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(Ill)usional Fatness Syndrome: [Un]framing the Chicana Lesbian Fat Body

Towards Body Liberation

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
in Chicana and Chicano Studies

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

(Ill)usory Fatness Syndrome: [Un]framing the Chicana Lesbian Fat Body
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Over time, the United States national narrative on the Obesity Epidemic created a xenophobic, racist, sexist, and fatphobic cultural paradigm that villainizes queer, and non-queer Latinos. The goal of this thesis is to understand how the Latino Obesity Narrative creates an internalized illusion of disease within fat Chicana lesbians. First, I use medical, public health, and fat studies research to delineate the Latino Obesity Narrative. Second, I use Chicana Lesbian Feminist methodologies to dissect the national paradigm on Obesity, and begin my analysis of Fat Chicana Lesbian Photographer, Laura Aguilar. Aguilar's photographs, videos, and letters are the backdrop to understanding the impact the American obesity consciousness has on Chicana lesbian bodies. Lastly, I conclude that Aguilar's artwork is a foundation towards body liberation that resist the United States' dangerous sense of the model body.

The thesis of Dafne Faviola Luna is approved.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: El Sitio Y Lengua de una Chicana Fat Femme Dyke	1
CHAPTER 2: From (Ill)usional Fatness Syndrome to a Gendered Latino Obesity Narrative.....	8
CHAPTER 3: Fat Chicana Lesbian Photographer Laura Aguilar's Body Liberationist	
Methodology.....	38
CONCLUSION: Curing (Ill)usional Fatness Syndrome.....	73

FIGURES

- Figure 1: Christy Roads. Next World Tarot: The Lovers. Print. Los Angeles, 2018.
<http://croadcore.org/>
- Figure 2: Norival Trindade. House of Mirrors. Digital Photograph. 2016.
- Figure 3: Laura Aguilar. Three Eagles Flying. Three Gelatin Silver Prints. Los Angeles. 1990.
Found in Laura Aguilar: Show and Tell.
- Figure 4: Laura Aguilar. Letter to Joyce Tenneson on September 6, 1993 with a scan of
Access + Opportunity = Success. Box 1, Folder 4. Laura Aguilar Papers and
Photographs, Stanford Special Collections, Palo Alto, CA. 19 July. 2018
- Figure 5: Laura Aguilar Letter to Joyce Tenneson on September 6, 1993.Box 1, Folder 4. Laura
Aguilar Papers and Photographs, Stanford Special Collections, Palo Alto, CA. 19 July.
2018
- Figure 6: Adobe Stock Photo for named “Obesity Female body, fat woman belly” found through
Google.com
- Figure 7: Laura Aguilar Letter to Joyce Tenneson on September 6, 1993.Box 1, Folder 4. Laura
Aguilar Papers and Photographs, Stanford Special Collections, Palo Alto, CA. 19 July.
2018
- Figure 8: Laura Aguilar. Laura: Latino Lesbian Series. 1988. Gelatin Silver Print. Box 6 , Folder
1. Laura Aguilar Papers and Photographs, Stanford Special Collections, Palo Alto, CA.
19, July 2018.
- Figure 9: Laura Aguilar. The Body. Film Snapshot. 1995. Box 8. Laura Aguilar Papers and
Photographs, Stanford Special Collections, Palo Alto, CA. 20, July 2018.
- Figure 10: Laura Aguilar. Clothed/Uncloded #1. 1990. Two Gelatin Silver Prints. Printed in
Laura Aguilar: Show and Tell. 2017.
- Figure 11: Gil Cuadros. “The Emigrant.” Newspaper Clipping. 1992. Box 3. Folder 9. Laura
Aguilar Papers and Photographs, Stanford Special Collections, Palo Alto, CA. 19, July
2018.
- Figure 12: Laura Aguilar. The Body. Film Snapshot. 1995. Box 8. Laura Aguilar Papers and
Photographs, Stanford Special Collections, Palo Alto, CA. 20, July 2018.
- Figure 13: Laura Aguilar. The Body. Film Snapshot. 1995. Box 8. Laura Aguilar Papers and
Photographs, Stanford Special Collections, Palo Alto, CA. 20, July 2018.
- Figure 14: Laura Aguilar. The Body. Film Snapshot. 1995. Box 8. Laura Aguilar Papers and
Photographs, Stanford Special Collections, Palo Alto, CA. 20, July 2018.

Figure 15: Figure 16: Laura Aguilar. *The Body*. Film Snapshots. 1995. Box 8. Laura Aguilar Papers and Photographs, Stanford Special Collections, Palo Alto, CA. 20, July 2018.

Figure 17: Instagram Post by @Frutamala about Laura Aguilar's passing. April 2018. Used with permission from user.

CHAPTER 1

El Sitio Y Lengua de una Chicana Fat Femme Dyke

When I first started graduate school at UCLA, I thought I was very Fat Positive, but I actually had an elementary understanding of Fat Positivity that is more akin to Body Positivity. Body Positivity is a human rights concept that all bodies deserve respect, peace, and inclusion in society because humans have implicit worth. To me, this idea seemed like a no-brainer; of course we all deserve respect and to live our lives in peace. The reality is that Body Positivity is hard to accomplish and explain because it often leaves out Fat Positivity. Historically, Fat Positivity is what jumpstarted the Body Positive movement. In order to have Body Positivity we need Fat Positive politics.

During my first quarter at UCLA I developed @Fierce Fat PoC, an Instagram digital art project, for a course called Social Media Art and Activism. This Instagram showcased fat people of color in a “positive” light. Models for my project submitted a picture of themselves and answered questions about their experience. My mission was to show how fat people of color are happy, thriving, and accepting of their bodies. At first, I was really excited and passionate about my project. I was working with models closely, making images every couple of days, and posting regularly on Instagram. The more I read over the interviews, studied my images, and received tremendous positive responses the more passionate I got. At the end of that quarter we had to share with the rest of the class about our project and I spoke about Body Positivity and fat people thriving. Three months later I dropped the project and have not produced a single image in years. Why?

Around that time I was talking to my primary care practitioner about weigh loss surgery. I hated looking at myself in the mirror because I felt ugly, gross, grotesque. How could I, a Fat Positive activist, want to cut out parts of my body to feel pretty. How could I push an ideology I believed in and did not practice? Could I continue lying?

If I wanted to do my research right then I needed to unpack my own experiences being fat, queer, chicanx, femme. Emma Pérez's "Sexuality and Discourse: Notes from a Chicana Survivor" argues that Chicano patriarchy requires a dissecting of its power "among heterosexuals, lesbians, and gay men" because of its effects on our "sociosexual relationships" with ourselves and each other (160). Sociosexual, according to Webster's dictionary, refers to the interpersonal sexual willingness between people. Perez argues that this willingness is poisoned by patriarchal power structures that enculturates unhealthy and nonconsensual relationships between gendered people (i.e. rape culture). Sociosexual is rooted in an interpersonal experience between two or more people. For my research and identity formation purposes I want to expand on this definition to center the intimacy that is part of the sexuality experiences between the self and the other/s.

Perez divides her sexuality discourse into three parts that are crucial for my understanding of the contentious relationship I had with my fat body and Fierce Fat POC. The first component is the foundation of Chicano machismo in an oedipal triangulation of mestizaje and Spanish colonization; the white father (Cortez), the raped Indian mother (La Malinche), and the mestizo son (Octavio Paz, and by extension, Chicano men). The second is "'memory of origin' when girls recognize they do not have sociosexual power in relation to men" (162). The last is *Sitio y Lengua* for "Third-World-Identified-Third-World-Women...and women and [sic] men of color" that "[reject] colonial ideology and the by-products of colonialism and capitalist patriarchy... [because it] is rooted in both the words and silences of..." them (173-174, 161). Simply put, *Sitio y Lengua* is for Chicana, and women of color, who use their social positionality in this culture and speak their truths out loud as a form of resistance. I used these three interventions to unpack my fat, queer, femme, and chicana body.

Perez's chicano oedipal triangulation claims there is a toxic colonial relationship Chicano men have to their white forefather, Cortez, which instills a "castration anxiety," or a powerful envy, shame, hatred and even fear because his brown "manhood" will never measure up to the white father's manhood (164). What will always make the brown son's manhood less than the colonizing father's is the color he inherited from his brown Indian mother. This internalized racism acts as a castration tool that develops in generations of frustrated heterosexual Chicanos who perpetuate a violent machista culture where they "displace their frustrations on to women of color" and queers (161). Queer Chicana/os live under these conditions, and I know they have impacted, and continue to affect, my relationship with myself. The most blatant violences that I experiences are almost particularly my female body shape and size, my identity as a woman, and my fatness. During moments when I hate my body I focus on the shapes and sizes of certain body parts and how those body parts have been the target of the most harassment. I wonder if maybe my butt and breast were smaller men would leave me alone? If I lost weight would those body parts get flat? Will brown older men target me less if I was more fat or thin? What can I do to hide my body to avoid their gaze?

My moments of self-hate follow on par with Perez's memory of origin, the moment I do not have sociosexual power with others. She uses *el Corrido de Delgadina* as a case study to unpack sociosexual disempowerment in Chicanas. The song is about a young woman with two siblings and straight parents and she is being sexually harassed to become her father's lover, or else. At the end of the corrido no one helps her (including her mother) because "[p]atriarchal law dictates the tacit language and behavior of incest, which places fear [and complicity] in the daughter's [and other mujeres'] psyche" (170). While rape never occurs, the signs, words, and gestures "are as damaging as penetration" and ultimately Delgadina dies from neglect and

despair (171). This case study represents the historical and colonial legacy that patriarchy has on mujeres. Perez believes that it is not until “victims resist the perpetrators and have the courage to abandon the pattern, not until women and men stop assigning the perpetrator power, can women and men finally abandon phallogentric law and order” (173). On a certain level I agree with Perez’s argument, but it is important to consider that these women who perpetuate violence or stay in these relationships are powerless and oftentimes the codependency and fear of leaving is stronger than the fear of violence. It is a complex power exchange that blame is not sufficient enough to explain.

My memory of origin of the shame I felt towards myself is one of my mom and me sitting in the office of a middle-aged dietician. At around the age of six or seven, I remember sitting to the left of my mom in a faux leather seat with metal arms. We were both facing an ugly evergreen metal desk that I kept kicking with my feet. Behind the desk I remember a woman with dyed blonde hair in a sort of short teased out wave style. I do not remember what my mom and her talked about but I remember the words *pesada y muy gordita*. Now mind you, by then everyone called me Gordis or Gorda, but it was not until that initial appointment that I began associating Gorda with something bad. After that the diets began and the comments on my weight have yet to stop. Perez argues that women are also complicit in the violence of other mujeres. I do not believe my mother was trying to violate my body autonomy or my peace. I do not believe that this dietician had any other intentions but to “help” me. Patriarchal law dictates a certain gender behavior and that includes a certain body type. My body is not beautiful by patriarchal standards. My mother and the various women in my life internalized machista standards of beauty that are rooted in colonial ideologies. Later in this thesis I will discuss model bodies. The point is that this memory of origin began the deep-seeded self-loathing that led to

my abandoning Fierce Fat PoC and discussing bariatric surgery. This memory of origin is the spark for Perez's most powerful methodology intervention, "un sitio y lengua (a space and tongue)" (161). Our sitio is constructed from the understanding of our sociosexual and machista oppression and its impact on ourselves and our place in the world. Our lengua is the way we speak this knowledge to share our truths and challenge the colonial structures.

This is my sitio y lengua: I, Dafne Faviola Luna, am Fat. Not chubby, curvy, gordita, chunky, plus size, or big boned, but capital F Fat! My fatness does not hide, nor can it be hidden because it is an excess of me. I do not mean fat as in ugly, motherly, gluttonous, dumb, uneducated, or diseased. I mean fat as an adjective relating to the excess of my body. I am a United States born Mexicana (a U.S. citizen) navigating a contentious middle-class life because of my higher education status and professional experience. My site affords me the privileges of accessible health and mental care that ensures my body and mind have the resources I need to be a productive member of UCLA, a neoliberal higher education institution. By society's standards I am an American success. But my "sitio y lengua" is more complicated than that because my experience and body are part of the power structures that grew out of colonization and occupation. Being fat, brown, queer, and a woman in American society is a very particular experience. I deal with constant policing of my body size, my gender performance, mannerisms, and choices. A result of this experience has been to limit and isolate myself from a variety of activities, aesthetics, opportunities such as not wearing a bathing suit to the beach or avoiding crop tops and unflattering clothes to avoid standing out more than I already do. Despite these various struggles I plant my feet, my heart, and mind in the decolonial epistemological truths of my sitio y lengua because that is the only way I can work through my self-hate. My wanting to have bariatric surgery is an extreme measure I was willing to take to stop my self-loathing. I

realize now that a surgery cannot do that, this surgery would only take parts of my body. Self-loathing is something I have the power to remove from my everyday experience.

