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Narratives of Gendered and Racialized Carework: Feminist Faculty of Color Organizing During the Pandemic

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Cover Page Footnote

Author names as listed in alphabetical order by first name and the authors equally contributed to the research and writing process that went into this article.

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Abstract: Inspired by feminist narrative and the Latin American tradition of testimonio, this paper is grounded in the lived experiences of the four authors as academics, mothers, and organizers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing on women of color feminisms and theorizing anti-racist feminist understandings of motherhood as a political identity, we examine how the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated challenges faced by parenting and caregiving faculty, especially those positioned at the intersection of multiple structural vulnerabilities. The COVID-19 tipping point presented both unsustainable challenges for parenting and caregiving faculty and opportunities for collective support and organizing as parents and caregivers. We participated in collective organizing with other academic parents and caregivers, most of whom are mothers, as we shared our struggles and organized to respond to changing conditions. We examine the ways in which undervalued, gendered, and racialized labor in the workplace merged with unpaid gendered labor in the home, highlighting how the pandemic brought caregivers—those providing care through their undervalued paid labor and unpaid household labor—to a crisis point. We also highlight the ways in which the organizing that began around parenting and caregiving faculty, who have been disproportionately overburdened during the pandemic, was in addition to and in the context of ongoing activism around other forms of structural violence. Finally, we conclude with a call for structural change at the institutional level to address the exacerbated racialized and gendered equity gap caused by the pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19, pandemic, mothering, academic parents, feminist narrative, feminist testimonio, carework, higher education, gendered labor, racialized labor; feminist faculty; faculty of color

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Feminist Narratives and the COVID-19 Pandemic

In this article we draw on our personal and collective experiences as university faculty, mothers, and organizers to shed light on the social and political context of our lived experiences, considering the recent past, the present, and proposing recommendations for a more equitable and just path forward.¹ We respond to the systemic inequalities reflected in the work conditions we have experienced since March 2020 drawing on the traditions of feminist of color narrative practices and testimonio to share our stories of mothering, organizing, and working as academics during the COVID-19 pandemic. We all work for the California State University public system, consisting of over 20 campuses, enrolling 486,000 ethnically, economically, and

academically diverse students, and employing more than 56,000 faculty and staff. Three of us are faculty at the same large public university and one of us is a faculty member at a nearby campus in the same system. Our narratives highlight our shared experiences with childcare, cultural and identity taxation, mental health, and multiple structural barriers within the university. We also contemplate how our experiences differed across racial lines and in terms of access to the leave programs that our campuses offered to parents at the beginning of the pandemic.

Our responses to the conditions we have experienced during the pandemic draw on feminist narrative practices that center personal experience as a form of theorizing. Through personal narrative, we make sense of our lived experiences and share our stories of mothering, organizing, and working as academics during the COVID-19 pandemic and set those experiences within the institutional and intersectional social contexts in which we live. In our conversations with each other, we have learned that we share histories of trauma inflicted through structural violence that we continue to experience at present and that impacts our well-being and mental health. As feminist professors who center and teach about marginalized communities of color, students seek us out because they identify with us, resonate with our curriculum, and feel supported in their interactions with us, leading each of us to experience racialized and gendered forms of cultural and identity taxation. While we are committed to supporting our students, this is a type of labor and carework that not all faculty are called to perform (Flaherty 2021). Thus, we recognize that our positionalities and identities structure our relationships to the university, our colleagues, and our students. Analena is a Black woman, an Associate Professor of Sociology with an emphasis on race and ethnicity, and the mother of a seven-year-old and a 6-month-old. Araceli is a Chicana feminist, the mother of a six-year-old, and an Associate Professor of English. Sabrina is a Professor of Sociology who identifies as a cis queer South Asian mother of two children, ages 9 and 11. Lori is an Associate Professor and Chair of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and a cisgender, white-passing Puerto Rican mother of two children, ages 4 and 7. Collectively, we align ourselves with women of color feminism, and we are working to change institutions of higher education to make them more equitable for historically marginalized groups, including mothers, parents, caregivers and women of color. In sharing our narratives as mothers and organizers, we center the power of collective organizing and voices that are not typically made visible by institutions that espouse a commitment to gender and racial justice while in the end investing scant resources toward making equitable educational institutions a reality.

Our narrative approach is shaped by the Latin American practice of *testimonio* and women of color feminism. Our collective contributions to this article are inspired by the *testimonio* tradition which understands "*testimonio* as a crucial means of bearing witness and inscribing into history those lived realities that would otherwise succumb to the alchemy of erasure" (The Latina Feminist Group 2001, 2). The Latina Feminist Group writes that in the Latin American tradition, "*Testimonio* is often seen as a form of expression that comes out of intense repression or struggle, where the person bearing witness tells the story to someone else, who then transcribes, edits, translates, and publishes the text" (2001, 13). *Testimonio* is understood as a practice that "is driven by an urgent need to speak about an ongoing experience of violence" and is "typically told by a narrator who is assumed to represent an economically, politically, or racially marginalized collectivity" (Esparza 2013, 13). Further *testimonio* helps "people make sense of what has transpired while simultaneously (re)imagining different ways of being in the world" and those who give witness "anticipate that the ideal audience will take action against the ongoing violence that is represented in the *testimonio* narrative" (ibid).

Inspired by anthologies such as *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios* and *The Chicana Motherwork Anthology* (The Latina Feminist Group 2001; Caballero et al. 2019), we share our experiences with systemic violence, disregard, and exploitation during the COVID-19 pandemic to inspire, promote, and initiate collective organizing in support of more just working conditions for caregivers and parents. The

editors of *The Chicana Motherwork Anthology* argue that through testimonio “the private becomes profoundly political with the intent to raise social consciousness for readers” (Caballero et al. 2019, 9). They further state, “Our testimonios challenge the silence we hold, within ourselves, out of fear of not being ‘academic enough’ or ‘mother enough,’ and allow us to reclaim space that would otherwise be marginalized by dominant discourse (Flores Carmona and Luciano 2014)” (Caballero et al. 2019, 9). We also acknowledge that this tradition of giving witness to social and institutional violence through personal and collective narratives has been central within women of color feminist theorizing as evidenced by the collections *This Bridge Called My Back, All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave, This Bridge We Call Home, Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia, Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, and *Making face, making soul/ Haciendo caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color* (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981; Hull, Bell-Scott, and Smith 1982; Mathis 2002; Gutiérrez y Muhs et al. 2012; Lorde 2007; Anzaldúa 1990).

Theoretical and Institutional Framing

Our narratives contribute to the conversation on the negative impacts the COVID-19 pandemic has had on faculty, especially those positioned at the intersection of multiple structural vulnerabilities including race, gender, class, and empire. Throughout the pandemic, existing inequities in faculty workload were amplified as faculty struggled to keep up with the frantic pace of working from home, teaching online, and buoying a productive research agenda despite losing access to writing and research time, research facilities, travel, and student assistants. As schools and care centers closed across the country, those with parenting and caregiving responsibilities experienced an added obstacle to research and writing as they were suddenly expected to simultaneously engage in fulltime paid work and fulltime carework. During this time, primary caregivers were often performing double work, performing their jobs and caring for their families at the same time, leading women in particular to leave the workforce across many sectors in record numbers (Guy and Arthur 2020). Faculty caregivers experienced a widening professional gulf, where domestic responsibilities butted up against time for research (Flaherty 2020; Guy and Arthur 2020) and women who experienced this second shift often reported publishing less during the pandemic (Andersen et al. 2020).

