

THE WAKE-UP CALL

Anónima

This testimonio sheds light on an act of resistance and survival in academia as a scholar and teacher and within marriage as a newly-wed, recién casada. It also shows how surveillance takes place on women's bodies in and outside the home. It tells the story of my being unable to balance mi trenza de identidades and the self-surveillance and self-inflicted dolor on my being because of what I experienced as a school-family-puente disconnection. This testimonio, more importantly, also points to how as mujeres we get caught up and internalize often-unrealistic expectations about productivity and responsibilities. It shows how I prioritized others before myself and, subsequently, an imbalance occurred in my life, which evidenced itself through a chemical imbalance in my body. This is the testimonio of a wake-up call and the lessons learned from it.

When I started graduate school, I had only been married for a few months. At the time of these events, I had only been in the master's program for one semester and was about to start the second. Additionally, while working full-time and being a full-time student, I went through the invasive, scrutinizing process of becoming "legalized" in the U.S. I thought I had it all and should be happy, but I wasn't. Toward the end of the first year in the master's program, I found that I had slowly fallen into a state of depression. I did not trust my husband's late night outings with friends. To make things worse, family obligations led me to become a parent overnight; family teenagers came to live with us so we could motivate them to graduate from high school. I felt like my marriage was imploding because I was struggling to manage too many

competing commitments. I was emotionally and physically crashing. There was a lot going on in my life, and I did not know how to weave, manage, balance, and maintain my *trenza de identidades* without having to sacrifice any one aspect of my identities and my life.

On a mid-December evening, I decided I'd had enough doubt and low self-esteem. My body was physically and emotionally tired. I drove to a nearby Walgreen's, bought sleeping pills and a bottle of wine, went home, and took them. My brother and cousin found me unconscious and not responding. I was taken to the emergency room and then to a psychiatric unit to be put on suicide watch. Sean, my husband, was nowhere to be found. I began to react, wanting to know where he was, why no one could find him. You'd think I would have known better. After all, I was the self-proclaimed strong woman, a feminist who would preach to others, "Don't let a man decide your future," "Never love someone more than you love yourself," and "Ni todo el amor ni todo el dinero." It is so true that the practice and modeling of what we preach in classrooms should begin at home and in our lives. I felt like I had let down all the feminists of color whose words had informed my consciousness and awareness about the power and knowledge women/mujeres possess. Very strong women raised me. What had happened to my body and to me *como mujer*?

When I began to recollect what had happened, I was taken to a white male doctor's office, where he questioned me about anything and everything. I felt humiliated. I felt I was being scrutinized and judged, much like young women who are victims of sexual abuse and questioned about what they were wearing. What could this white guy ever understand about my life, about all that I had to endure until then, about not being able to juggle all that was going on in my life? I just wanted to sleep and rest. I wanted to stop feeling so alone and so overwhelmed. I wanted to stop feeling like I had an obligation to take care of everyone else but me. I wanted to stop

looking the way I did, since I had gained the most weight ever, and I was not happy with my image. This was the reason why I couldn't trust Sean. I hated myself. When many of my friends and mentors came to visit me at the hospital, that just made me feel more guilty. I felt guilty for having thought about myself first and not about the consequences of my actions. What if I had died? What a selfish act!

When I was out of the hospital I continued eating and not responding to the therapy. I overate and continued gaining weight. I began to feel lots of pain on the right side of my stomach after eating. Soon, the excruciating pain became unbearable. Once again, I was taken to the emergency room where I was interrogated about my symptoms, the date of my last menstrual period, and whether I was sexually active. I was used to being questioned about my period and my sexual activity since 1998, when my boyfriend and I went together to get checked for sexually transmitted diseases before we decided I was going to take prescription birth control. I have understood time and again that Latinas' bodies are constantly under surveillance and that our bodies need to be controlled and overpowered by the authorities, the state, those at home, and even by our own selves. After an ultrasound, I was told my gall bladder was about to burst and needed to be operated that very day.

The removal of my gall bladder forced me to go on a diet, and I lost about twenty pounds within three weeks. Ironically, my body, with its now missing organ, helped me overcome my depression and value life after the wake-up call from the sleeping pills and the second trip to the ER. Losing weight and participating in therapy helped me feel better about myself. I thought I could put back together my fractured marriage, but it was never the same. I fell out of love, and my husband, Sean, knew it.

I went through therapy for over a year, in spite of people in my community who

said, “¿Pero por qué vas con esos doctores, si no estas loca?” I was fractured inside, and Sean and I were a fractured young couple. So when I finished the master’s program, I took time off to try to focus on my life and marriage. I reconnected with my body and my inner desires as part of my work to form a family and a home free of tensions and full of happiness. However, I still felt like something was missing. To avoid figuring out what was wrong, I continued to focus on my studies, projects, and friends. I was consciously drifting apart from the person who had been my partner for over five years. I constantly interrogated my actions, the possibilities of opportunities, and the choices I made. I reflected and concluded that others do enough interrogation of my body and my being, so I need to stop doing that to myself, or at least just be reflexive and learn de la vida.

My body remembers, recollects, processes, and sometimes I am too critical of my actions and myself. I have to repeatedly remind myself that the complicated messiness of our bodies and what we do with the epistemologies that our brown bodies produce and endure are what informs our future decisions, and that is from where our facultad is developed.

As women who juggle multiple responsibilities and whose multiple subjectivities places them at society’s margins, we have to pay attention to our bodies to begin to observe and recognize signs and new knowledges that spur from our lived experiences. There is great bravery inside us. Our spirit must be in tune with our bodies and with our minds, the mind/body/spirit connection needs to be held and housed within us—embodied.

If we have a wake-up call, we must be vigilant and pay attention to different ways of being, of reacting, and of treating our body. Otherwise, we might not wake up from our sleep. ¡Despierta mujer!