The reality of living in a fat-hate based society is that the discourses around fatness impact our internal understandings of ourselves and results in self-imposed limitations towards self-determination. To begin my research I argue against an (Ill)usory Fatness Syndrome, an understanding of fatness as an illness that leads to a dissociated or warped sense of self for fat queer people of color. (Ill)usory Fatness Syndrome is a symptom of a disease discourse that I call the Latino Obesity Narrative. To support my arguments I use public health and medical literature as a foundation for the discourses on obesity that create the (Ill)usion of our fatness being an illness to the world and ourselves. I move into connecting the obesity discourse with xenophobic and racist rhetoric on Latinidad and the Latino community, particularly how obesity is a tactic towards perpetuating further exclusion and oppression. Lastly, I use Fat Studies literature to dissect the gendered and queer impact of the Obesity Latino Narrative and its impact on the self-determination of fat queer people of color. Before diving into my study of Chicana Lesbian Photographer Laura Aguilar's work as a case study for how (ill)usory fatness syndrome affects *the* individual, I establish my methodological grounding in Chicana lesbian feminist methodologies such as Gaspar de Alba's "[un]framing the 'bad' woman," Sandoval's five technologies of emancipation, and Emma Perez's decolonial imaginary. I conclude my research with a critical analysis of Laura Aguilar's *Three Eagles Flying* and her short video journal *The Body* in conversation with her *Clothed/Unclothed* Series.

CHAPTER 2
From (Ill)usory Fatness Syndrome to a
Gendered Latino Obesity Narrative



Figure 1: Christy Roads. *Next World Tarot: The Lovers*. Print. Los Angeles, 2018. <http://croadcore.org/>

(III)usionalary Fatness Syndrome

Over the summer of 2018 I purchased and framed this Cristy Road's Next World Tarot: The Lovers print to put up on my wall (see Figure 1). The print shows a queer person in a skirt, a shaved head, with combat boots and a necklace with a pink triangle. This queer is using a cane as they stare into the full-length mirror where a reflection of them is stepping out and gifting them spoons and a tender caress of their cheek. I love this piece because it elicits joy, sadness, desire, and even fear for something I could not put together then. The fear I felt by looking at The Lovers went back to my fear of the house of mirrors. The house of mirrors are a common circus or county fair attraction that is a maze completely constructed with mirrors that distort the reflections. I think even as a child I was already afraid of my reflection.

From my distortion and fear of self my (ill)usory fatness syndrome festered inside. The mirrors in these mazes create distorted images because a film coating the mirror is intended to warp the viewers' reflection. As a kid, walking through the maze was terrifying because it bloats, extends, engorges, and twists the body parts that I had already been told were wrong in my body. The point of these attractions was to create an experience of illusion simply for the fun of it all (see figure 2). But what happens when the illusions are more akin to the reality of your body? What happens when a fat person's stomach resembles that of an illusory reflection? What happens if the engorged face looks like the double chin or round full cheeks some of us already have? These reflections, while they may be illusions, depict images of what a body should not be like.



Figure 2: Norival Trindade. House of Mirrors. Digital Photograph. 2016.

When someone walks through the maze they are faced with numerous mirrors, each intended to target a certain aspect of the body, much like walking through society and being faced with images, rhetoric, and experiences targeted towards assimilation. In my literature review I will show that the national consciousness around fatness is rooted in obesity, an alleged pathological condition of excess body fat. Consider the whole house of mirrors this national consciousness. Each specific room of this maze is a sector of society we navigate as residents of the United States. Consider our medical system, political infrastructures, interpersonal networks,

popular media and cultural productions—each of these as separate rooms. Specific sectors are given certain mirrors, or tools, to construction a reflection of the normative ideological paradigms of society, such as model bodies. The (ill)usion aspect of (ill)usionary fatness syndrome, is cemented in the structure that is the house of mirrors because it sets the parameters of the obesity discourse that all sectors are entrusted to disseminate. I use (ill) because an obese body is considered a sick, diseased, disordered body.

I argue that fatness is different than obesity because fatness, or rather fat, is a more common day to day vernacular that is used as both an adjective and a tool of punishment. One of the rooms in this maze of mirrors is our interpersonal networks. In this part of our life, people who have excess body fat are called fat. Doctors do not use it because it is not medically correct, but the people in our everyday life use fat, or gorda/o to describe our whole existence in one word. It is important to separate fat from obese because fat has the chance to separate from its pathogenic origin; mirrors can be broken. (Ill)usionary fatness is the idea that fat is not a disease, but an illusion of a pathogenic ideology imposed on the body. Being fat is not a disease, being fat is an aspect of normal human diversity, much like having brown versus blonde hair or blue versus brown eyes. But why syndrome? Syndrome, according to Google, is a group of co-occurring symptoms that relate to a disorder or disease. I use syndrome to argue that the obesity narrative that creates these illusions of bodies, (ill)usionary fatness, is a disease in the fat individual's consciousness that is accompanied by various symptoms that actually result in an unintentional disordered quality of life. As a fat femme dyke, the symptoms of the (ill)usionary fatness syndrome I contracted is extreme self-loathing, avoidance of interpersonal experiences and opportunities, fear of eating, dissociation, and a fear of my reflection (among many other things). Having these symptoms flaring up on an everyday basis is quite honestly exhausting and

akin to suffering. (Ill)usory Fatness Syndrome is an ideological social disease that engenders a distorted sense of self in all bodies, particularly fat ones, that results in a real and negative impact on the quality of life of fat people. What follows is a literature review that explores the obesity narrative that constructs the house of mirrors, how the different rooms are raced and gendered, and the ways (ill)usory fatness syndrome impacts fat Chicana lesbian bodies.

The House of Mirrors: Public Health, Obesity, and the Model Body

(Ill)usory Fatness Syndrome festers through the national obesity discourse. The house of mirrors is the home of the pathogenic obesity narrative that is engrained into the national consciousness; think of it as the theme of the attraction. Because this attraction's purpose is to saturate us with the illusion of a diseased obese body, it is necessary to lay out how, why, and what the narrative actually is and its impact on Latinidad.

These studies are heavily cited by government-established, or sanctioned, institutions that are tasked with exploring health within the United States. The Center of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is a federal agency that focuses on “developing and applying disease prevention and control, environmental health, and health promotion and health education activities designed to improve the health of people of the United States” (1). To sustain their mission they maintain “surveillance of disease through epidemiologic and laboratory” research that is then used to develop health promotion programs to improve health (1). The CDC controls the spread of infectious diseases and supports national agencies, institutions, and centers that directly work within the CDC's scope. The CDC has four different Departments that collaborate to support the CDC's mission. The majority of the work on obesity is hosted by the offices of the Deputy Director for Public Health Science and Surveillance and Deputy Director for Non-

Infectious Diseases who then have concentrated departments to sustain their respective work (1). Out of these offices a range of obesity-related research and prevention programs came to fruition that had national impact. Much of this work was in collaboration, passive or active, with private or education research institutions that focus on eradicating or curing diseases often attached to obesity: cardiovascular, cancerous, respiratory, orthopedic, reproductive, and even infectious. Some of these organizations are the American Medical Association, National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, American Cancer Society, and National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Why is this important? Michel Foucault's *Birth of the Clinic* is a genealogy that explains how medicine became politicized through embracing a knowledge of the body, particularly a "non-sick man and a definition of a model man" (40). He argues that when a field of knowledge is dedicated to the body, particularly through the notion of eradicating epidemics on a "national" scale, then the body becomes politicized. His case study for this argument is rooted in understanding medical practices developed for the purpose of sustaining a military's health. When a whole field of practices is dedicated to a police state there is an inherent power differential established over who is considered right and wrong, normal and abnormal, good and bad (31). Therefore, this new knowledge of the body is inherently tainted with power and as such tackling the prevention, control, promotion, and improvement of a pathogen on the epidemic level is a strategic power-sustaining move. He talks about how to sustain health and prevent the spread of disease; these efforts are supported by the police (at least in his context of France in the 18-hundreds) (28). To get a whole workforce to participate, Foucault identified the medical gaze, which is a "collective consciousness" of the alleged information of a pathogen (33). This information is coordinated and constructed by the judicial medical experts that "prescribe what books were to be read and what...works were to be written; it would indicate...the information

received; what treatment was to be administered for prevalent disease” (35). So the medical gaze of a disease is the information the political powers have deemed important to share with the police, or enforcers of justice, under the guise of control and prevention that creates the collective consciousness to identify a diseased body.

In the United States context, the CDC is the political entity that constructs the medical gaze that is imposed on all its resident bodies, and even those beyond its borders. The CDC is a power structure in the US because it is not only governmentally funded but is given the sovereign power to decide what are the epidemiological pathogens plaguing society, how to tackle the prevalence of these pathogens, what treatments to implement, and the steps to reducing their attack on its citizens. I want to connect the medical gaze to obesity because obesity is considered an epidemic in the United States and actually internationally. The CDC’s Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity, under the office of the Director for Non-Infectious Diseases, “is at the forefront of addressing obesity in the U.S [because] too many people have obesity.” To address this issue they have conducted research and collaborated with different academic institutions, private research centers, and major medical thinktanks to learn what causes obesity, how dangerous is obesity, is it a risk factor for life-threatening diseases, and what are the best interventions to reducing the incidence of it. Through their work, the CDC, constructed a governmentally-backed national obesity narrative that constructs the model body, which is a thin, white, male body. This epidemiological obesity narrative begins to characterize obesity as a disease, something wrong with the body, dangerous to the body’s survival, something to be fixed. This narrative becomes part of society’s collective consciousness that feeds the type of knowledge-production necessary to support this characterization. It becomes, in other words, a vicious cyclical narrative that says the fat body is sick.

One of the most recent studies that clearly depicts this epidemiological obesity narrative is Dr. Christakis and Fowler's "The Spread of Obesity in a Large Social Network Over 32 Years" in which they hypothesized that the pervasiveness of obesity is configured as a communicable disease. This study was part of a multigenerational study, the Framingham Heart Study, "designed to identify genetic and environmental factors influencing the development of cardiovascular and other diseases" for which obesity is often a risk factor (National Health, Lung, and Blood Institute). They conducted a qualitative study with medical assessments, from 1971 to 2003, beginning with 5,214 primary participants (egos) and ending with 12,067, which included the majority of primary subjects and their social networks (i.e. friends, coworkers, and family members). The researchers tracked the obesity status of the original participants as well as that of the three generations that followed. During the interview process they noticed egos frequently mentioned their social networks from which they coded relational investment and geographic proximity. The goal of the study was to understand how the spread of obesity grew exponentially over a 30-year period. Researcher noted clusters, as in a high incidence of obesity within a closed geographic area. They concluded that an individual is up to 57% more likely to develop obesity by the emotional, social, and geographic closeness of their interpersonal relationships. Christakis et al. argued that the "egos'" norms about their acceptability of being overweight, more directly influencing the ego's behaviors (e.g. Affecting food conception), or both" were affected by their relationship with alters (377). Alter's are the ego's social networks, the non-primary study subjects, but those they discuss in their interviews. Their medical intervention through this study is that obesity is not strictly developed by negative individual behaviors or beliefs, but by a "psychosocial mechanism" that, if the ego observes an alter's weight gain, they will accept it in themselves (378). One of their suggestions, which they did say

needed further discussion, is that, preventing the further spread of education to individuals of healthy lifestyle shifts would change individuals' perceptions of obesity and would result in a slowing down of the spread of obesity (379).

Foucault argued that the group in power, in this context the CDC, defines what is the epidemic plaguing society. One of the key jobs of this group is to contain and eradicate the disease, and the first step to that is understanding how it spreads. Christakis et al. found that there is a social factor to the spread of obesity, beyond that of individual behaviors, which has been the predominant idea in public health. To paraphrase their argument, they believe that obesity spreads by touch, much like a flu. If I the obese person makes a deep interpersonal relation with someone who I have access to regularly because we live in the same area and they are not obese then I will infect them with my obesity. That person who is infected will pass it on to their social network and that network will pass it to their network and so forth. This spread of obesity is clustered within a geographic area because the degrees of separation between those originally infected and the rest of the residents is small enough.