Though it may be tempting to believe that all parenting faculty experienced the lull in research productivity equally, a 2020 report published by *The Chronicle of Higher Education* found that “in every category of faculty, women were more likely than men to say that since the start of 2020, their workload has increased, and their work-life balance has deteriorated.” The study’s authors found that at the same time, “the pandemic has already created cumulative advantages for men,” particularly in the realm of research output, with the disadvantage for women being most notable among women with young dependents (The Chronicle of Higher Education 2020). Thus, while academics of all genders may have faced pandemic related work challenges, according to these findings, women-identified caregivers carried a greater burden and faced disproportionate negative outcomes. There are many reasons that women faculty face additional challenges including the reality that they are often earlier in their careers, receive less pay regardless of position, are more likely to be single parents or primary caregivers, and face greater work-related stress and discrimination in their workplace (National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2021). Further, research has shown that women continue to perform disproportionate amounts of caregiving and household work, creating conditions within which women academics manage their children’s schoolwork and daily needs more often than men, and therefore have less time to engage in their own paid work and to focus on their own needs and mental health (Peck 2020). Women often spend more time on teaching and service than men (Misra et al. 2011; Misra, Lundquist and Templer 2012; Pyke 2011,

2015) and less time on research (Winslow 2010; O'Meara et al. 2017). Women are also asked more often to engage in less promotable or career advancing tasks when compared to men (O'Meara et al. 2017). These problems are so deeply systemically ingrained within the organization and practices of universities that the work of women faculty, particularly women of color, contingent, and other marginalized faculty has been referred to as the "housework of the university" (O'Keefe and Courtois 2020). The question of mothers' and women's mental health during the pandemic is critical as women faculty reported more stress than men related to scholarly productivity, teaching, and advising as well as more stress related to childcare, other dependent responsibilities, and their personal health (Kotini-Shah et al. 2021). These realities reveal that while universities make proclamations about being committed to equity and diversity, they are in fact implicated in the reproduction of heteropatriarchal and Eurocentric power structures.

Gender and race play a pivotal role in the inequitable distribution of faculty labor as well as what work is seen as valuable and rewarded (Bird, Litt, and Wang 2004). "Cultural taxation," a form of racialized and gendered emotional labor in a university, describes the additional service burden placed on faculty of color, as well as faculty from other marginalized communities, that is often invisible, unrecognized, and can hinder faculty advancement in the university (Padilla 1994). It is now becoming more recognized that faculty from historically excluded groups spend more time on mentoring and diversity-related work (Hirschfield and Joseph 2011; Wood, Hilton, and Nevarez 2015). Unsurprisingly, research indicates that women of color are often engaged in disproportionate service, teaching, and mentorship (Eagan and Garvey 2015; Hanasano et al. 2019; O'Meara et al. 2017). Our own experiences and research on the topic reveal that students often have increased expectations for carework from women faculty in general, but even more so for women of color faculty (Social Science Feminist Research Group 2017; Anantachai and Chesley 2018). During the pandemic, college students' increased needs for mentoring, advising, and emotional support have been disproportionately met by women faculty who have traditionally assumed these roles that are now demanding even more of our labor (Shalaby, Allam, and Buttorff 2020).

Feminist researchers have theorized carework as a form of emotional labor, which in both its paid and unpaid forms, is often invisible and when visible, is often devalued (Hochschild 2012). Since the majority of carework in the US is performed by women, especially mothers who are providing care for family members, face an uphill battle when it comes to the devaluing of the emotional and physical labor required in mothering and other forms of carework. Parenting is also a form of unpaid and undervalued labor that is often invisible in the workplace, yet it impacts the careers of parents in gendered ways, with mothers often experiencing the "mommy tax," a term coined by Ann Crittenden (2001), to refer to the lost earnings that mothers endure over their lifetime. As we discuss in the following testimonial narratives, our experiences reflect much of the research that has been conducted to date on how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted academics who are mothers, and our narratives document our theoretical and experiential perspectives as academic mothers who organized during the pandemic through a critical intersectional lens that calls for action and structural change.

Double Toil, Double Toll: Black Womanhood and Carework at Home and at Work— Analena's Narrative

From 2015 to 2022, I was the only Black tenure track faculty member in my Ethnic and Women's Studies Department. During the summer of 2020, rather than being relieved from teaching and service duties, I was thrust to the forefront of critical conversations about structural racism and inequality in the context of a global pandemic, global racial justice uprisings, and the convergence of the two. I was asked to partner with our campus Inclusive Excellence Council to develop and co-facilitate a 300-person webinar on anti-

Blackness and police violence. I was also simultaneously enrolled in two separate “remote teaching” workshops to convert my courses to a virtual format for a remote fall semester and caring for my then 5-year-old daughter, who had been home with me since March. What had already been an imbalanced service and advising load shaped by cultural taxation quickly became an unyielding barrage of requests to lead workshops, compile reading lists, and hold space for students and colleagues seeking to learn about racism, state violence, privilege, and allyship. As an Ethnic Studies practitioner and a Black woman professor, I am accustomed to being sought out by underrepresented students, staff, and faculty of color across our campus and from other institutions seeking guidance in professional and career matters, as well as mentorship and support for navigating racial hostility and microaggressions. I consider it an honor to be recognized for my unique body of knowledge, and it is a privilege to help my students, colleagues, and campus community make sense of racism and intersecting forms of oppression. However, this often-invisible labor of holding space for others (even as I am mourning and processing my own racialized trauma and grief) compounds the teaching, research, and service commitments that are expected of all faculty. It is also often undervalued and overlooked by tenure committees (Breeze and Taylor 2020).

According to the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, in 2019, only 3 Black women professors had tenure at my previous campus (0.9% of the total number of tenured professors).² I joined that number in 2021, after being denied tenure myself the first year I applied. As a Black woman, I come from a legacy of devalued and exploited labor that has persisted in different forms since the antebellum period (Hills 2019). Moreover, I grew up in the inner-city shadow of narratives like the Moynihan Report, which pathologized Black families and shamed Black women for supporting their households—a survival strategy long used to combat the continual threat of anti-Black state violence. It is no secret that racialized and gendered academic professionals experience “...diminished productivity and work/life quality due to, among other things, ‘invisibility, salary inequities, lack of support from administrators regarding students, and stereotypical comments and racist behavior from colleagues as well as students’” (Hills 2019, 9-10). At work, I constantly navigate and negotiate what Patricia Hill Collins (1990, 65) calls the “mammification” of Black women, whereby uneven expectations of institutional carework for the university and its members are foisted upon my time.

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, many industries and workplaces immediately responded by switching to remote work and telecommuting. The same was true of educational institutions; however, many parenting faculty like myself experienced this pivot as an increase to our already heavy workload rather than a relief (Burk, Pechenik Mausolf, and Oakleaf 2021). For instance, I began the fall 2019 semester compiling my (first) tenure application, teaching four fully-enrolled undergraduate classes, advising multiple student theses, giving public lectures and conference presentations, serving on an inordinate number of university committees, and attempting to complete my own research projects for publication. By the second week of March 2020, I was doing all of this while also sharing a makeshift home office and spotty internet coverage with my then 5-year-old daughter. As she struggled with virtual kindergarten alone in one room, I sat in another, navigating endless online meetings and fighting to maintain a connection to my students, most of whom had become faceless black boxes in the void of Zoom. Although telecommuting kept me off the infamous southern California freeways and helped incubate my family from a potentially fatal new virus, it also functioned as an infringement upon what would otherwise be sacred time for myself and my family, separate from my work life. Navigating motherhood and academia at the same time (and in the same close quarters) blurred the important boundaries between work and home and made it impossible for me to do either job very well.

