Surviving Academia

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The process of healing from first episode psychosis as a queer person of color is not represented in the medical model, academia, or media. As a pansexual, non-binary, Latinx femme with a psychological disability, walking out of the hospital doors for the final time incited immense amounts of isolation that overcame my spirit because of the lack of dialogue around such healing. I assembled this zine with the intention of my intuition that somebody, somewhere, someone with my identities and positionality exists with similar trauma to mine from having experienced a mental health crisis. Zines are an accessible multimedia approach to sharing collective wisdom. The very definition of a zine varies as each publication can differ in size, art and writing media, price, and shape. Through this multimedia personal narrative of the different stages of healing, I continue to endure as a graduate student still affected by my trauma, I hope to center the power of personal narrative and lived experience as valid scholarship.

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SURVIVING ACADEMIA: A GUIDE FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS POST-MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS
BY: LAURA M. AGUILERA

Self-Advocating for TRAUMA-INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY
(CONTENT WARNINGS IN THE CLASSROOM)

1. Trigger/content warnings refer to disclaimers about the content in given material with the intent to enable people to make decisions as to whether they would like to expose themselves to such content (Carter, 2015).

2. Sometimes speaking up in class is intimidating -- especially when it comes to advocating for yourself and/or others. Your impostor syndrome nails your arms to your sides and seals your lips from articulating why you wish she didn’t call you “spicy” in front of the whole class. Your shoulders tense up with the shame you feel from internalized racism passed down from generation to generation. Be brave in the way your ancestors were when they had no choice but to focus on surviving everyday so that you could thrive. Consent to advocating for yourself when you feel ready.

3. When people in class bring up ______ without any warning, it triggers you.*Your holistic response to trauma is valid and worthy of addressing.* Depending on how comfortable you feel, you have the option of emailing your educators the script below. You can also say something in class along the lines of what I have provided below.

“I would greatly appreciate if we can challenge ourselves moving forward to commit to using content warnings in the classroom. I hope that we can respect them as much as we honor pronouns because I know that statistically I am not the only survivor in the room who feels impacted by the mentioning of ______. Thank you.”
Understanding and reducing your resilience through learning from the universe with each touch. I hope you know that just because your body and your brain are programmed to do things a certain way, doesn't mean that you have to accept that. Your body and brain are malleable and can adapt to new ways of thinking and behaving.

To Mental Health Crisis

A Letter to MySELF on Responding Academically
Radical (Self) Love

I look in the mirror
and I remember,
your
words
as a love song
you sing
when you’re
storytelling.
Your laugh
reminds me
of the daffodils
blooming
in spring.
Your ancestors
sculpted
Your smile,
Cheekbones peak
like your homelands’
earth.
Brown belleza,
the air you inhale
is sacred
and your exhale
holy.
My medicine is
your embrace
your face
this place,
with you
my home,
the only one
that has known,
worshiped
my softness.”
This love
is my religion.

Con Amor,
Laura Mercedes
DEVELOPING A CRISIS PLAN

What is a Crisis Plan?
A crisis plan is a piece of paper that you carry nearby you to ensure your security if you relapse. This will ground you as you will have a preventative measure to potentially avoid traumatic experiences and be more in control of your crisis.

Things you should include in a crisis plan:
- Name
- Address
- Phone
- Birthday
- Gender/Pronouns
- Emergency Contact
- Health Needs
- Service Providers

Describe what crisis looks and feels like for you?
When you've been in a crisis situation what kinds of support did you seek? What people, places, services things were the most helpful? Why?

Think about the people around you when you experience crisis. Are there behaviors or actions you take that might frighten other people?

Are there people in your life who are important to you? Think about who they are, and who you may want to be in touch with if you're experiencing crisis, or end up getting support other than in your home. List their information.

Is there anything else you would like people to know or consider when you're "in crisis"? Is there anything else you need to remind yourself about when you're "in crisis"?
Bill of Rights
for Students Grieving their Mental Health Crisis

As a college student who has experienced crisis in regards to my psychological health, I have the right to...

1. Not seek validation for my diagnosis from the world, i.e. I have the right to self-diagnose.
2. Grieve every aspect of my bodymind that has apparently failed me.
3. Not be responsible for people’s discomfort with how I behaved when I was experiencing crisis.
4. Feel negative sentiments towards the medical industrial complex, medical model, and hospitals I stayed at.
5. Identify my challenges with mental health as a disability.
6. Be angry and grateful simultaneously.
7. Create language that encapsulates my healing journey and my pain.
8. Grieve the bodies of those that were forced to live in mental health institutions against their will.
9. Prioritize self-care and community care over my work.
10. Re-conceptualize my temporality in order to adapt to rhythm of my healing bodymind.
The Patient