The researcher defined obesity as a disease that spreads, clusters in an area, and affects the population which is exactly what an epidemic is. This highly pathologized framing and wording of obesity is not unique in that most of infectious diseases are discussed in this manner. In 2011/2012 Eiback, Casalegno, Bouscambert, et.al., conducted a study of an influenza outbreak in the geriatric department at Hôpital Edouard Herriot in Lyon, France. They used an epidemiological analysis to track the spread of the flu incidence in patients. They concluded that one, not all wards were affected the same, two, it because of the patient to healthcare workers consistent contact, three, clusters of infected patients reflected the three different wards. Eiback et al, intervened by isolating wards by limited healthcare workers and patient contact between

the wards. The discussion of this study argued for better hygiene practices by healthcare workers and preventative vaccination. They also encouraged healthcare workers to stay away from work if they were sick.

The language and discussion of obesity and influenza are almost identical. Christakis et al. found that obesity spreads by one-on-one contact between peers. Eiback et al. also found that the flu spread between one-on-one contact between healthcare workers and/or patients. Both researchers demarcated clusters of infected people within a geographic region, wards and neighborhoods or cities. Their conclusion to tackling the spread of any epidemic is to change the behavior of those who spread the disease, for the egos to change their lifestyles to healthy, and for healthcare workers to change their hygiene practices. To contain either infection, both studies essentially argue for an individual behavior change and isolation of the infected from those who are not.

What is striking here is that obesity is not understood to be a disease but an infection, a condition associated to major diseases. It itself is not noted to have any symptoms besides having excess fat in the body, but that in itself is what defines obesity. If the CDC argues that obesity, or excess body fat, is a disease then they are arguing that people who are obese are sick. Going back to Foucault, he says that a non-sick man is a model man and sick person is abnormal. If people with excess fat have obesity then they are abnormal. Model man is a productive member of society because he supports the growth of a nation-state to towards its potential; a sick body does not. Obese bodies are sick so they are not productive members of society and should be eradicated to sustain the health of a productive society. The longer the epidemic goes on, the longer the nation suffers fiscally, socially, and even morally. Therefore, the medical gaze is

constructed by these systems of power, the CDC and academia, to understand the enemy of the nation-state, which is being attacked by diseased bodies.

Flegel, Kruszon-Moran, and Carroll continued the work of Christakis and Fowler by investigating the trends of obesity from 2005 to 2014. The goal of this research is not to understand the factors influencing the obesity epidemic but to track its spread over time through units of analysis that include race, gender, education, and smoking cessation . The article observed that women kept a steady upward increase of obesity across all units of analysis while men had virtually no change. One critique that they posed for their study was that their limitation of the study was defining obesity through the Body Mass Index (BMI). While this article provided very little academic intervention beyond a summary of the epidemic, there was a big issue that stood out to me. While the study considered race a unit of analysis, they subtly defined race as a group of Hispanic origin, meaning they did not consider other raced groups in their study. There is a historical difference between Hispanic and Latino as a race and/or ethnic group. The medical field does not differentiate it, so for the purpose of this literature, I will use Latino when they use Hispanic. This limited exploration of race shows how obesity in this study, and in general across the discourse, is racially linked to Latinidad as an almost innate characteristic of Latinos.

The Latino Obesity Narrative

In the anthology *Obesity Intervention in Underserved Communities* edited by medical doctors and public health specialists Virginia Brennan, Shiriki Kumanyika and Ruth Enid Zambrana, they collected a series of articles and chapters to tackle how obesity is being handled by medical practitioners, community health providers, and the community. The anthology strictly

focuses on the Black, Latino, and American Indian populations across the nation. However seven out of thirty-one of chapters were specifically on Latinos and at least another fourth included Latinos as their target population among African American, American Indian, Military, even faith-based communities. This idea that obesity is an innate part of Latinidad is present in almost all medically-based writings on obesity. In Natalie Ceballos's "Weight Loss Interventions in the Mexican American Community," in the anthology, draws literature that shows how medical providers experience a pushback or resistance for weight-loss interventions from Latino patients which she claims is because Latinos have a unique social construction of obesity "that overweight people are robust and healthy" (Brennan et al, 123). Ceballos argues for a weight-loss intervention that should help Latinos change their perceptions of obesity by providing information about the health risks of obesity, like cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, hypertension and stroke (124). This approach is on par with Christakis's theory that obesity spreads from peer-to-peer and because of this "it makes sense" to tackle obesity at the community level. She designed programs that promoted a healthy lifestyle like using more fruits and vegetables, incorporating physical exercise on a day to day, and weight loss support groups. She had her team make all materials in Spanish, recruit community members to become peer-educators, and recruit participants in local medical offices, churches, community centers, and schools. Their primary targets were women and adolescents. At the end of the study Ceballos concluded that a reduction of BMI and body composition in Latina women was marginally statistically significant, but there was no significant shifts in male and female adolescents, meaning that weight-loss for those in the program was marginal. These findings represent the failure of the program. The researchers involved created these interventions using a

culturally competent approach, an approach that over time has been proven ineffective in encouraging individual behavioral change.

In a previous life before academia, I was a mental health provider and we were always forced to attend cultural competency trainings. As a Latina I found it rather offensive because Latinos were reduced to a list of bullet points: our food, low socio-economic status, religious values, lower-education status, Spanish speaking communities with extreme gang violence, machista ideologies, and strong family values. Cultural competency “implies the trained ability to identify cross-cultural expressions of illness and health” that would help providers explore diagnoses that are culturally specific (Metzl et al., 126). Jonathan Metzl and Helena Hansen in “Structural Competency: Theorizing a New Medical Engagement with Stigma and Inequality” argue to move away from cultural competency training of medical doctors to a structural competency. Ceballos’s study mentioned the structural impacts on the Latino community they were working in; however, their intervention was still reduced to changing the behavior of Latinos through using “what is a Latino?” the strong familial and social network ties, mostly Spanish speaking, and religious affiliations. The fact that the majority, if not all, obesity interventions are aimed at individual behavioral change implies that individuals are the problem. If individuals are the problem, then Latinos must be innately obesity-prone. Metzl argues that medical training and practitioners need to throw out cultural competency and center structural competency. Structural competency is the understanding that individual patients are influenced by social factors, particularly inequalities and stigma, that influence the health outcomes of patients (126).

Jo Phelan, Jefferey Lucas, Cecilia Ridgeway, and Catherine Taylor in “Stigma, Status, and Population Health” divide social status with stigma, through Status Characteristics Theory

(SCT) to explore stigma and its impact on health. SCT parallels the idea of cultural competency in that the status of patients, their race, socioeconomic status, and gender play a role in health outcomes and medical providers should be well versed on how and what those outcomes are to treat patients effectively. However, Phelan et al. argue, similar to MetzI, that social status in combination with macrolevel structural inequities produce stigma. The way that MetzI talks about status and stigma is similar to looking at status and stigma through a semiotic lens. Status is the symbol and stigma is the symbol's connotation. The connotation, in this example, is the systemic ideas of Latinos and obese Latinos that are socially constructed by the CDC, which is backed by governmental power. This connotation is layered with problematic ideas about fat bodies. Predominantly fatness is seen as an epidemic that does not contribute to the nation-state and should be eradicated for the health of the nation. I call this disease discourse the Latino Obesity Narrative. Stigma is "linked with negative health outcomes" because medical practitioners oftentimes have a negative, unspoken, implicit bias that contributes to the "inferior healthcare received by groups described in the status and stigma literature" Latinos and obese people (Phelan 21).

Phelan, Burgess, Yeazel, Hellerstedt, Griffin, and van Ryn in "Impact of Weight Bias and Stigma on Quality of Care and Outcomes for Patients with Obesity" argue "that physicians and other healthcare professionals hold strong negative opinions about people with obesity" that results in obese people have negative interpersonal interactions with physicians which engenders a mistrust that keeps patients from seeking medical care resulting in poor health outcomes (1-2). Phelan et al. conducted a narrative review of peer-reviewed qualitative and empirical literature to extract the narrative physicians and obesity patients had towards each other. They found that physicians believe patients with obesity are "lazy, undisciplined and weak-willed" (3). These

beliefs resulted in doctors spending less time with obese patients, disregarding symptoms, and misdiagnosing illness (3). Constant negative interactions with medical providers leads people with obesity to avoid medical care and only seek it when illness and conditions are more advanced, which become harder to treat, meaning bad health outcomes could have been prevented (3). Phelan attributes that stigma impacts the body in a way that has “long-term physiological health effects, including heart disease, stroke, depression and anxiety disorder, diseases that disproportionately affect obese individuals and have been empirically linked to perceived discrimination” (3). Metzl and Jo Phelan argue that stigma produces a negative health outcome for Latino patients because of the lack of knowledge of structural inequities impacting patients that create conditions for negative physician-to-patient interactions furthering poor health outcomes. Almost point by point, Phelan argues the same. Physicians have implicit biases, or stigma, for people with obesity and that impacts the healthcare they receive.

I argue that Latinos with obesity are doubly stigmatized and marginalized because of their Latinidad and obesity status. Foucault argues that the clinic was created to address the epidemics killing the bodies of a nation-state, which affects the amount of bodies for services, particularly, military and labor production. In the U.S. the CDC has the most power to influence the medical field and the training of its practitioners. But they are by no means the only powerful influencers, Cassandra Dame-Griff in “‘He’s not heavy, he’s an anchor baby’: Fat Children, Failed Futures, and the Threat of Latina/o Excess” conducts a critical discourse analysis of First Lady Michelle Obama’s speech in the National Council of La Raza as part of her Let’s Move campaign (156). She argues “that the supposed threat posed by Fat Latina/o youth is directly linked to U.S. military service, through which youth...are offered the “opportunity” to “prove” their worth and loyalty to the nation-state” (157). Obama’s Let’s Move campaign is her primary

national intervention as the First Lady during President Barack Obama's eight-year presidency from 2009 to 2017. The campaign was a direct action against the obesity epidemic that pushed for families and the communities of children to implement healthy lifestyle changes such as exercise, more plant-based meals, and quality family time to reduce childhood obesity. Dame-Griff unearths anti-Latino, cultural inferiority, and blaming rhetoric towards children, Latinidad, and mothers. She argues that this case-study is an example of "the state project of crafting body politic comprised of physically "fit" or thin subjects...in particular as shaping the future of the nation-state" where Latino youth are part of that but only within their ability to "achiev[e] thinness" and so contribute to nation building (163, 165).

Michelle Obama's discourse as part of the Let's Move campaign is exemplified by her iconic comment "'while food might be love, the truth is that we are loving ourselves and our kids to death'" (Dame-Griff 157). Flegel et al. racialize obesity as a strictly Latino condition by categorizing their unit of racial analysis as primarily focusing as "race/Hispanic" by comparing them to a large pool of white subjects and significantly smaller pool of Black and Asian participants (2285). This inherent connection of obesity to Latinidad posits the community as inherently diseased. Looking back at the cultural competency training that permeates the medical field, Metzler, and much of my own experience, there is a paradigm of Latinos being very family oriented. When thinking of what a close kinship orientation looks like, it oftentimes, relates to very geographically close and strong interpersonal relationships between multi-generational family members. Obama directly speaks to this paradigm by including the "familiar trope of the child-spoiling grandmother figure, saying that "[a]buella doesn't have to stop making that tres leches that everyone loves" (Dame-Griff 161). Comparing this Latino paradigm of close familial kinship with Christakis's conclusion that obesity spreading via strong interpersonal ties I can see

that Latino families and the community are considered pathogenic clusters of disease. Latinos are not model citizens because they are considered robust contributors to the obesity epidemic that is reducing the amount of abled bodies to produce and contribute to the nation-state. Craig Hales, Margaret Carroll, Cheryl D. Fryar, and Cynthia Ogden found that between 2015 and 2016 the prevalence of obesity was highest among Hispanic-origin groups at 47% and non-Hispanic blacks at 46.8% (2). The CDC claims “the estimated annual medical cost of obesity in the United States was \$147 billion; [and] the medical cost for people who have obesity is \$1429 higher than those of normal weight” (CDC Adult Obesity Facts). I argue that the U.S. government effectively created a Latino Obesity Narrative saying that Latinos are a threat to the nation-state due to their different, pathogenic, and innately obese nature.

In 2007 the United Kingdom’s Government Office for Science released an 80-page report called “Tackling Obesities: Future Choices-Building the Obesity Systems Map” that organized the different reason people are obese with a small section of next steps to reduce the problem. They created a systemic model diagram of frames that go beyond the individual factors. The eight frames they propose are: social psychology, individual psychology, individual activity, physical activity environment, food production, food consumption, individual physiology, and physiology (17-18). They cluster these into four areas human physiology, physical activity patterns, human psychology, and food environment (17). The Obesity Systems Map’ conducted a qualitative study with focus groups with obesity and weight “experts” which resulted in findings that obesity is a much more complex condition than obese people having poor nutrition and lack the discipline for physical behavior (58). The systems map challenges the ideas of the paradigm around obesity by including the societal context that impacts peoples who are obese, that they do not live in a vacuum. As the research articulated before, obesity is primarily studied from an

objective lens that assumes subjects exist in a vacuum. At the very least this obesity systems map provides a different frame to look at obesity. I am particularly interested in the social psychology aspect because this map still fuels the obesity epidemic discourse. First, this study is sanctioned by the UK government meaning that obesity has been deemed an epidemic there as well. It sanctions a deep search into the growth of bodies which could give insight into how to stop it. What all the research does not explore is how social psychological aspects hurt people who are obese and actually likely exacerbate health outcomes of obese people. The social psychological aspects of obesity is created by the medical gaze that constructs obesity in the national psyche. If medical experts have so much power, the way they disseminate the information is impactful.