As a woman and a parenting professor, I am keenly aware of how my labor is “split between the ‘public’ sphere of paid employment and the ‘private’ sphere of unpaid family responsibilities” (Hill Collins 1991, 47). I am privileged to have a partner who does most of the cooking for our family and shares other

household responsibilities equitably. However, my partner also works outside the home as an essential worker, so the day-to-day mental, emotional, and physical labor of parenting often falls to me. This includes packing lunches, ensuring that our daughter arrives at school (or logs onto her virtual classroom) on time, and staying on top of medical appointments, play dates, and other calendar items. Additionally, I have had to sacrifice the separation of work and home that my partner enjoys, and instead, I am torn between the oppositional poles of caring and “careering” (Breeze and Taylor 2020). Moreover, even when my partner is home, our child will regularly walk past him in the kitchen and find me at my desk to ask for a snack, an experience I share with my co-authors who are also partnered with men.

In the fall of 2020, I applied for pandemic leave through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) Program, which I learned about from colleagues on a different campus a mere two weeks before the Fall term began. The paid leave programs available to faculty across our university system were not widely publicized on my campus, and our benefits officers were unsure how to implement them. After many frustrating hours on the phone –often with HR staff from other campuses who could not provide specific information about my case, I finally submitted my FFCRA application the day the fall term began.³ I received two course releases but no break from my campus service expectations, which had multiplied. While I was certainly grateful for any reprieve, the time it took to seek and implement this partial leave severely detracted from my course preparation and my ability to support my daughter and my panicked students. Additionally, my own research and organizing around food justice and health were suddenly amplified and relevant in new ways as vulnerable populations across the country increasingly depended on mutual aid efforts and community-based food networks to stay afloat during this unprecedented and precarious time. Contrary to prevailing medical advice to “stay home and stay safe,” I found myself driving around with bags of canned beans, bread, peanut butter and root vegetables to support neighborhood food distribution efforts. The fall term passed quickly, and paid faculty leave was completely unavailable the following spring. So, along with my co-authors, I quickly found myself back underwater, drowning in tasks, teaching, and full-time childcare.

During the height of the pandemic, I had to let many expectations go, giving grace to my students, my daughter, and myself as we collectively navigated major global events. I accepted that my publications would have to remain in the pipeline until I could find the time to work on them, and instead, I focused on tangible ways to keep people and communities fed. I was transparent with students about my own struggles as a parent and professor, and I used class time to process any collective feelings and experiences that came up. I removed assignments, dropped the lowest grades, and did not require Zoom cameras to be on. I pivoted my classes to explore how racialized and gendered communities are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and instances of police brutality at the same time. At home, I stopped demanding that my five-year-old child do impossible things like remaining fully engaged in a chaotic Zoom room. Instead, I painstakingly tried to explain (in age-appropriate ways) the meaning of all the signs and shirts emblazoned with “stop killing Black people” and “Black Lives Matter.” I looked for silver linings, like how our homeschooling routines included learning about the laws of motion by riding bikes and tossing frisbees at the local state park where we could safely stay six feet away from others. We would putter around the neighborhood between classes and meetings, looking closely at flowers, making art with sidewalk chalk, and having nervous conversations with neighbors on separate sides of the street.

I forged community “pods” with other parenting friends to collectivize and outsource our childcare needs. This process required detailed planning, extensive conversations about safety and logistics, transportation to and from outdoor play sites, and the additional financial burden of paying an external caregiver to spend a few hours with our kids. However, this network helped relieve the mental health toll of pandemic isolation for our children and for us parents. It allowed me slivers of time to rest, hear myself think, and revive the creative projects that had stalled as I struggled to balance the expectations of care from

my family, my students, and the university. I also reapplied for tenure and received it in the Summer of 2021. I do not doubt that my second application was successful largely because of the hyper-focus on racial justice in the country at the time, and my ability to frame the carework I provided to my campus as excess cultural and identity taxation.

Making Carework Visible and Valued—Araceli’s Narrative

Informed by Chicana and women of color feminisms and drawing on my own experiences, in this narrative I contribute an understanding of how the COVID-19 pandemic has helped transform and solidify feminist collaboration and organizing and the limits of such organizing within Eurocentric, heteropatriarchal university spaces that fail to recognize the ways in which neoliberal policies help reproduce inequities for mothers and women of color (Presumed Incompetent). In the despair that has been wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic, I have often considered what it means to be a mother and a Chicana within the Eurocentric, heteropatriarchal, neoliberal university at this moment (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al. 2012; Ferguson 2012). Some of the questions informing my contribution to this conversation include: What does it mean to be called in to do carework both at work (for students and for equity and diversity initiatives) and at home (for my child and my aging parents)? How has this moment of crisis exposed the structural inequalities faced by women of color and caregivers of color? And what are the opportunities and barriers such a moment creates? Why have parents been expected to carry on with fulltime work and fulltime childcare as if we are not living during a pandemic, as if schools and childcare facilities are open, safe, and reliable, as if family members, friends, neighbors, and acquaintances are not getting sick and dying, as if we are not getting sick and dying?

When the pandemic began my child was three and a half years old, and as this publication goes to press he is now six. More than two and a half years will have gone by during which my child has not had a pandemic-free childhood. Put another way, almost half of my child’s life has been structured and dictated by the COVID-19 pandemic. I share this to mark the passage of time and to mourn all that we have collectively lost. As the days, months, and years of life during a pandemic pass, children have been growing and requiring our love, support, and attention; and sadly the “our” in this sentence often only refers to an isolated and individual demand on mothers, fathers, and other caregivers, rather than a collective “our” that would require robust systems of social support. While I recognize that the pandemic has granted my family the gift of more time together, that time is often burdened by excessive work and educational demands that have infiltrated any boundaries that previously existed between our home life and our public responsibilities. Zoom teaching and meetings have meant that there is an expectation that we be more available outside regular work hours, even though my young child was home demanding my attention at all hours. Yet, I also acknowledge my privileges. I was able to work from home. I have healthcare and job security (although my partner is a musician and lost his income). I live near my family and was able to get some childcare support from my sister.

While I have been able to have dedicated teaching time thanks to my sister’s and partner’s support, my research has suffered tremendously, and I have had to delay applying for promotion to full professor as progress on my publications slows due to both my own lack of time and the increasing struggle editors face when trying to find reviewers. This reflects a widespread institutional barrier women have long experienced when it comes to moving through the professorial ranks due to insufficient childcare and the pressures of other feminized household work that are further exacerbated for women of color (Cancian 2002; Kim and Patterson 2022; Duncan, Dutt-Ballerstadt, and Lo 2021; Staniscuaski et al. 2021). While my research languishes, my service workload has increased since summer 2020 when the Black Lives Matter uprisings protesting the police perpetrated murder of George Floyd and continued state-sanctioned violence against

Black and Brown people led universities across the country to a moment of racial reckoning during which they committed to addressing systemic racism. I was one of the co-organizers of Scholar Strike events in September 2020, I have participated in my campus' Abolition Network, I sit on two presidential commissions at my university (one focused on women and the other on racial equity), I regularly sit on faculty and administrator hiring committees to ensure that equity and diversity are prioritized, and I co-facilitated an intensive year-long participatory based process that culminated in writing a new strategic plan for my college. Simultaneously, during this period feminists and parents (often led by Sabrina and Emily Berquist Soule, another feminist colleague) on our campus began organizing to address the untenable conditions of working fulltime while caring for children fulltime, calling on administrators to offer paid time off, course releases so that parents could restart their research, and economic support to meet the rising costs of childcare. Out of these efforts we established a Feminist Writing and Research Group, that Sabrina discusses further, and I collectively constructed a parent and caregiver community led by Sabrina and Emily. The advent of online meetings during the pandemic has made it possible to build community and organize with colleagues on my own and other campuses, and we now have emerging feminist and parenting communities to call on and collaborate with (this article for example was made possible through those networks) that did not exist prior to the pandemic.

