve none of our futures” (BlackPast, 2012, n. p.).

Here, we think about the experiences of many others who are silenced, subjugated to retaliation if they speak back to/against authority—if we do, this results in hostility and isolation. Though this testimonio focuses on my experiences as a m(other) scholar, nearly identical experiences of aggressions have been found among m(other) scholars in different colleges. These aggressions exist and are perpetuated because the existing university leadership allows it under the guise of policy--hence, “del dicho al hecho.”

We move forward by sharing some consejos/advice, especially for other m(other) scholars and pre-tenured faculty. Try to find allies at your campus—if you have none in your department. Create spaces where you can let out/release the weight of oppression. Release and speak of the pain and trauma, the violence, and then create spaces of healing. While the mistrust that is sown by our experiences runs deep in higher education—some people have experienced similar oppressions and created relationships of compassion and solidarity. Such praxis requires courage for us to come together and bear our wounds, to trust again, to question our own role in perpetuating it, to find ways to push back against it, and to see the openings in the structures of academic instructions. Coming together as compassionate scholars-activists is doable and needed more than ever—especially in these multiple pandemics.

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