Gender and the Latino Obesity Narrative Through Fat Studies

Cheryl Krasnick Warsh edited *Gender, Health, and Popular Culture* to explore how “health is a gendered concept in Western cultures” and how the presentation of health through popular culture “resulted in the absorption of universal standards of beauty and health, and in generalized desires to achieve them” (vii-viii). In my previous discussion of the model body, I used Foucault’s model body, the model man, that he rooted during a direct moment in France’s history of violence. Warsh modernizes the definition of a model man “a healthy man is strong, assertive, tolerant, moderate in his big appetites, hard-working, adventurous, responsible, and wise”(vii). This ideological model incorporates the overall development expansion towards a of capitalist and imperialist western society. The ideal bodies in the United States (as part of Western cultures) reflects a “dominant socio-economic and geopolitical” ideology that is “overwhelmingly white, young, slim, prosperous, and free of disabilities” (vii).

George Liptitz *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* argues that “whiteness has a cash value: it accounts for advantages that come to individuals through profits made from...discriminatory markets” (vii). Warsh’s definition of the ideal body is on par with the highly capitalistic shift of the United States since the Industrial revolution because it reflects a body that is contributing to the betterment and power of U.S. society. Liptitz implies there is a cash value to the model body and as the CDC has established obese people are not that and on the contrary reduce the value of the United States with their high medical costs. In 1994 Proposition 187, which was eventually found unconstitutional, mandated that “doctors, nurses, teachers, social workers, and other state employees” report undocumented people (47). This Proposition passed by around 60% and was especially pushed by news media through a “demagogic and hate-filled public relations campaign blaming “illegal” immigrants” for problem’s plaguing California’s economy. Annette Burfoot, in Warsh’s anthology, conducted a case study on “Body Worlds III.” an educational exhibition that showcases real bodies donated for science as a way to teach the public about the human body, health, wellness, and disease. She argues that the human body no longer requires “medical authority” because on the discursive level the bodies on display become part of the public discourse that highlights ideal bodies (190). When these model body discourses become part of the public discourse it allows “private citizens to become government informants” of those do not belong to the model class, obese Latinos. These discourses get passed down to the public via different avenues, primarily the media.

With President Barak Obama’s and the 45th’s approach to immigration, specifically Latino immigration, the Latino obesity narrative created a condition that extremely marginalizes obese Latinos and exacerbates xenophobia, racism, and fatphobia. It is important to note that all

the research presented so far is based on medical and public health research. This type of research is based on an objectivity framework that implies the researcher do not hold an implicit bias towards their subjects, their subjects can be studied in a vacuum, and their results are generalizable to the masses. Objectivity is a dangerous framework because it discounts the societal context that impacts how people live their everyday lives. The medical field, practitioners, and researchers are blinded by objectivity to see the problematic impact their work has on marginalized bodies. Medicine and research has a historical legacy in the eugenics movement that has trickled into modern day racial bias in medicine. Eugenics intends to create a society with racial purity, a set of model bodies, that sustains a model society that is wholly focused on the expansion and production. Bodies that are not pure are excluded and pushed to the margins and labeled non-citizens of this nation-state. Medical research is historically one of the primary methods that pushed the eugenics movement and while eugenics is considered to be over its impact is still in full effect. There continues to be a racist undertone to medical research and care that impacts the quality of life of Latinos. In this current political climate and historically Latinos are not considered the model body and now that they are inherently tied to an epidemic of obesity there is “objective” evidence that they are plagues on the expansion and productive state of the United States. This objective work ignores the power it has in society and how its resulted in the Latino Obesity Narrative

Esther Rothblum and Sondra Solavay co-edited the first Fat Studies Reader in 2009. The reader solidified the field of Fat Studies as scholarship around the human rights of fatness which began circulating in the early 2000s. Their forward sets up the scope of the field with major claims pushing back against the obesity discourse. First, they start by reclaiming the word “fat” because in “the field of fat studies, there is agreement that the O-words are neither neutral nor

benign” (xii). They are also aware that the o-words are considered more polite than “fat” but make claims to fat “as a preferred neutral adjective” also implies a “preferred term of political identity” because it rejects the negative connotations imposed on fatness. In my exploration of the medical gaze towards obese Latinos the language is highly pathogenic and perpetuates an idea of a diseased body that spreads. In the reader, Dina Giovanelli and Stephen Ostertag’s “Controlling the Body: Media Representations, Body Size, and Self-Discipline” argues that the media produces a cosmetic panopticon, “a state of permanent surveillance and judgement around concerns of physical appearance and standards of ‘beauty’” (289-290). The theoretical panopticon is a Foucauldian concept he constructed from Bentham’s architectural model of a prison in *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison*. This prison was shaped as a cone that on the top had a guard room that had a view in every direction and the prisoner cells were facing inwards that allowed all prisoners to see each other. However, the prisoner could not see into the guard tower. The idea of this prison was that the prisoners would not know when the guards were watching and in order to avoid collective punishment from any acting out the prisoners would be conditioned to surveille each other out of the fear of being punished. The cosmetic panopticon functions the same way. Giovanelli et al., argue that television media works towards “fat women’s symbolic annihilation...through the ability to pass judgement, stigmatize, and pressure people to manage their identity” (294). The cosmetic panopticon is responsible for “a number of interrelated psychological and societal factors” of eating disorders that have real life health impacts and that are driven by this extreme surveillance of body weight from each other (295). The power of the media is exemplified in this article and that is the purpose of Rothblum et al. Fat Studies Reader and the field of Fat studies, to unpack the ways the medical

gaze is disseminated by popular culture and media which has led to an extreme condition of fat-hate that severely impacts the quality of life of fat people.

Susan Greenhalgh's *Fat-Talk Nation: The Human Costs of America's War on Fat*, examines how the war on Obesity became so widespread and the conditions of fat people in the United States. Greenhalgh conducts in-depth interviews of people with diverse body shapes and size to highlight the effects of the war on obesity had on them. She found that people were afraid of their BMI score, meaning the BMI is weaponized as a scare tactic. Her participants, of all sizes, expressed internalized a deep sense of hate and shame of their bodies because they felt they did not have the ideal body. This hate is the human cost of the war against obesity. She believes that "public health messages and medical advice to urge weight loss above all" along with an "unremitting cultural pressure" "heavy" young adults are "pushed to go extreme -and often physically risky- lengths to shed pounds. Bodily damage often follows" (182). In her study she gathered essays from her fat young people (as young as 6) that she asked to write about the pressures they were subject to, the practices they took to lose weight and if they knew the dangers of that. She found that her youth primarily talked about disordered eating, even if they did not name it that way (184). Those who found poor results in their attempts would move on to more riskier tactics such as starvation, extreme cracker and water diets, and excessive exercising (184). One six-year old girl did not know what calories are but she knew that "food is bad" so she started reducing her food intake (186). The human cost of the obesity epidemic is the sanity, health, and life of people across the nation. The obesity epidemic intends to annihilate fat people from the nation-state; however, an unintended consequence is the extreme psychological and physiological impact on all bodies in the United States.

April Michelle Herndon, *Fat Blame: How the War on Obesity Victimized Women and Children*, expands on this cost as it relates specifically to women and children. She argues that because the because children and women are so systemically defined by their bodies they are the most victimized by obesity related medicalized interventions, surveillance and correction (4). She defines fat blame as the methods used by apparatuses of power to place blame on mothers for causing childhood obesity and blaming fatness as a sign of detrimental sickness in American society (7). She further argues that fat blame is a scapegoat to cover up the different ways that American systems are failing its citizens in society and really blaming obesity as the cause for a health decline. These systems are capitalism, individualism, racism, sexism, and queerphobia. This scapegoating is a way for the U.S. to not be accountable for the way its systems make power function in such a way that it impacts marginalized (predominantly black and brown) communities. These communities are blamed, or really framed, for creating unhealthy (and downright oppressive) conditions that keep their communities' poor, unhealthy, and underachieving with complete disregard to how the lack of resources inaccessible to them makes it nearly impossible for people to thrive out of such conditions. I am not saying that being thin is thriving, I am simply arguing that scapegoating is another war tactic against fat people, who the CDC claim are largely black and brown. Herndon argues that this blame covers up how food pathways, health care, poverty, social welfare resources, and education have systematically excluded people of color and now it has shifted to blame the oppressed for their oppression.

Abigail C. Saguy's *What's Wrong with Fat?* argues that to truly understand the obesity discourse and its effect on people, it must be discussed through a framing methodology. She constructs two frame types for obesity, the problem and the blame frames. The problem frames highlight what the national consciousness believes of fat people, i.e. that they are a problem to

society because they are considered inherently diseased, a representative of a national public health crisis that, as discussed earlier, imposes a fiscal burden (26). Her second framing approach is the discourse related to who or what to blame the obesity epidemic on? Saguy's intervention in the field studies is important because it opens up a space to explore the compounding layers of fat along its blame and problem frames to better understand the complex impact on fat people. She identifies three frames that the public blames obesity on: 1) personal responsibility, 2) societal factors, and 3) biological (11). These three Similar to Saguy this report engages a system of frame that impact obesity, however, this report does not care to go beyond blaming and problematizing obesity.

In combination with Saguy's blame frames I would tack human psychology to individual responsibility, societal, and biological factors because the eight major factors could be incorporated into the spectrum of the overarching four frames. What Saguy does in her text that the UK report does not is an attempt to include a conversation about the economic and political powers that created the obesity epidemic and leaves her us with the effect of it on society in the United States. She argues the affect is "weight-based discrimination and stigma, obesity policies, weight-related health risks, and the value[s]" imposed on size diversity. Where both these texts fall short is in their methodology and their conclusions. Saguy, conducted in-depth interviews with stake holders in the obesity and weight-based debate (both experts and activists), discourse analyses of U.S and French news articles, and other sociological studies that measure exposure of media fat frames of participants (18). Saguy's framing methodology functions as a good approach for exploring the complexity of layers in the international Obesity discourse. A limitation of her framing is that it does not have a strong intersectional methodology rooted in feminism because she conducts her research through an objectivity standpoint as a sociologist.

From Blame Frames to [Un]Framing Fatness: Chicana Lesbian Feminist Methodologies

Alicia Gaspar de Alba's *[Un]framing the "Bad Woman": Sor Juana, Malinche, Coyolxauhqui, and Other Rebels with a Cause* simultaneously provides us with both a methodology and a theoretical framework for understanding how Chicana women are oppressed, the parameters imposed on women because of this oppression, and how Chicana and Chicana lesbians have resisted. I identified her three steps towards [un]framing: 1) identifying the colonial frame 2) unframing (as in deconstructing) the colonial frame and 3) [un]framing by rewriting the narratives "within a revolutionary frame" (19). This methodology is crucial for bridging fat studies, queer studies, and gender studies to the field of fat studies; which is specifically significant for my construction of (ill)usionary fatness, but more to come on that later. Gaspar de Alba's pinpoints the different types of colonial frames that gendered bodies are put in, those that border, conceive, isolate, construct, stereotype, structure, blame, and persecute bodies "within a particular discourse and patriarchal imperatives, which are capitalist, racist, and imperialist imperatives" (18-19). These colonial frames are ingrained into cultural conditions that restrict, restrain, and oppress mujeres through toxic machismo that perpetuates rape culture, interpersonal violence, and hyper-policing of their bodies. Gaspar de Alba proposes that Malinche's revenge is our "wellness of spirit that comes from loving ourselves and living true to our nature rather than embodying... 'the cruel incarceration of the feminine gender'" (78). This chapter's identification of the colonial frames that plague the Chicana body suggest a structure for beginning to identify the colonial frames applied to fat bodies of color and use towards decolonial framings and possibilities.