While we are organizing and making community on the ground, at the administrative level, even though the childcare crisis continues and has only become more severe as the pandemic continues, tangible policy change has not been implemented. Alternative modes of instruction and scheduling flexibility are not being embraced as faculty are called to in-person teaching and given little choice about their mode of instruction. Women of color faculty continue to engage in onerous amounts of racialized and gendered labor, serving as a support network for students who have been detrimentally impacted by the pandemic, for each other, and within our own families. The cultural and identity taxation women of color have long experienced within the university and within society more broadly has only been exacerbated by the pandemic (Hirshfield and Joseph 2017; 2012; Padilla 1994). In a university system that was developed to serve cis white, male students and to foster cis white, male, heterosexual faculty who presumably have a wife to take care of household and childcare needs, it is no surprise that many women faculty feel that they have reached a breaking point as levels of burnout reach all-time highs (Ferguson 2012; Flaherty 2020; Wood 2021). While they had already been at the edge of a precipice, women and mothers have been pushed to a tipping point by the white heteropatriarchal underpinnings of the Western university during the pandemic. Will anyone notice that those charged with taking care of so many are not doing "okay"? Will we be given some relief so that we can mind our children, our mental and physical health, and restart our research? Will our lack of progress on research be seen as an individual problem, or as a systemic failure that should be addressed through support that focuses on achieving equity for those of us who face intractable institutional barriers (Ahn et al. 2021)?

Paid leave policies continue to be deficient and even when it is apparent that faculty who are parents need relief, as I have experienced myself and several colleagues have shared, we are often made to feel like we are requesting unnecessary accommodations. For example, during fall 2020, to their credit, my university offered paid leave to those with caregiving responsibilities that would interfere with them being able to carry out their job responsibilities through the Coronavirus Paid Administrative Leave Program (CPAL), the expanded eligibility for Family and Medical Leave enacted under the Emergency Paid Sick Leave Act (EPSLA), and the Emergency Family and Medical Leave Expansion Act (EFMLEA). This came as a relief for many parents who had been working fulltime and caring for children fulltime since March 2020.

However, across the system this leave was not equally available on all campuses, as Analena shares in her narrative. Many faculty within the system did not receive information about leave options as I have learned from conversations with other faculty across the university system. I was fortunate to receive partial

leave through these funding sources during fall 2020, and as spring 2021 approached I anxiously asked a staff member on my campus if leave time would be available for caregivers during spring semester. The response I received was disheartening. They said that there would be no paid leave time but that if I wanted to, I could request unpaid leave. Like most working people, I need to work to pay for daily living expenses and this response seemed both accusatory (e.g., lazy, unwilling to work, asking for a handout, echoing the racialized and gendered stigmatization of mothers of color) and out of touch with the financial realities of most. However, this reply was very much in line with the message coming from upper administrators that faculty were not going to be paid to not work, disregarding that faculty with fulltime caregiving responsibilities were in fact engaged in the daily work of social reproduction that benefits everyone in our society (Massey 1994; Federici 2019). The staff member I spoke with added that even if paid leave became available, faculty would have to prove that childcare facilities and schools were closed to be eligible, even though schools remained closed, and campus childcare facilities had not reopened. This response was also alarming. Did the university expect parents to place children in collective care situations without concern for their exposure to a potentially deadly virus and before vaccinations were available to them? Was my child's health and possibly his life part of what I had to risk for the university to staff its classes, save money, and continue with business as usual? This discouraging response failed to address the economic and health impacts of children either returning or not returning to shared childcare and school during a pandemic and of parents with insufficient childcare being forced to work fulltime out of economic necessity.

This example illustrates the policies that undergird the ongoing systemic inequalities that mothers and other parents experience and the context within which we have been organizing for the rights of parenting and caregiving faculty. Now that we have started organizing as mothers, parents, and caregivers we will continue to expose and refuse the institutional logics that push mothering faculty out of the university and the barriers we face when it comes to tenure and promotion. There is undoubtedly an immense amount of work to do to change anti-maternal and anti-carework institutional policies. As the editors of *The Chicana Motherwork Anthology* write:

The existing research about academic mothers demonstrates that motherhood goes hand in hand with second-tier positions within the university. Mothers are an astounding 132 percent more likely than fathers to end up in low-paid contingent positions (Mason, Wolfinger, and Goulden 2013). The likelihood of a Mother of Color receiving a tenure-track position, let alone obtaining tenure, is minimal (Castañeda and Isgro 2013).

Combined with the invisible labor of mentoring students of color, providing undervalued service work for diversity initiatives, and maintaining family and community responsibilities, Mothers of Color are often institutionally pushed out because they rarely receive credit or compensation for their feminized labor, and they do not receive resources to adequately accommodate their motherwork. (Caballero et al. 2019, 8).

We need to work collectively to change these institutional realities and we need to challenge the logic that mothering should necessarily represent an impediment to our career progress. Rather, we should refuse to invisibilize our mothering work and instead make the carework we perform both within and outside the university visible and valued. Our mothering and carework should be recognized as an asset to the university and institutions should work to remove the barriers to success that parents and caregivers experience. As academic mothers, we will no longer make our carework an undisclosed reality even though it has for so long been treated as an inconvenience and devalued within university spaces. Instead, we will make motherwork and responsibilities recognizable as part of an effort to change anti-carework institutional practices.

A “Feminist Snap” for Caregiving Faculty and an Opportunity for Ongoing Organizing—Lori’s Narrative

Feminism is homework. I am suggesting feminism is homework because we have much to work out from not being at home in a world. In other words, homework is work on as well as at our homes. We do housework. Feminist housework does not simply clean and maintain a house. Feminist housework aims to transform the house, to rebuild the master’s residence (Ahmed, 7, 2017).

In *Living a Feminist Life*, Sarah Ahmed (2017) describes living a feminist life in terms of enacting our feminist politics where we live and work. This speaks to my experience of being a feminist mother and professor, and later Chair in a Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Department during the pandemic. I found myself performing an increased amount of carework for the university through feminist pedagogical practices that involved addressing the context we were living in, which at the time was both the global pandemic and the intensified racial reckoning after the police murder of George Floyd, transitioning courses to online formats, and tending to students’ needs as they navigated their own pandemic-related challenges. All of this was done from home while caring for my two young children, who at the ages of one and a half and four and a half at the start of the pandemic, required substantial care. We chose to hold our older child back from beginning Spanish dual-immersion kindergarten in fall 2020, as the thought of adding bilingual, zoom kindergarten felt like it would have put our already delicate pandemic family/work/life situation over the edge. Instead, I mostly let our children play and our days sounded much like Analena’s and her daughter’s. It was a daily movement between walks around the neighborhood, teaching our older child how to ride a bike, preparing meals, washing dishes, drawing, and dancing, all woven around and between intensified university (care)work.