The Patient is the sixty-sixth card in the major arcana of the Tarot. It is often associated with illness, but also with the need for self-examination and reflection. The card suggests that one needs to look within themselves, to understand what is causing their illness. It may be a time to take a break from the outside world and focus on the needs of the body. The Patient is a reminder that the body is not only a vessel for the soul, but also a canvas for the soul's expression. It is a time to be patient with oneself and others, to allow the healing process to occur naturally.
Some Instagrams for emotional First Aid

@projectlets
@roots.of.south.la
@nsvrc
@make.daisy.chains
@nayyirah.waheed
@survivor.love.letter
@qtpctional.health
@lalahdelia
@the.body.is.not.an.apology
@nalgona.positivity.pride
@projectvrok
@chaninicholas
@the.official.sad.ghostclub
@counseling.4.all.seasons
@queerspoons
@healing.as.resistance
An Intuitive Poem and Plan for Social Justice Praxis in Higher Education

What does it mean for my body to exist, to survive, and thrive, in this Ivory Tower?

I am queer as in “forget the system that latches onto my body and assigns every detail.
I am Brown as in “this reflection that gazes back to me reveals my body, a mosaic of manifestations of my ancestors and homelands of contradiction: both stewarded and occupied.”
I am disabled as in “my body is a border constructed to differentiate between sanity and incompetency.”

Every piece of the mosaic that makes up my identity signals, “forget the Tower. The very bricks that lay the foundation for your future profession were built without your body in mind.”

What does it look like when my body is a barrier to pursuing social justice action in this Ivory Tower?

Always at odds with the system I am a part of, I can dedicate my energy and wellbeing (my body) to simplicity in action: Surrendering to community care because maintenance of the self is too precious to not share, Ongoingly persisting to broaden and fine-tune the sculpture that is my critical consciousness,
Redistributing my minimal wealth to scholars sharing collective wisdom outside the Ivory Tower, because the revolution will not happen inside inaccessibility.

Areas for improvements first look like destroying self-hate and self-stigma since the revolution starts with the body, and minding (prioritizing) the matters of bodies that are barriers to action in institutions such as Higher Education.

"Who can you lean upon to support you and hold you accountable?"
I cannot answer with a single name because my community care is accountability and I never experienced belonging until arriving in Abenaki Territory, so-called Vermont, against all odds towards my body of rejection, fluidity, and borders. Accepting the opposition of my existence to an educational system that would never consider my Abuela’s seamstress skills as technology, and complying with this system that would never admit her non-English speaking tongue and “fifth grade education” into an institutionalized post-secondary learning environment incites self-doubt, but

if my body commits to this action plan not only can I witness the horizon of liberation, but also honor my ancestors as we all become ancestors one day.
Journaling Prompts to Initiate Healing

Use these questions as prompts to engage in introspection and begin the stages of your healing process from mental health crisis.

1. Can you name 5 mental health activists or influencers with disabilities?
2. How has the endeavor known as “medicine” enacted violence on you and your community? How are you healing?
3. Growing up, what words were used to describe your body/mind? What words are you keeping? What words are you letting go? What words are you letting in?
4. What are things you desire/need that are things the universe also desires/needs?
5. How does your identity affect your healing?
6. Name your favorite things about yourself.
7. What have your physical or emotional scars taught you about being human?
8. What is the relationship between pleasure & the medical model?
9. What is healing without whiteness? What is medicine without whiteness?
11. What is your theory of change when it comes to healing the earth/yourselves? What future(s) is your theory of change conjuring?
12. What songs do you listen to while connecting with the space around you and losing the sense that your body is a discrete entity?
13. Whose land are you on? How does this relate to your healing?
14. What words have you lost? What words are you reclaiming? What words do you need?
15. Name the places where you find your ancestors.

Modified from @beinggreenwhileblack
I can no longer bear
the effort of
carving
off and into
an island of dried platelets
searching for
what softness remains
on my body.
My body is
my earth
stolen from me
since puberty.
Parallel menarches
owned my arms.
They reach to heal in
The sunlight
But
I don’t forget
the night.
Bipolar Brujeria

When I believed in Magic,
the world was a Beautiful Place.
Evil eyes decked my gown
and my blurred vision, well, the vacant factories
I spotted from the hospital window
were mosques.
I imagined the day
I would hear a call to prayer
from the minarets
in America.
Birds flew in circles
in the sky,
my gaze followed them
with envy.

Did you or I know
that the windows
in the ward
had locks?
...That I had to ask for Permission
to open the blinds?
My psychosis was spiritual.
Patience with a Chemical Imbalance
was sacred
and so was refusing Medication.
Why would I want to slip that yellow pill onto my tongue
if the antidepressant I stop swallowing in the spring helped me see God?
It took an antipsychotic and a mood stabilizer
for them to make me an atheist,
or so they thought.
My neurodiversity is my magic.
Bipolar brujeria
is the capacity to feel the contrasts of earth,
its landscape
high in the emotional altitude
of mountains
and low in the depths
of the ocean.
What a beautiful thing to be blessed with empathy.

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References