José Esteban Muñoz, in *Disidentifications: Queer of Color and The Performance of Politics*, develops the theory of disidentification. I use it with [un]framing theory to analyze the video journal to make claim that it is in fact a performance. Disidentification theory “is a performative mode of tactical recognition that various minoritarian subjects employ in an effort to resist the oppressive and normalizing discourse of dominant ideology” (Muñoz 97). My interpretation of disidentification is reading it as process towards reframing a paradigm imposed on the body, for my purposes the Latino Obesity Narrative. The first step is acknowledging that mainstream dominant culture does not mirror the self of the marginalized because nation-state power grants permission to the model bodies to create the paradigm (6). Second, is rejecting assimilation and alignment with the dominant discourse, or the model body (97). Third, is not opposing the paradigm but strategically negotiating what identities the marginalized self can adopt and/or discard in cultural performances to encode subversive messaging of the hegemonic standards of the model body (6). Disidentification is a negotiation between resistance and adaptation towards what the hegemonic national consciousness of a model body, the white, cis-gender, heterosexual, thin body. Muñoz roots it in queerness, i.e. claiming that queerness is and can be a performances of resistance. He cultivates disidentification by using performance, videos, and zines by queer black and brown artists to argue that art is not only a tool to dismantling dominant power structures but a site of resistance of the marginalized self. Disidentification theory is crucial in [un]framing the fat chicana lesbian body because it is part of the reframing process of an empowered understanding of fatness and bodies.

Gloria Anzaldua’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* provides a decolonial unframing of the consciousness called Mestiza Consciousness. Mestiza consciousness that Anzaldua conceptualized to discern the violence and ideologies chicana/os internalized through

societal violences. This framework consists of (10) different steps towards decolonizing the mind. For the purposes of my research I will focus the Shadow Best, the Coatlicue State, and Entering the Serpent. Shadow beast is mirrored beast that is both destructive and tender (42). The shadow beast holds up two mirrors in front of us, the realities of the destruction we caused ourselves as well as our potential for holding ourselves in tenderness. Anzaldua asks us to look at the face of the monster and accept both reflections as they an inherent part of interstitial existence as Chicana lesbians. To accept both reflection we must enter the serpent. The serpent is the feminine divine in all of us that's been used against us through the colonization of indigenous Mexico via religion. The Virgen de Guadalupe is a foundation of Mestizo and Chicano identity and through feminist iterations of her the last attempt of the Mexica peoples to maintain their indenols connection by bringing Coatlalopeuh to a catholic sainthood. However, the colonizers "desexed Guadalupe, taking Coatlalopeuh, the serpents/sexuality, out of her. They completed the split begun by the Nahuas by making La Virgen de Guadalupe/Virgen Maria into chaste virgins and ...Coatlicue/La chingada into putas...they made all the Indian deities and religious practices the work of the devil" (50) Entering the serpent means accepting both our feminine and masculine diving that which Catholicism created a border been and in a sense the Shadow Beast was born. Anzaldua does not say this is an easy process, on the contrary she understands that Mestiza Consciousness is painful. The coatlicue state is the painful state of moving through consciousness.

When I think of the Coatlicue state I imagine a black hole that I am trying to fight against. The blackhole is all the pain that is coming out of being conscious of how much violence I internalized and how much I also inflicted as a colonized person towards other colonized peoples. The battle against the blackhole is what the coatlicue state is about. It is about climbing,

grasping, scraping at the edges to pull oneself out of it and into a decolonial existential possibility. In *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, Anzaldúa expands on the Coatlicue State with the Coyolxauhqui imperative. The Coyolxauhqui Imperative is “to reconstruct oneself and heal the sustos resulting from wounding, traumas, racism, and other acts of violation que hacen pedazos nuestras almas” (2). In this excerpt I see Anzaldúa dragging herself out of the Coatlicue state, and it mirrors my own experience as a Chicana queer:

“I’m still trying to move through my depression and into another state of mind. I’m still trying to escape my shadow beast (desconocimientos): numbness, anger, and disillusionment...I stare up at the moon, Coyolxauhqui, and its light in the darkness. I seek a healing image, one that reconnects me to others. I seek the positive shadow that I’ve inherited. With the imperative to “speak” esta herida abierta (this open wound) before it drowns out all voices, the feelings I’d buried begin unfurling” (Anzaldúa 121).

The Coatlicue state is painful because it is not easy to undo all the Post-Traumatic-Stress-Syndrome (PTSD) we have suffered in this violent nation-state that pathologizes brown bodies, brown fat queer bodies. Laura Aguilar is an example of that struggle to move towards a Mestiza consciousness. Her artwork and video journals give us an insight into her process and how we, her fat audience, can use her tools to decolonize ourselves.

Methodology of the Oppressed by Chela Sandoval constructs a third-world women methodology that expands on Barthesian semiotics to decolonize the Chicana consciousness. I consider her most powerful intervention, the technologies of emancipation: semiology, (de)constructing, meta-ideologizing, Democratic, and Differential Movement II. She refers to this methodology as a technology because she this process cannot be separated as each component is inherently necessary for it to work as a unit. Semiology is recognizing an image as a symbol and explore the connotations associated with it. The Technology of Semiology

demands a noting of the power associated with the connotations, as in what meaning was “chosen by history” and how has it contributed to the “process of colonization itself” (99). Sandoval’s (de)construction, ask us to decode the ideological meaning of the symbol down to its mythology, in a sense inventing the unreality of the connotation, and how it upholds the oppression of the racialized bodies (100-102). The construction part symbiotically codes an emancipatory meaning when identifying the colonial connotation. Sandoval’s third technology, Meta-ideologizing, is the “manipulation of one’s own consciousness through stratified zones of form and meaning...[that] requires the desire and ability to move...” against the power structures, or, to explore the self’s use of the oppressive signs and actively re-ideologizing them towards an emancipatory and decolonial reframing (110). The first three technologies are asking us to reframe our understanding of symbols on a very individual level that requires a shift of consciousness from our colonized minds.

The last two, on the contrary, incite action a recreation of our own decolonial signs that work towards liberatory opportunities for the oppressed. Technology of Democratics (ethics), the fourth technology, is an action-oriented commitment to third world women’s social justice goals, an “egalitarian redistribution of power” across difference of “race, gender, sex, nation, culture, and class distinction” (112). The fifth and final technology, Differential Movement II, is acting with an oppositional consciousness by drawing from the other technologies to manufacture symbols that incite action for the movement towards emancipation and liberation from the colonial power structures (111). Sandoval argues that this technology actually functions as both an endpoint and the fuel of the other technologies, because without this goal in mind why even bother doing the work in the first place? The technologies are crucial because “The methodology

of the oppressed is a set of processes, procedures, and technologies for decolonizing the imagination” which is crucial for decolonizing the fat Chicana lesbian body.

CHAPTER 3

Fat Chicana Lesbian Photographer Laura Aguilar's Body Liberationist Methodology

Who is Laura Aguilar?

Laura Aguilar (October 26, 1959 – April 25, 2018), was a world-renowned Chicana lesbian Photographer from Los Angeles, more specifically San Gabriel, California, who was also fat. She was well-known for her works *Three Eagles Flying*, the *Plush Pony Series*, *Clothed/Unclothed* and in the last decade of her life, for her nudes in nature. As a self-taught photographer, struggling with poverty her whole life, Aguilar rose in fame throughout Los Angeles within the Chicano and Latino lesbian and gay community. Her *Plush Pony* and *Chicana Lesbians* series was the work that launched her national and international career. She did numerous art work for herself and different social justice organization around lesbian and gay issues, HIV and AIDS, healthcare access, and mental health awareness. The different collaborations and subject matters of her work speak to her self-identity as a fat, disabled, impoverished, chicana, lesbian.

Aguilar was raised mostly by her grandmother, since her mother passed away earlier in life. In her youth and young adulthood she was closest to her older brother Johnny and friend Gilbert Cuadros. Johnny was the catalyst to Aguilar's fascination, love, and exploration of photography as an artform when he taught her how to develop film in a dark room. Cuadros and Aguilar attended East Los Angeles Community College where she both found and expanded her love of art but discovered the immense limitations of her dyslexia. In my immersion to the *Laura Aguilar Papers and Photographs* at the Stanford Library Special Collections, there were letters and essays of Aguilar describing her frustrations, depression, and sadness over her dyslexia and how it tremendously affect her ability to keep a stable job. She also suffered from major depressive disorder that was her constant companion throughout a large portion of her life. There is speculation between her friends and community if Aguilar was depressed due to the major

losses of her grandmother, mother, and brother early in her life or if she suffered from this before then. Regardless, her letters to friends always referenced her deep sadness and suicidality. Less referenced were her sexuality and body. Despite being known and identified as a Chicana Lesbian, for a long time Aguilar struggled with her Chicana identification because she always felt not quite Mexican and not quite American because she was a fourth generation Mexican-American. As a fat chicana femme dyke myself, I also wonder if that disconnect was also related to queerness? As I previously mentioned, she rarely mentioned her body, which for the purpose of my thesis is one of her most important characteristic. Laura Aguilar was fat.

Fat is a word she did not use to describe herself, and it is not a word others use to describe her, it is the adjective and identity I impose on her because her fatness cannot hide, much like mine. Before her nudes in nature most of the writing around her art did not reference her body size, but mostly her race, sexual orientation, mental health illness, and poverty status. It was not until after she released her *Clothed/Un clothed #1* (1990) that the conversation of her art included her body. She was often and is still today (as is obvious in the essays in corresponding catalog to her retrospective show) considered brave for showcasing her naked body. Oftentimes, when I read this, as a fat woman, it does not sound like a compliment, but more a surface level understanding of what it entails to have a fat body in a thin-centric society and to use it artistically. In her archive I found a three-part video series of shorts where she talked about herself and her experience. The last video *The Body* is an eight-minute video journal dedicated to her process towards being nude in front of the camera. In both the Stanford Library Special Collections and UCLA Chicana/o Studies Research Center Laura Aguilar archives, this was the most time she spent talking about being fat. The silence of her body screams an engagement that I want to partake with.



Figure 3: Laura Aguilar. *Three Eagles Flying*. Three Gelatin Silver Prints. Los Angeles. 1990. Found in Laura Aguilar: *Show and Tell*.

The Bondage of Fatness

Three Eagles Flying (1990) is one of Laura Aguilar's most iconic photographs. It is an image of Aguilar wrapped in an American flag tied with rope that wraps around her neck, her head shrouded by a Mexican flag (see figure 3). On the left of the image there is an American flag and on the right side there is a Mexican flag. In, the *Laura Aguilar: Show and Tell* catalog, in Deborah Cullen's "Beyond Face Value: Reconsidering Laura Aguilar's *Three Eagles Flying*" she argues that this piece should be put in conversation with other important Latino and Chicano work featuring the use of tryptic style, bondage, and patriotic symbolisms to convey contentions between the artist's identity and the nation. Much of the writings on this piece argue that "Aguilar's image is symbolically trapped between nations, identities, expectations, and assumptions" of her identities, Chicana, woman, Lesbian, working-class (28). Cullen expands this analysis by putting Aguilar in conversation with other brown artists, such as Juan Sánchez,

Carlos Leppe, and ASCO (A collective of Chicano Artists from the 1970's, who are making similar claims to being stuck in a liminal space between cultures and identities . Cullen's connecting Aguilar's work to other artists is powerful because it shows the conditions of the Latino identity in moments that they live through marginality of her woman, Mexican/Latino/Chicano, and American identities. Cullen ignores or glazes over the symbolism and impact her fatness has in *Three Eagles Flying*. I expand and deviate from Cullen's analysis because I will use Aguilar's fatness as a focal point to understand a differential meaning for *Three Eagles Flying* than the medical gaze on fat Latino bodies. I'll specifically be using Chela Sandoval's technologies of emancipation.

Luz Calvo's "Embodied at the Shrine of Cultural Disjuncture," in *Beyond the Frame: Women of Color and Visual Representations* edited by Angela Y. Davis and Neferti x. M. Tadiar, argues that Aguilar's bound body "between Mexico and the United States" flags speak to "subordination and desire, between fantasy and geopolitical reality, between artist production and its reception" (208). Calvo approaches their reading of *Three Eagles Flying* by, first, confessing their reaction and obsession with looking at it and the strong reactions it elicits in them. Second, they frame their understanding of the production of it through a Sadomasochist (S/M) framework because they argue that the staging, and exposure of her breasts, in *Three Eagles Flying* indicates to the "scene" intentionally constructed for "play." Lastly, she extracts a fantastical scene of the geopolitical reality that Aguilar alludes to in her photograph.

I agree with Calvo's argument that Aguilar is making a statement towards the geopolitical reality of the time, arguably still the same reality, however, the complete lack of a discussion of identity is disregarding the reasons that Aguilar is the appropriate subject to create this image, elicit the feelings Calvo experiences, and be the object within it. As a member of the

Bondage, Dominance, Submission, and Sadomasochism (BDSM) community, I believe their methodological framing of *Three Eagles Flying* through S/M falls short of a true understanding of what S/M means, how it is played out, and the critical consent component required to engage in these scenes. While Calvo does state that S/M culture does not provide a “a privilege ground” to read the photograph she uses it as a way to build the fantasy involved in the staging of the image and its intended witnessing (212). There is value to theorizing the nuances of BDSM for the purposes of exploring the power dynamics imposed on her Chicana Lesbian Body.