The pandemic did not begin the crisis of carework in the university, but it brought us to a tipping point. To shed some feminist light on this tipping point, I utilize Ahmed’s (2017) term “feminist snap” to refer to this moment in time. According to Ahmed, “A snap can tell us when it is too much, after it is too much, which is how a snap can be feminist pedagogy. Sometimes you snap when an effort to do what you have been doing is too much to sustain” (2017, 198). Ahmed notes that a snap is often experienced by others as being aggressive. It can feel loud and upsetting. It is seen as an action. But the snap is a reaction to the history of intense pressure that has come before it leading to the moment of the snap. She also states that while a snap is often perceived as a breaking and therefore an end, it can involve a kind of optimism. “...An optimism that makes a break of something the start of something without knowing what this something is, or what it might be; an optimism that does not give a content to something, including what lies ahead” (Ahmed 2017, 200). In what follows, I will discuss how I experienced the pandemic as a “feminist snap,” which felt both like a clear breaking point, but also an opening for new connections, feminist organizing as caregivers, and possibilities for radically restructuring the university to become a space that values all forms of carework.

It feels strange to reflect on the past two years of the pandemic while we are still in it. After the 2021 holiday break, I braced myself to send my children off to preschool and kindergarten during the worst surge of COVID yet, with the Omicron variant raging and my youngest still ineligible for vaccination. I both hated sending them back and desperately wanted them to go back, for their sake and my own. The irony was not lost on me that during the time I had blocked in my schedule to draft this paper on caregiving faculty during the pandemic, I was met with a COVID surge, and a two-week preschool quarantine followed by our older child being home with cold/COVID symptoms for a week. This unexpected interruption of work is part of

parenting and caregiving even without a global pandemic. Your time is never yours alone to plan and structure, as it may be for colleagues who are not providing reproductive labor in addition to academic labor. During the pandemic however, this experience became more visible, urgent, and unworkable—a “feminist snap,” a cry, a plea, a demand for something better for parents, caregivers, childcare providers, and teachers. We cannot do this alone. We will not continue to do carework quietly, invisibly, and privately, treating it like an individual problem or failure when our unpaid carework conflicts with our paid labor and the additional devalued carework that we perform at the university. During our child’s two weeks at home, I repeatedly saw articles with titles such as: “Parents and Caregivers of Young Children Say They’ve Hit Pandemic Rock Bottom” (Kamentz 2022). While those in power, including university officials, strive to put the pandemic behind us and move on with business as usual, parents and caregivers have reached a tipping point, and we need to continue collectively organizing and refuse a return to the unjust structures and institutional practices that created the pressures that lead us to snap in the first place.

In many ways my experience of parenting during the pandemic was cushioned by privilege. I am a tenured professor with a partner who is also employed full-time. Our livelihoods were not threatened. I was able to fully work from home. He eventually was also able to partially work from home. We could alternate caring for our children, while the other worked. As Analena and Araceli mentioned, our university system granted partial paid COVID-related parental leave for the fall 2020 semester, allowing me to reduce my teaching load from four to two courses. Given that I already had tenure, I completely dropped my research and focused my energy on caring for my young children, teaching my classes remotely, supporting my students and resting whenever I could. I tried to mentally reframe the situation as an “extended parental leave.” I was privileged to keep my family safe and cared for, spend more time with my young children, and keep my job. Despite this privilege, these past two years have been challenging, isolating, and have delayed my ability to go up for promotion to full professor. Getting stuck at the associate professor level is not something new for academic moms, but it has been exacerbated by the pandemic and has lifelong earning consequences (Gibbard Cook 2014; Weissman 2020).

As I settled into life at home with my children, while teaching and attending meetings remotely, I knew that I could not engage in my research. Being home with two young children meant that I did not have blocks of time in which to focus without someone asking me for a snack, or to go outside, or to mediate a squabble. I put my research aside, stopped thinking about it completely, knowing that this would hold me back in my career professionally and financially, but also feeling that the choice was between that and my mental health and well-being. Our campus childcare center arranged for monthly zoom calls among parents. I remember on the calls how many parents talked about getting their work done after a full day of caring for their children. They would put them to bed at 8pm and work until 2 or 3am and then be up at 6 or 7 the next morning. They talked about burnout, fatigue, deteriorating mental and physical health, and losing their patience with their children. I remember thinking, oh, I just am not doing my research. I am sleeping. I thought of this as self-care, such a basic form of self-care, because I felt I would not be mentally or emotionally capable of caring for two young children without sleep. This is not a choice caregivers should have to make. I should not have to decide that I will not be able to advance in my career under the normative time to go up for promotion or earn less because I chose sleep. And the other parents on the call should have been able to sleep as well. So many parents and caregivers sacrificed our own physical and mental health during the past two years.

Like many parents with young children working remotely during the pandemic, my worlds merged in new ways. As a feminist scholar, I have always critiqued the notion of a public/private dichotomy, but as someone who had previously tried to have boundaries around my work time and my family time, this was new terrain. While I had always talked to my students about being a parent, they could now see my children climbing on my lap and playing with my hair during zoom office hours. Student parents related to me

differently, as we shared our struggles around parenting during COVID. Similarly, my older child saw me comforting students during office hours, heard me talking about abortion politics during a teach-in, and saw me get nervous before a meeting and made me a heart out of play doh to comfort me. Colleagues across the university also saw my children pop in during meetings. Parenting became visible in university spaces in a way that it had not been before, despite how many of us are parents. This impacted the workplace and forced open a space for what was always there (parenting and caregiving labor) but had been previously invisible or hidden. The visibility also allowed parents and caregivers to see each other and come together for support and to organize collectively. As discussed by Sabrina and Araceli, I have participated in and been inspired by the ways in which parents and caregivers, particularly mothers, have come together during this time to support each other and collectively organize for institutional change.

While in many ways my pre-pandemic parenting communities and connections were disrupted by the physical distancing that the pandemic required, I engaged in new forms of community building and collective organizing online. When the on-campus childcare center closed, another parent and I began communicating about what was going to happen with the childcare staff. We were concerned that with no children to care for, they would temporarily lose their jobs. We collectively drafted a letter of support to university administrators advocating for the continuation of employment for the childcare center staff. In the end, the lead teachers maintained their employment and developed a weekly virtual preschool program. While I had previously worked closely with the preschool teachers, we became closer during this time. We saw our struggles as interconnected and created a system of mutual support. At the same time, we have also witnessed pandemic fatigue and anger coming from parents toward childcare workers and teachers, as centers and schools have shut down or adjusted protocols in ways that parents have found challenging. From my intersectional feminist politics of movement building, grounded in reproductive justice, I hope that this moment of feminist snapping as parents and caregivers can lead to more intersectional movement building around all forms of carework. The pandemic has simultaneously demonstrated the necessity of carework for society to function, while showing how quickly people turn on careworkers when they refuse to provide care in under-resourced or unsafe schools and childcare centers. This moment has the potential for seeing these connections and advocating for all careworkers.