Robin Baur, in *Queer BDSM Intimacies: Critical Consent and Pushing Boundaries*, argues for understanding BDSM through a queer framework that he calls Dyke + Queer BDSM. Through a qualitative study of queer and transgender BDSM practitioners, he defines Dyke + Queer BDSM as a practices of “*alternative intimacies... exuberant intimacies*, that reject reason, moderation, mediocrity, harmony and equality as well as reproduction and usefulness,” “*alternative intimacies celebrate difference, tension, intensity, risk, excess, ecstasy, wastefulness, perversity, campy extravagance, fluidity and insanity... becoming something beyond the human*” (4). These intimacies occur in a contained space created with the negotiation of consent (4). Calvo’s understanding of S/M ignores a crucial tenet of its practice, which is consent through negotiation. Baur’s theorizing of intimacies do not perverse these practices from the outside but articulate an autonomy to be perverse within the scene.

One of Calvo’s main intervention is that *Three Eagles Flying* poses a fantasy curated by Aguilar using bondage and the Mexican and American flag. They argue that it is a commentary on the geopolitical climate between Mexico and the United States. In my archival work at the *Laura Aguilar Papers and Photographs 1980-1995*, in Stanford’s Special Collections, I conclude that the photograph goes beyond a political commentary but a process to understand her

identities as Mexican-America, woman, and fat. The curated fantasy communicates to an alternative intimacy that Aguilar is engaging with herself by accepting the Mexican-American identity, her womanhood, and the fatness. The image itself reflects Dyke + Queer BDSM methodological understand of how her identities are systemically used against her. A problem of Calvo's analysis is their disregard to the negotiation of consent. While she does discuss this in terms of the witnessing of the piece and the creation of it, I believe it objectifies Aguilar as the subject of the image. Dyke + Queer BDSM demands a curation of a contained space through negotiations between players. *Three Eagles Flying* does not showcase a negotiation or consent. The bondage of Aguilar's body highlights the lack of consent because she bound, silenced, and immobilized by American and Mexican nationalist standards for a model body. Aguilar does not consent to her inability to access decent health care and mental health (refer to figure 4). She does not consent to being made to feel like her body is undesirable, like she is undesirable. She does not consent to be understood as not being Mexican or American enough for either side.

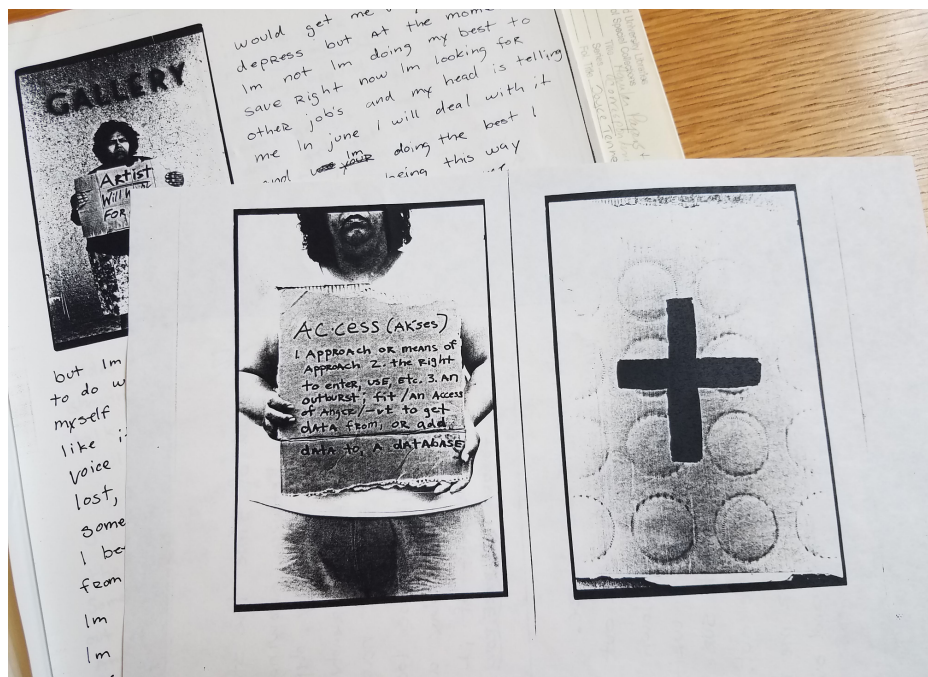


Figure 4: Laura Aguilar. Letter to Joyce Tenneson on September 6, 1993 with a scan of Access + Opportunity = Success. Box 1, Folder 4. Laura Aguilar Papers and Photographs, Stanford Special Collections, Palo Alto, CA. 19 July. 2018

In the letters and papers she purchased by Stanford she speaks of visiting Mexico and being made to feel like an other because she does not speak Spanish, similar to the ways Chicano's make her feel for the same reason (see figure 5). Aguilar does not negotiate being treated as a second-class citizen because of her disability, body size, and gender. These experiences are not a fantasy for Aguilar, or any other person who sees themselves reflected in her. While the image curates a visual fantasy of a very real experience, Calvo's analysis fall short by not including consent.

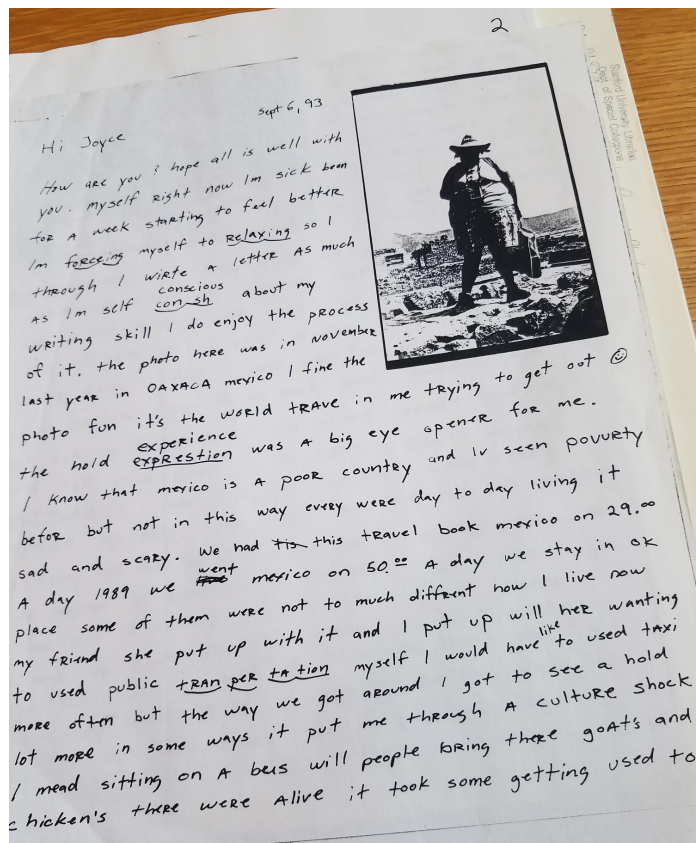


Figure 5: Laura Aguilar Letter to Joyce Tenneson on September 6, 1993.Box 1, Folder 4. Laura Aguilar Papers and Photographs, Stanford Special Collections, Palo Alto, CA. 19 July. 2018

The most blatant affront to their analysis is not mentioning her fatness at all. As scholars we cannot ignore what is obviously in front of us. Aguilar's fatness is the anchor that sinks her into an ocean of xenophobic, racist, sexist, and fatphobic oppression that results in her self-loathing, depression and suicidality, and poverty. The Latino Obesity Narrative is not a negotiated fantasy to enjoy, but an anchor that keeps Latinos being considered unproductive members of the American nation-state. Aguilar had ability limitations and by standards of capitalist productivity, she did not meet them. Glossing over Aguilar's fatness is ignoring that her breast, a sexualized body part and a body part that is sexual, is like large because of her fatness. Going back to Perez's oedipal triangle, Aguilar is trapped as Malinche, the raped mother. She is immobilized from stepping out of her binds by the white father, the American flag, and is silenced by the mestizo son, the Mexican flag. She represents the raped mother, because I cannot believe that this scene, this fantasy, is one of consensual non-consensual play. This "fantasy" is a scene of non-consensual bondage to nation-state power apparatus and their effect on her life. Her fat female body is an extra weight used to restrain her into submissions, and not the good kind. Going beyond the Dyke + Queer BDSM methodology, I use Sandoval's Technologies of Emancipation as a more appropriate analytical tool for *Three Eagles Flying*.

Methodology of the Oppressed by Chela Sandoval constructs a third-world women's methodology that expands on Barthesian semiotics to decolonize the Chicana consciousness. For my analysis of *Three Eagles Flying* I will use what I consider Sandoval's most powerful intervention, the technologies of emancipation. These technologies are crucial because they work towards "The methodology of the oppressed [that] is a set of processes, procedures, and technologies for decolonizing the imagination" that align to support a liberatory action for fat lesbian Chicanas through Laura Aguilar's *Three Eagles Flying* (69). The photograph has four

different signs, an American flag, a Mexican flag, a rope, and her body. Historically, the flags are a symbol of patriotism for the nation-state. The American flag represent the land of the free, the home of the brave, and the land of opportunity. The Mexican flag represents the winning the revolution against the Spanish, the cry of unity, and a country taken care of by God and its angels. Both flags incite nationalist sentiments to the country and a strong emotional tie to the country. The rope can mean many things but it is essentially for tying things together. Aguilar's body is the last symbol.. The body, as simply a sign, is a human being, it represent a living breathing human with thoughts, movement, and agency.

The symbols are ladled with faux positivistic nationalism with an implication that the nation-state has reached a place of goodness for its citizens. This connotation does account for the long history of violent colonization of both lands, and the corrosive relationship between the United States and Mexico. This history is the root of the power of these symbols. The (de)construction of the flags is the contrasting truth and untruth of the symbols. The untruth is the nationalist ideas of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness inspired by the American flag. The untruth of the Mexican flag is a patriotic unity of the mestizo race under god. The truths of these symbols are that the connotation of the American flag is rooted in the genocide of indigenous communities of this land, the enslavement and displacement of Africans from their homes, the imperialist westward expansion encroaching onto another nation-state, and the neoliberal imposition of its neighbor countries that have ruined the Mexican economy and the lifestyle of different Mexican communities. The Mexican flag symbolism ignores the violent colonization of what is now known as Mexico, the violent genocide of indigenous communities through sexual violence, biological warfare, and displacement, the erasure of currently existing indigenous nations in Mexico, and the extreme racial and economic stratification between

peoples historical and now. The flags construct a fake truth of the nation that is internalized by the national consciousness and has extreme power over how citizens of the nation-state view the world, interact with each other, and tolerate difference (or deviance).

Sandoval talks about the “dangerous state of theoretical apartheid” when referring to our socially constructed notions of racialized gendered bodies (69). Apartheid is a system that segregates groups of people along racial division. So, when I use theoretical apartheid for my research I interpret it as a framework of social constructs and discussions to articulate a segregation between the conversations of fat people that are often racialized, sexed, and classed, but hardly discussed explicitly. Aguilar’s *Three Eagles Flying* is a meta-ideologizing of the fat, lesbian, Chicana body. The symbol of her body is complex because it interplays with her being wrapped in both the symbolic Mexican and American flag and being tied to them with a heavy thick looking rope. Foucault argues that the treatment of epidemics in France during times of war which separated those who contribute to the nation-state and those that do not because of disease. As per my public health research obesity is considered an innate Latino condition that is largely observed via a gendered lens. I argue that her photograph is a meta-ideologizing of America and Mexican power dynamics and how they impact the chicana lesbian body. Aguilar is wrapped in both the American and Mexican flag but she exposes her large breast and arms. First, she is a fat woman in the United States. She has to deal with nationalist ideas of the body.