In addition to organizing with parents and caregivers on campus, I yearned for feminist community. I missed the lively feminist engagement of face-to-face classes. Based on previous conversations with friends who asked about how to talk to their young children about racism, sexism, and other social justice issues, I created @little.justice.readers, an Instagram account dedicated to discussing the books I was reading with my children and how to use picture books to engage in conversations about social justice issues with young children. I used this format to discuss Black Lives Matter, gender and sexuality issues, and even the pandemic. This outlet provided a supportive and engaging community of parents, caregivers, and preschool and K-12 educators who were dedicated to social justice parenting and teaching. It remains a life-affirming, anti-racist and feminist space that I was grateful to become part of during this time of social isolation. This virtual space allowed me to connect my scholarly expertise, anti-racist, feminist politics, and my parenting in a way that fostered virtual community. While the pandemic caused a feminist snap for me and many other academic parents and caregivers, the connections, community, and organizing that we have forged are powerful and ongoing.

State Funding for Social Processes of Destruction Instead of Life-Affirming Labor— Sabrina's Narrative

As a mother of two young children, the pandemic meant that I was organizing on dual fronts as I continued to work in my community (i.e. alongside grassroots community organizers representing anti-war, queer

and feminist, abolitionist, Muslim POCs), who were hardest hit by these forms of state violence and simultaneously at my university, where our carework as parents and caregivers went unsupported. During the peak of the pandemic, vulnerable communities across the US demanded increased governmental support to survive the economic and social suffering caused by the global pandemic. Despite the passage of a record trillion dollar Federal Covid stimulus spending package for COVID-19-related efforts, the US security state continued to flourish with unprecedented levels of federal funding throughout the pandemic. The global pandemic accelerated the widespread growth of health and medical related surveillance technologies exacerbating the profiteering and repression of Muslim and other marginalized communities around the world who are subjected to ongoing processes of war and military occupation at the behest of the US nation state. In 2021, the Department of Homeland Security announced an all-time high in grant funding providing “more than \$1.8 billion in critical funding to assist our state and local partners in building and sustaining capabilities to prevent, protect against, respond to, and recover from acts of terrorism and other disasters.” Nothing was more disheartening than realizing the increase in Homeland Security funding would inevitably bring more state violence to Muslim communities coinciding with the crisis of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

As a public worker and as a parent of two public elementary school children, it was devastating to witness the draining of public resources at my children’s school while simultaneously seeing unprecedented levels of government funding to perpetuate violence against women of color and other marginalized communities. In response to the escalating state violence, I organized with a collective known as the Partnership to End Gendered Islamophobia, which focuses on the intersection of state violence and gendered Islamophobia. In 2021, I was part of organizing a nationwide collective movement of over 50 grassroots organizations who congealed to organize a grassroots agenda to abolish the War on Terror, otherwise known as Muslim Abolitionist Futures. The War on Terror (waged both at home and abroad) that Muslim communities endure is deeply interconnected with the state apparatus which continues to fund social processes of violence and destruction instead of supportive and life-affirming programs for all. This contradiction played out in my own life, where I was organizing in dual spaces simultaneously to combat the violence of state securitization and as a working mother. Like so many others, our unpaid and unsupported gendered labor of parenting and caregiving during the pandemic meant that women, particularly mothers of young children, were disproportionately impacted at their paid jobs.

Despite our university system receiving massive amounts of aid, including emergency relief through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, in addition to specific campuses receiving another \$120 million, they largely chose not to help the parents who were performing the bulk of the labor for the day to day functioning of the university. The move to neglect parent and caregiver faculty needs, while reaping hefty pay raises for university presidents and administrators, mirrors many other disturbing impacts of federal and state funding priorities.

As a cis queer femme of color parenting professor, much of my investments in organizing have sprouted from the working conditions that we face along with other marginalized faculty at the university. In summer of 2020, my partner and I organized a zoom meeting that we advertised on our faculty forum, asking any parenting faculty to join us to discuss how we can support each other during the pandemic. A group of faculty joined and we shared resources for going forward, and at that time we were offered COVID family leave for the fall. However, this COVID family leave was not offered uniformly across the university system, as Analena discussed. By spring 2021, the other large university system in our state, private universities, and community colleges all extended the COVID family leave since the pandemic in California caused schools closures for almost a year. However, our university system refused to do so, instead offering faculty sick leave that could be taken ad hoc, which of course did nothing to relieve us from our additional burdens of homeschooling and teaching online fulltime.

In response to not being offered a COVID family leave option nor any childcare on campus, my colleague Emily and I founded *Parents and Caregivers United*, which drafted a petition garnering hundreds of faculty signatures on our campus. We presented this petition to Academic Senate with a zoom-in protest where over 70 faculty joined with their kids in their zoom frame while we delivered the petition and its demands. We sent this petition to our President and met with our Provost and AVP multiple times to discuss our demands. We initially pushed for graders, emergency caregiving stipends, course release time for research, and a COVID Senate taskforce that would structurally respond to faculty evaluations to take into account the challenges faced by caregivers, women, and faculty of color with an equity lens. We also participated in a statewide caregiver group consolidating us across our campuses under our union. We continued to advocate to our bargaining team and also spoke at statewide legislative events to bring attention to the predicament we were experiencing. We ultimately won graders and one course release for all faculty who lost time for research.

Additionally, we aimed to divert some of the Higher Educational funding (HEERF) to small programs in case the university did not deliver on our demands. Organizing with Araceli, Lori, and Emily, we developed proposals for funding a scholarship kickstart program that aimed to structurally support faculty parents and caregivers' research and launched an inaugural Feminist Research and Writing Program that would keep afloat a pipeline of parenting professors whose scholarship had suffered the worst under the pandemic. Our organizing also extended to supporting the emotional and community needs of parenting faculty by starting a Pregnant, Parenting, and Caregiver Learning Community that ran over the course of a year serving 25 faculty per semester. In the midnight hour of a burnout weekend, Emily and I also wrote a proposed resolution and presented it to the Academic Senate to establish the COVID Equity in Faculty Evaluations Taskforce which aimed to "develop a campus-wide set of informed best practices for how evaluators can read candidates' files through an equity lens, so as not to perpetuate inequities caused by the Covid pandemic, particularly for parents and caregiving faculty, including its acute impacts for women and faculty of color." The taskforce met every other week over the summer of 2021 to develop two sets of guidelines; one for TT faculty and one for lecturer faculty. In addition, we (along with another feminist colleague Jessica Russell) partnered with Faculty Affairs to co-present three university workshops to TT faculty, two university workshops to lecturer faculty, and met with every Faculty Council and RTP college committee on campus to encourage the adoption and widespread use of the guidelines. We also have started concurrent organizing within our college strategic plan to launch our organizing for pay equity. One of our ongoing concerns has been the hit that many of us has taken to our financial security by delaying going up for promotion or tenure, as it compounds with the loss in earnings from stop the clock policy; ultimately causing gendered and racialized financial disparities. While all of these efforts led to some tangible outcomes and the formation of feminist, parenting and caregiving faculty communities that continue to collectively organize, most of it was also uncompensated labor during an already exhausting time, reflecting the gendered and racialized invisible labor and identity and cultural taxation we continue to experience even as we organize to change the structural barriers we face.

While organizing with faculty parents, I spent much of my time during the pandemic in close community; a rare opportunity to build with each other. In our conversations, organizing, and collective writing, we talked about the deterioration of our mental and physical health, our children's struggles, and our dwindling attention to our research. The university, however, demanded more of our labor and often spoke of students' increased needs, without acknowledging that faculty were also experiencing great hardship. For many of us, who come from marginalized communities and families, being in academia often means surviving deep personal and community traumas and ongoing structural violence. Oftentimes, we are the only ones who can make it out; in my case, I am haunted by survivor's guilt knowing that my youngest brother passed away from a fentanyl overdose just as I was going up for tenure. Having survived

homelessness and made it to the professoriate does not buffer me from experiencing the fallout of structural violence. The university often celebrates rhetorically their marginalized faculty, but continues to offer lukewarm support for the complexity of our experiences and mitigation of these challenges.

Narrativizing Our Collective and Politicized Maternal Identities

Together our testimonial narratives reveal the importance of collective forms of resistance in the face of deeply entrenched heteropatriarchal, Eurocentric, and neoliberal capitalist logics that exacerbate the vulnerabilities historically marginalized people experience. In contemplating the feminist framing that has informed our experiences as mothers and academics during the COVID-19 pandemic, the intersectional lens that has been developed by feminists of color over more than four decades has served as a guide both in terms of theory and practice (Crenshaw 1991; Hancock 2016; Hill Collins and Bilge 2016; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981). Anthologies such as *This Bridge Called My Back*, *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras*, *Telling to Live*, and *The Chicana M(other)work Anthology* have served as guides in this process (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981; Anzaldúa 1990; The Latina Feminist Group 2001; Caballero et al. 2019). Our narratives speak to the widespread and deeply entrenched social inequalities that women, especially working-class women and women of color, have disproportionately experienced the negative outcomes of the pandemic as they are positioned at the axes of multiple forms of discrimination, exclusion, and disadvantage (race, class, gender, sexuality, citizenship, etc.) (Duncan, Dutt-Ballerstadt, and Lo 2021; Covington and Hernandez Kent n.d.; Cahn n.d.; Crenshaw 1991). In the context of racial violence and economic exploitation, which is to say under the daily conditions of existence that women of color and working-class women face in the US, the contradictions of dominant middle-class, Eurocentric notions of motherhood that call for intensive, isolated, individual carework come to the surface. Our narratives underscore the work of social reproduction that is undertaken under positionalities that center mothering and motherhood that can foster the emergence of new political identities and solidarities.

As we have continued to collectively respond to the cruel conditions under which we are expected to parent and work during the pandemic we made some gains, but the root of the inequalities we face as mothers, caregivers, and women of color has not been addressed by the university or through government relief efforts that are entrenched in capitalist and heteropatriarchal logics. Yet, now that our identities as mothers have been politicized within our places of work, we will continue to make demands collectively from those positionalities instead of invisibilizing our parenting in university spaces, as has been the widespread expectation in all of our workplaces (*Telling to Live*). As Gretel H. Vera-Rosas writes, “enacting a feminist politics of maternity demands refusal to see mothering as detrimental to my professional life. A feminist politics of maternity pushes me to continue to theorize and embody motherhood as a collective social practice that can generate radical connections to others” (2019, 69). Out of a desire for radical social transformation, as mothers, scholars, and activists, we have collectively arrived at a politicized conceptualization of mothering and carework from which to resist white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, capitalism, and the resulting social and state-sanctioned violence that permeates US society. Our narratives make clear that the work of social justice is deeply intersectional and must be engaged on multiple fronts from ending state-sanctioned and state-perpetrated violence against Black and Brown people to ensuring working caregivers have access to life-affirming resources and systems of support.

Our narratives underscore the lack of support we received as academic mothers including limited and often difficult to access leave time and our universities’ lack of awareness that although administrators wanted a quick return to “normalcy” many faculty, students, and staff were still facing immense pandemic related obstacles, including school closures, lack of childcare, barriers to research and writing, and mental

health challenges. The call to return to business as usual failed to acknowledge the inequalities the pandemic had exacerbated for women, communities of color, working-class communities, and other vulnerable populations, revealing that the administrative logics of the university fail to acknowledge how sexism, racism, and capitalist exploitation structure managerial goals. For instance, our narratives speak to the barriers to research and writing we all experienced. Such slowdowns will have disproportionate long-term impacts on those on whom carework disparately fell due to school and childcare closures and will be made tangible in the form of delayed publications, tenure and promotion, and promotion to full, subsequent lack of salary increases and other professional and economic impacts. As we note in our narratives, for mothers these types of delays have only been exacerbated and laid bare by the pandemic (Gibbard Cook 2014; Weissman 2020).

Another theme that emerges from our narratives is that we each understand our maternal identities beyond the dominant heteropatriarchal understanding of motherhood as individualized, isolated, and labor-intensive work that requires self-abnegation and sacrifice (Hill Collins 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). We understand motherhood through a politicized lens that acknowledges the colonial, racist, heteropatriarchal, and class-based violence within which we engage in the work of mothering under seemingly impossible conditions. This framing has been essential to our collective organizing as mothers and to building a radical politics around carework that calls for a restructuring of how universities evaluate faculty, administer family and other types of leave, assign classes, and other related matters. Feminist scholars have challenged traditional white, middle-class notions of mothers as self-abnegating caregivers that individually perform carework in the privacy of their own homes to instead identify and develop anti-racist, anti-patriarchal, and anti-capitalist forms of mothering (Gumbs, Martens, and Williams 2016). Our organizing work aligns with these political trajectories as we create space for making the carework that has for so long gone unacknowledged (caring for children and elders and the emotional labor we perform for the university) visible within workplaces that often resist recognizing such work as central to the functioning of the university.

The capacity to build community and have meetings online as both a source of empowerment and a burden also emerged as a theme in our narratives. Many of us experienced online meetings that could have been emails. We were expected to be available for more meetings and often outside regular work hours. However, the option to meet online also allowed us to organize and build community without the necessity of commuting in heavy Southern California traffic, or finding childcare while our children were home with us, a reality that, as we detail, created its own complications. Social media and online technologies also enabled Lori to offer resources on gender, race, and sexuality beyond the space of the university to reach the caregivers and teachers of K-12 children, and Sabrina engaged in transnational organizing to challenge gendered Islamophobia and the War on Terror. Without the option to meet online, much of our collective work would not have been possible during a global pandemic that required physical distancing and as we look to the future this mode of meeting and mobilizing will continue to be a tool that we use to facilitate change for mothers, parents, and caregivers.

Returning to the notion of “feminist snap” and Ahmed’s (7, 2017) assertion that “feminist housework aims to transform the house, to rebuild the master’s residence,” our narratives underscore that that COVID-19 pandemic was a snap that was caused not just by the circumstances of the pandemic, but the mounting pressure around being academic caregivers, particularly for women of color faculty. This moment allowed caregiving faculty to become visible to each other and to develop community and demand change. We collectively made sense of how our unvalued caregiving university labor and parenting labor simultaneously hold us back in our careers, while providing great service and value to our students, the university, and our families and communities. We sought immediate interventions to ease our COVID-specific struggles, but also saw our caregiving labor as connected to other forms of caregiving labor, which

are often rhetorically praised, but continually undervalued in terms of resources and compensation. In this sense, this feminist snap opened new possibilities now that we have collectively organized as politicized parents and caregivers to transform the institutional structure of the university in a way that values caregivers and caregiving labor. We include institutional recommendations below. We hope that our collective narratives inspire others to collectively organize and resist the neoliberal urge of academic institutions to return to pre-pandemic practices.