Figure 6: Adobe Stock Photo for named "Obesity Female body, fat woman belly" found through Google.com

The American medical gaze engendered a rhetoric of racism towards Latinos implying the Latino bodies do not contribute to the nation-state because they are not model bodies, they are brown, fat, "illegal," criminal, and leeches of public services. Aguilar's legs are bound together by the American flag and her constructed symbolism can mean she is feeling bound and immobilized by the American dream and the ways she is unable to access it. Because Aguilar is fat, brown, poor, and severely dyslexic she does not have the ability status and access to work towards her the American dream the flag promises. Furthermore, the bondage restricts the movement of life because she is marginalized to the extent that upward mobility is not an option for her. Furthermore, because she is fat, there are perceptions of fatness that allow assumptions to be placed on her. With a quick Google image search of "fat" the first couple of images show us what the U.S. perceives as fatness (see figure 6). This image shows us a person (not quite gendered) with very large stomach, with multiple rolls, fleshy arms and hands distorting their stomach's natural shape. Fat bodies are a distortion of the model body. When your body is considered distorted, your race, ethnicity distorted, your gender is inferior, and your desexualized Aguilar's leg bondage is an accurate depiction of the immobility caused by societal powers on

the body. She is immobilized, we are immobilized from being able to thrive but are anchored to our oppression.

Her head is wrapped with the Mexican flag, the eagle covers her face, and her neck is noosed by the weight of the rope. This part of the photograph is chilling because it represents her suffocating from Mexican ideologies in the United States as well as from her brown community. Aguilar is actually a fifth generation Mexican-American, although she does have a contentious history with labeling herself. In interviews she talked about how her family was here before the United States was here. Aguilar has ancestral lineage to Mexican mestizos and the indigenous communities that existed in California before the United States stole half of Mexico's land during the Mexican-American war. However, as a visibly brown woman she was often perceived as being a recent immigrant as speaking Spanish and being a laborer. Aguilar was none of those things. Aguilar does not speak Spanish and in her archives she mentions the various negative experiences she has had with both English and Spanish speaking people around her language. Furthermore, she is not a day laborer, she worked various odd jobs throughout her life but was and will always be an artist first. She identifies with her artist identity so strongly that it is one of her leading self-identification in her construction of self. The noose represents the various lynching across California and the southwest conducted by American soldiers and citizens during and after the Mexican-American War. The noose represents a suffocating under the pressures, assumptions, and expectations from Chicanos, Americans, and Mexicans to be Mexican enough, to be part of la Raza, and to be a good American. The rope connects with her bondage of the legs.

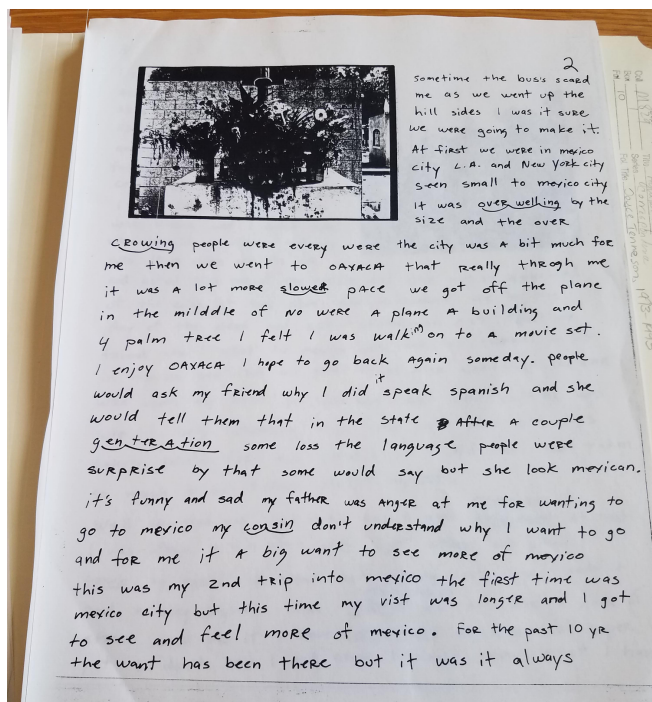


Figure 7: Laura Aguilar Letter to Joyce Tenneson on September 6, 1993. Box 1, Folder 4. Laura Aguilar Papers and Photographs, Stanford Special Collections, Palo Alto, CA. 19 July. 2018

The middle of her self-portrait is the rope cutting across her exposed chest with her hands bound in front of her. The bound hands alluded to the cultural clash of the US and Mexico as it lands on her body. Her hands are bound yet relaxed because at some level we all believe what we have internalized. Sandoval, however, is asking us to challenge these ideas and Aguilar beautifully does that with her breasts. She left her breasts exposed because, I argue, her sexuality and womanhood are also bound but she has more agency over how she can express those. In her youth Aguilar would present more masculine of center, butch, to signifying her lesbian identity, at least that is how I interpret her presentation (see figure 8). Overtime as she aged she began to explore with more feminine representations, still with a tomboyish flare. Her sexuality and gender, particularly her nudity, is a resistance to the racialized oppressions she experiences. She meta-ideologizes American and Mexican ideologies on her by subverting the violence with her

soft and squishy flesh. While in this image she is immobilized by the ropes, shortly after this image she began her *Clothed/Un clothed* series where she exposes her gaze and body.

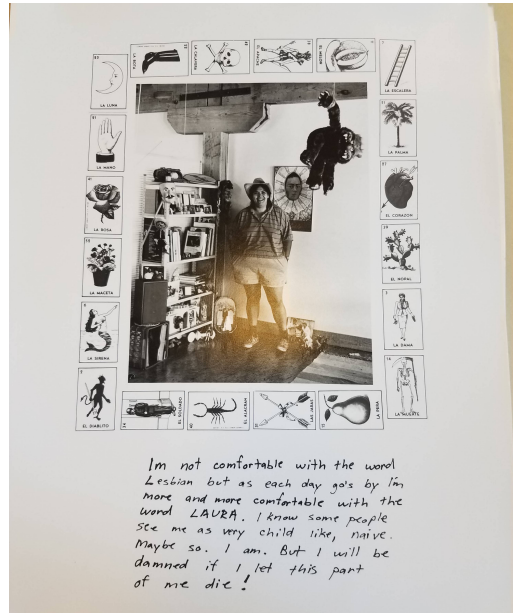


Figure 8: Laura Aguilar. Laura: Latino Lesbian Series. 1988. Gelatin Silver Print. Box 6 , Folder 1. Laura Aguilar Papers and Photographs, Stanford Special Collections, Palo Alto, CA. 19, July 2018.

Aguilar’s First Encounter with Fatness

Laura Aguilar’s short video, *The Body* (1995), begins with Aguilar looking into the camera, in a cream-colored tank top, giggling, in an awkward sort of way, and exclaiming “Hi!.” She quickly composes herself, “ok,” looks away from the camera, takes a deep breath, and quickly turns her gaze back to us. Before speaking she closes her eyes, releases a breath, and begins to tell us why she began photographing herself nude.

The Body is an eight-minute short film, that I call a photo journal. This short is part of a three short-film series that features Aguilar talking about different aspects of her depression, suicidality, her use of SSRI’s, and her feelings about her body. For the purpose of this chapter I will focus on the third short-film *The Body*. This video is composed of four different clips. In the

first clip the camera frames her from the shoulders up and she is also clothed. This first section ends with her almost talking about how it feels to “deal with my body...” which she looks away from the camera, her lips move without words, as if grasping for language. She takes a pause and looks back at us and says, “ok we stop here.” The frame switches into clip two, a slight zoom out of the previous section. In this beginning she gives us permission with her challenging gaze to see observe her body from the top of her breasts and up.

During this section she holds her arms crossed across her chest covering her areolas, she has not given us consent to see her breasts. This section ends with her speaking of the revelatory moment she started seeing her body in a different light. She takes a pause, looks away from and immediately back to us. She holds our gaze. Her eyes shift to slightly away from the camera to her camera person as she signals for them to cut. She cuts the film to the third clip. This clip frames a close up of her breast, namely the areola and nipple, her arm folded in such a way that it rests on her belly just below her breast. This clip shifts to the next sections with her introducing her newfound body acceptance. In section four Aguilar gives us the privilege to view the biggest part of her body, her stomach. In this clip she is framing her left side profile for us, giving us the optimum view of her stomach, her breasts, her rolls, her shapes. Her face is out of frame, but she still speaks to us. She wraps up her video journal with different ways she appreciates her body and how she finally feels about it. I argue that Aguilar’s choice to frame her body in four different ways is a visual depiction of her own [un]framing process towards a Chicana Lesbian Feminist body liberation standpoint.

Gaspar de Alba’s [un]framing methodology is a guide to look at how “brown female bodies have been framed by racial, social, cultural, sexual, national/regional, historical, and religious discourse of identity” and possibilities towards reframing or unframing them (19). Her

intervention is a starting point to analyze *The Body* in two different ways. First, I will theorize Aguilar's choice of frame to try and understand the experience she wanted her audience to have. Second, I use [un]framing to unpack her narrative to track a portion of her body acceptance journey. My goal is that this process is a possible feminist decolonial tool for fat chicana queers.



Figure 9: Laura Aguilar. *The Body*. Film Snapshot. 1995. Box 8. Laura Aguilar Papers and Photographs, Stanford Special Collections, Palo Alto, CA. 20, July 2018.

The Body and Clothed/Unclothed Series

The first section of *The Body* begins at 16:31 with Aguilar awkwardly laughing from joy and maybe nervous excitement (see figure 9). She exclaims a loud “Hi!” giggles throatily while still not quite making eye contact with the camera. At 16:35 she looks up and away from the camera and controls her happy facial expression to one of seriousness and says “ok” as she settles her eye contact into the camera, us. She closes her eyes for five seconds and collects herself. When she opens her eyes her strong, assertive, and piercing gaze is directed at us. She gently looks away to her left to gather her thoughts, takes a deep breath, and at 16:44 she begins talking to us.

During this section she is framed by the camera from her upper chest area to the top of her head. You can see that she is wearing a tank top, meaning, she is dressed during the two-minutes or so of this section in *The Body*. In this time Aguilar is sharing with us how she began taking nudes and what that aha moment was for. Her journey began with a photo workshop on the nude body. She articulates how nude bodies, in the context of a class, are part of a rather lax about nudity and being nude: “you know in this atmosphere of you know thinking about the nude you know it’s not a big deal to find yourself posing nude” (*The Body*). However, her shift to photographing herself nude for the purpose of her art came out of a bout of depression, which is “usually when I start new bodies of work” that was triggered by being stood up for a date (*The Body*). Aguilar was motivated to photograph herself nude to make herself feel ashamed of her body. She says that it was a very uncomfortable and awful feeling to photograph herself. But even more distressing was when she showed her friend the images she had developed. When she handed him her photographs she left the room and was so sure he was going to react negatively because “how dare I photograph myself nude?” (*The Body*). To her surprise her friend was awed by her photographs “said this is the greatest things come out of [her] work” (*The Body*). After this moment she started photographing herself in the nude, not only because she could not get anyone to pose nude, but because she needed “to deal with my body” (*The Body*). At 19:19 she seems to become stumped to continue her conversation with us about dealing with her body because she goes quiet, and from the peripheral of the frame you see her hand waving cut as she says, “ok we stop here.” (*The Body*).

The Body’s first section is Aguilar’s starting point of her [un]framing process. Gaspar de Alba’s first step in [un]framing is acknowledging and articulating the colonial frames imposed on brown female subjects. Aguilar did that by being clothed to start this video. It may seem

insignificant but the video was produced in 1995, within a year of completing her *Clothed/Unclothed*. The *Body* mirrors that photo series because it touches on the same conversations about nudity, difference, vulnerability, and embodiments of marginalized experiences. To [un]frame effectively it is necessary to explore the role of clothing for fat people particularly in alignment with class inequalities, gender and sexual policing, and fatphobia.

In *Laura Aguilar: Show and Tell*, Amelia Jones uses the term radical vulnerability to analyze the *Clothed/Unclothed* series. Radical vulnerability “can be understood to signify race, class, and sexual identification by referencing herself as the subject in self-portraiture (39). Jones’s radical vulnerability argues that Aguilar’s work “is a highly effective and affective practice: she gives voice to the radically vulnerable self” (44). What Jones fails to engage with in her article is the importance of the clothed photo within the diptych and looking at it as a whole. Radical vulnerability, an important contribution to understand the empowerment potential of the nudes in the *Clothed/Unclothed* series does not explain the need for the clothed portraits. What is the possible purpose of producing a series that requires both pieces to be seen; are we not meant to take them as a whole? Radical vulnerability does not only exist in the nude but in dressing and undressing because clothing is an instrumental aspect of how people queer, gendered, disabled, impoverished, and raced bodies choose to navigate the world, as well as how they will be perceived by it.



Figure 10: Laura Aguilar. *Clothed/Un clothed #1*. 1990. Two Gelatin Silver Prints. Printed in *Laura Aguilar: Show and Tell*. 2017.