Recommendations for Dismantling Barriers that Mothers and Caregivers Experience within the University

The COVID-19 pandemic pushed faculty mothers to a tipping point, exacerbating gendered and racialized inequities that already existed. At the same time, it made the carework women perform visible in new ways that created opportunities for organizing and holding our institutions accountable. By mobilizing under maternal political identities, we expose the fallacy of private/public dichotomies and make our “private” activities as mothers a central part of our “public” demands. Academics and activists who are engaged in mothering work and who have called for policies that promote justice and equity for those performing carework have helped to reveal the delusion of the private/public divide. Whether we like it or not, the pandemic has made our private lives quite visible to our colleagues and students as we log in to meetings and our children, family members, and the physical space of our home appear for all to see. In some ways, this shift helped us talk about our identities as mothers and legitimized our public demands for policies that would help balance work and home responsibilities in more manageable ways. From our vantage point, there are many recommendations for collective organizing that can improve the conditions of academic parents and caregivers.

To start with, to enhance and retain a pipeline of mothers as faculty, offering paid leave that promote gender equity policies is crucial. Despite the increase of white, upper class, cis women in positions of power at the “imperial” university who speak the language of diversity, equity, and inclusion, systemic racial, class, and gender inequities remain unresolved (Chatterjee and Maira 2014). Women administrators who hold structural class advantages and resources have often been able to shield themselves from the extraordinary challenges and intensive work that carework demands of those without such privileges. In other cases where they have not possessed such favorable advantages, advocating for pro-parenting policies represents a systemic challenge to the heterosexist, cis, white male institutional history and culture of academia, where carework remains a personal responsibility not an institutional one. Instead, a status quo approach that many universities have offered to combat the disruptions of childbearing, adoption, and most recently pandemic-related hardships are “stop the clock” policies that allow faculty to opt to extend their tenure clock an additional year. However, this intervention only delays time to tenure or promotion while keeping parents (mostly mothers) at a lower pay base and lower rank. It also functions to re-entrench the gender equity pay gap and loss of lifetime earnings due to the delayed time in ascending the ranks of the professoriate. Additionally, mothers are often left with a cumulative disadvantage if they already opted to stop the clock, then opt to be delayed a second year due to the pandemic. We recommend clock extensions that ensure back pay for the period of time the clock was stopped so that caregivers who are disproportionately mothers do not experience the so-called “mommy tax” on the tenure track (Crittenden 2002).

Some academic mothers also get “stuck” in lecturer positions because temporary employment provides flexibility for childbirth, bonding time, and childcare, as well as an additional income for families. As the number of tenure track jobs has shrunk over time due to disinvestment and restructuring of higher

education in the US, a disproportionately feminized workforce has emerged in the form of lecturer faculty. Given that over half of faculty are contingent labor, while there are more women professors now, many women faculty are in a precarious labor position without job security. Overqualified and underpaid, women lecturers face unpredictability in their schedules, job insecurity, heavy teaching loads, stagnant salaries, and other forms of exploitation. The pandemic is only worsening these severe structural inequalities. When we look even more closely, women of color, at the intersection of structural racism and sexism, are the most likely to have the most insecure positions and are concentrated in fields with the lowest pay. We suggest that there should be more institutional opportunities to convert contingent faculty members to tenure track positions, especially for those who are also mothers or parents and in need of the income and health benefits that stable employment brings.

Short-term measures can offer important career boosts for faculty parents. For instance, offering assigned time to be banked or extended for use in the future to assist with lost time can help faculty parents catch up with institutional support. Universities that have implemented this option have the greatest potential to close the gender equity gap since mothers with small children report the greatest disruptions to research, which can translate to tenure and promotion delays. An important structural intervention is institutionalized support for writing and research so women are not left alone to overcome these widespread structural obstacles. The ongoing nature of the pandemic will undoubtedly continue to impact women's future at the university as mothers continue to carry disproportionate amounts of carework. Performing an equity pay analysis by rank and replicating this for the next two, five, and ten years to assess how women and men as parents and caregivers are performing compared to their childless peers will enable the university to identify future fallout. While many universities gather data, women of color (who are more likely to suffer racialized and gendered inequities than their peers) as well as non- binary and trans caregiving faculty are often rendered invisible by metrics that reinforce a gender binary and/or separate race from gender. Even pre-COVID, faculty parents faced short parental leave times and no options for childcare on campus starting at infancy within our university system. Our universities continued their expectations of fulltime work during the pandemic while childcare was withdrawn due to continued closures. Furthermore, many lecturer faculty or faculty with more than one child cannot afford the exorbitant costs of childcare, or may be afraid to ask for parental leave for fear that they will lose their future class assignments. Subsidizing childcare at universities or providing childcare stipends would help decrease parents' and caregivers' multiple and conflicting work demands.

As universities move to adopt equity-based strategies to reduce gaps among students in terms of retention, achievement, and graduation rates, they will need to similarly take up these long-standing patterns of inequality among faculty as well. Systemic change requires centering those most impacted by the issue(s) with the goal of identifying the harmful practices and policies of institutions that pose ongoing barriers to the full inclusion of historically excluded faculty. This means avoiding the pitfalls of assuming that the solution lies with changing the individual (i.e. parents should adopt better work-life balance). This type of suggestion does not seek to transform the institution itself, but instead relies on parents to change how they balance their own time. We also need to be wary of institutional commitments to equity that are not attached to tangible resources. As universities become savvier in equity discourses, they will inevitably adopt and incorporate the least costly equity-based strategies, or those that do not carry administrative accountability or culpability. These shortcuts are dangerous, as they have limited impact when it comes to transforming our workplace and working conditions in positive ways.

The collective process of sharing our testimonios and working together on this paper has been incredibly impactful for us as scholars and mothers of color. In sharing these experiences of COVID as a tipping point, we were able to theorize the ways in which the university structure was never built for us and has continued to fail us. It was an emotional process of sharing things with each other as mothers and

colleagues that we often do not share at work, including family struggles, losses, and mental health issues. Through this process and the activism we have engaged in, we put forth recommendations and remedies that are within reach, and we continue to organize for them on our campuses. The pandemic has allowed for new opportunities to revisit the ways that parenting and caregiving faculty incur unnecessary costs to their careers, mental health, and well-being. Structural changes at the institutional level have the potential to address exacerbated racialized and gendered equity gaps, including loss of time to promotion and investments in a more robust faculty pipeline. Adequate support for parenting faculty (particularly those who are sought out by marginalized students) is vital to faculty well-being and retention, and to the long-term viability of universities during this ongoing pandemic and beyond.

Notes

1. Throughout the article we use the terms parents, mothers, and caregivers to refer to the various types of carework in which we and others engage. We position ourselves as mothers and women-identified faculty and some of us also engage in caregiving for our aging relatives and other community members. Since our arguments also speak to the conditions parents have endured during the pandemic more generally, at times, we use the language of parenting and parents. We also acknowledge that our intervention does not account for the challenges that non-binary, trans, lecturer, and other marginalized parenting faculty have experienced during the pandemic. Our intervention centers the organizing and mothering work undertaken by the authors, which included organizing in coalition with faculty from these backgrounds, but we recognize that there are many more narratives to be told from other perspectives, including that of fathers and those charged with caring for elders and other adults. Also, while lecturer faculty were involved in many of these collective organizing efforts, the institutional resources and support was abysmal for them, and consequently they occupied a much more precarious position than tenure track faculty.

2. Based on self-reported data <https://www.chronicle.com/article/how-many-black-women-have-tenure-on-your-campus-search-here>

3. While I was able to have two of my four classes reassigned, I later found out that other colleagues were relieved from all teaching duties. I attribute this to a lack of policy uniformity across the university system, and a failure to communicate properly with faculty and staff about the benefits available to them.

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