Laura Aguilar's Fat Girl Uniform

The *Clothed/Un clothed* series invokes the fourth and fifth technology, the Theory of Democratics and Differential Movement II (see figure 10). Amelia Jones uses the term radical vulnerability to analyze the *Clothed/Un clothed* series. Radical vulnerability “can be understood to signifiers of race, class, and sexual identification by refencing herself as the subject in self-portraiture (39). Jones’s radical vulnerability argues that Laura’s work “is a highly effective and affective practice: she gives voice to the radically vulnerable self” (44). What Jones fails to engage with in her article is the importance of the clothed photo within the diptych and looking at it as a whole. Radical vulnerability, while an important contribution to understand the powerful images and empowered potential of the nudes in the *Clothed/Un clothed* series does not explain the need for the clothed portraits. It is necessary to consider the possible purpose of producing a series that requires both pieces to be seen; are we not meant to take them as a

whole? The radical vulnerability does not only exist in the nude but in the differential movement of being dressed and undressing because clothing plays an instrumental role in how people (particularly QTPOC, disabled, and the working class) tend to navigate, exist, and are perceived in the world. Differential movement II is “formulation, [in which] both the limits of insanity and the possibilities of emancipation are born out of the same horrors of subjugation...differential movement-is recognized as a fundamental to advancing survival” (85). The Clothed/Unclothed series in conversation with Three Eagles Flying is the movement between the space of insanity and possibly. In Aguilar’s work, there is something to say about the movement and shift from being clothed to unclothed. It may seem more significant being unclothed, however, she had a particular relationship with clothing that is reminiscent of the subjugation of fat bodies.

In an article by Gil Cuadros, close friend of her’s, titled “The Emigrants” he shares with us a moment of their lives when she made a clothing choice; I read it as a differential movement for herself:

“Once John and I were in finals, studying side by side on an old mattress we there in the living room. Laura Knocked on the door. When I walked up to the screen door, I was amazed. I was used to only seeing her in jeans, T-shirts, large baggy sweaters to hide her size. She walked in with a summer skirt, beads, lavender heels, and her permed the way her father liked it. There were touches of make-up. John applauded. Laura bowed.”

Differential movement is a tool of survival for the subjugated subject and for Aguilar reclaiming her clothing was a way for her to engage her gender, her womanhood (see figure 11). In this moment between her, Gil, and John (Gil’s partner at the time) Aguilar chose to come to deviate from the normative fat girl uniform and celebrate herself with a little bow.



Figure 11: Gil Cuadros. "The Emigrant." Newspaper Clipping. 1992. Box 3. Folder 9. Laura Aguilar Papers and Photographs, Stanford Special Collections, Palo Alto, CA. 19, July 2018.

As a member of the fat community and fat positivity movement in Los Angeles, I can explain the fat girl uniform just a bit. With a quick Google search uniform is defined as a “distinctive clothing worn by members of the same organization or body” and it also means “not changing in form or character; remaining the same in all cases and all times.” What these definitions fail to express is that uniforms are usually asked of us to wear. The institutions we exist in demand a dress code that creates a division between those in power and those who are meant to be led by this group. The fat girl uniform is then distinctive clothing that is worn by the members of the fat community because our fatness is present at all times. This uniform consisted of usually loose-fitting pants, an oversized t-shirt, and on top of that an oversized sweatshirt or hoodie. When speaking to members of the fat community, many of us, myself included, have worn this uniform even while it is 100° out.

We are asked to wear this uniform by the thin-centric societal structures and those who uphold it (all us in a sense). We are reminded to wear this uniform by doctors, our parents, our tias, peers, teachers, even the cashier at the local department store when unsolicited advice,

comments, back-handed compliments, and stares compound to create an internalized sense of shame and disgust for ourselves engendered in us. This fat girl uniform is not only for us but for the comfort of everyone else. It is our safety because just maybe if we are dressed completely underwhelmingly no one will notice us, and our bodies will not be seen. Our uniforms make others comfortable because then they do not have to witness our grotesque bodies. What uniforms do for fat women is to articulate a type of de-gendering, by hiding the female body, then the body is agender in its perception. If a body is perceived as agender, then the body might be invisible? Francisco Galarte in “Fashion-ing Pedagogies” argues that the garments we wear hold “‘style memories’” (519). Style memories are a narration related to clothing and style...[that] highlights the affective and the material nature of fashion and garments as sites of produced knowledge and recorded memory” (519). The fat girl uniform invokes a style memory that narrates shame, self-hatred, and uncomfotability. Therefore, the moment that Gil speaks to is a differential movement of Aguilar’s towards self- fashioning that Galarte argues allows the wearer to transform the garment but be transformed by the garment itself. Galarte specifically refers to fashion-in pedagogies to be applied to transgender bodies as means to create a style memory that affirms gender within a heteronormative and cisgender society. However, because the fat girl uniform is very de-gendering, almost agender in its utility, fashion-ing pedagogy as a differential movement for a Chicana lesbian is also part of that gender affirming experience. Meaning, that Aguilar is self-transformed into a feminized woman via her skirt, accessories, and heels. She takes these garments and transforms them into a tool that she uses to engage her womanhood and femininity, as a radically vulnerable pedagogy. The radical vulnerability of this choice is in the resistance of the fat girl uniform and all the shameful and oppressive narratives attached to its memory.

If clothing performs such an important role in Aguilar's life then it is safe to argue that her choice to start her video journal is intentional as much as it is to create a series of diptych photographs that place the subjects as Clothed and Unclothed. Interestingly enough, in the Clothed/Unclothed #1 series Aguilar's self-portrait she is wearing a garment that is gendered masculine, a button up, for which I believe she is performing her queerness. Regardless, this first part of the video journal situates the oppressive frame in which fat bodies, and deviant bodies, are subject to, which is to always hide the grotesquery of fatness and their difference. This then makes Gaspar de Alba's first step of [un]framing covered by identifying what is oppressive. The clothes are a representation of the suffocating subjugation of excess body, specifically those of women, by patriarchal thin-centric societal powers. This particular need to hide difference is rooted in colonial historical context of the Spanish conquest of Mexico, which included a construction of morality, including the nude as immoral, rooted in Catholic ideas of how bodies should exist and be present with each other.



Figure 12: Laura Aguilar. The Body. Film Snapshot. 1995. Box 8. Laura Aguilar Papers and Photographs, Stanford Special Collections, Palo Alto, CA. 20, July 2018.

Disidentification and Radical Objectification

The second step to [un]framing The Body is unpacking, or deconstructing, the oppressive frame. In section two and three Aguilar is showing us her process of negotiating radical vulnerability by the amount of the nudity she is sharing with her audience. José Esteban Muñoz's theory of disidentification is a "...mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology" (11). Disidentification is acknowledging what society does not perceive to be "appropriate," or an investment in whiteness, and how we will negotiate it, not resist it or actively participate, but negotiate both for survival and empowerment purposes. The second section transitions into Aguilar being nude. However, the framing of her in this shot is from the upper chest area, cutting off visual of her full breast, and to the top of her head. In 19:25, the start of this moment, she is making direct eye contact with us, as if daring us to not look away, with her head tilted to the side with a tight tension, an almost frown on her lips. But just three second later it shifts to a cheeky smirk, her gaze softens, and invites us into her vulnerability. I am captivated, she has my attention. This section is just under two minutes long and she captivates us with her silence and two sentences.

"So it's not like I've never saw myself in the shower or the bath, and you see yourself naked and so I guess photographing myself, I don't know what went through my mind, but then all of a sudden I got a craze and started photographing myself and I started seeing my body in a different way, you know" (19:23 to 19:51)

At the end of her confession she takes a long pause, closes her eyes, and stops talking until 20:00 when she motions to her camera person to cut the filming. She did not speak with words but the last seconds of this section spoke through her body. I believe this moment of silence was an insight into the radical vulnerability that Aguilar is giving us the privilege to witness. In these

moments you see her face express confusion, pain, fear, and uncomfortability for what this process was to her. In this silence we see her negotiation.

This section is Aguilar's disidentification process is identifying the reality that the body she sees in the shower is hers. Her photographic craze of her nude self is part of her art process to decide how much of herself, her otherness, she is willing to share with us because her body is not normative by the standards of whiteness. She is darker skinned, with dark thick hair, dark eyebrows, fat, uneven skin, excess in her chin, arms, chest, neck, and breasts. Furthermore, because she is only showing us a snippet of her body, while covering her breast with her crossed arms, this is her representation of the negotiation happening.

In a letter to Pat Morel, poet and friend, Aguilar shares her "sir prize with myself by including myself and putting myself in a porsisten of being so von a bly where there notting left to hide" (Letter to Pat, *Laura Aguilar Papers*) But she figures that at this point she "need to get used to the ideal that people will see it and deal with whatever reaction that go's along by putting it out there" (citation). This letter was referencing to Aguilar's *Three Eagles Flying* and was writing in February 1990, five years before this film. This alludes that Laura was disidentifying long before she started her nudes, the film, and throughout the *Clothed/Un clothed* series. She understands that her body, and body of work, will receive reactions, and as she previously stated in the film likely not positive, and yet she is choosing to still be radically vulnerable.



Figure 13: Laura Aguilar. The Body. Film Snapshot. 1995. Box 8. Laura Aguilar Papers and Photographs, Stanford Special Collections, Palo Alto, CA. 20, July 2018.

In section two there is a drastic shift in framing from barely their nudity to a close up of Aguilar's breast, where her areolas are the primary focus of the frame. To me that is an extreme shift from us being given permission to see her perceived nudity since we are only allowed to see her shoulders unclothed, to now being given permission to see one the most private and policed parts of the female body. Aguilar makes a striking shift, a differential movement, to go from a barely their visualization of her body to a very close-up interaction with her audience. This part of her confession is inviting us to touch her. Esteban Muñoz argues that "autoethnography," Aguilar's video journals, seeks to disrupt the hierarchal economy of colonial images and representations by making visible the presence of subaltern energies and urgencies..." (82). Aguilar's whole video, but specifically this strategic striking shift between perceived nudity to a close up of sensual organs display an urgency to negotiate what her needs are as a person and what she wants the audience to experience with her during this performance.

This section is also just under two minutes long. After 20:20 when Aguilar cuts the second section the image immediately changes to her close up. Within three seconds, at 20:04,

she begins talking about the pivotal intervention she makes for herself, towards her journey to liberation, that speaks to disidentifying towards an [un]framing of her feelings towards her own body:

“So I started looking at the lighting and how the light hit my body and the shape. Like I noticed the light and the shadows and how it shape my breast and body and my arms and it was like I was looking at my body for the first time and you know it had its own beauty. And you know and it’s something I never thought about myself and through doing this art no more....oops...and through doing this art, you know of photographing myself, what I started to do was to feel ashamed of who I am cause of my body [but] I started to accept myself”(20:04-21:13)

What she says here in context to the imagery she chose is the direct moment she deidentified effectively and the tool she used to negotiation was radical objectification that is radically vulnerable. In section four we are privy to the whole process which one, showcases and [un]framing of the fat female lesbian body, and gives us insight into how we can apply Laura Aguilar’s body liberation process to ourselves, and more specifically, me.

Muñoz argues that “misrecognition can be tactical. Identification itself can be also be manipulated and worked in ways that promise narratives of self that surpass the limits prescribed by the dominant culture” (95). For Aguilar her misrecognition, or radical objectification, is an inherent tool that is natural to her artistic existence in her world. Objectification, within the gender studies field and feminist philosophies is largely considered a patriarchal tool to oppress and abuse women and people with feminized presentations into their subjugation. Objectification, in this sense is an investment in whiteness because it maintains women in their secondary class role. However, Aguilar’s objectification is radical because it subverts patriarchal notions of oppression and uses it to place herself as the subject/object of her art and recognizing beauty in it. Meaning, that is removing herself from the male gaze.

This fat radical objectification is Aguilar's [un]framing through a Chicana Lesbian feminist epistemology. Radical objectification places the self as object to be perceived through an empowering lens that is decided on by the subject/object. This radical objectification is rooted in Aguilar's radical vulnerability, the affective power of her work. For Aguilar the objectification of her breasts, the curves of her body, and shapes that are created by the shadows and light are what she needed to find body acceptance. Therefore, her choice to frame her areola as the object of our sight is an invitation for us feel that radical objectification with her. If disidentification and [un]framing ask us to restructure the relationships of self from society, then in misrecognizing herself from the photograph Aguilar promises a personal narrative that is subversive to what the dominant culture wants fat women to feel for themselves, shame. The brevity of both section two and three articulate an urgency for Aguilar, and her audience, to listen to her because it is part of healing process and possibly mine. Anzaldua in "Let us be the healing of the wound: The Coyolxauhqui imperative- La sombra y el sueño" says that it is the "job as an artist to bear witness to what haunts us, to step back and attempt to see the patten in in these events....,and how we can repair el daño (the damage) by using the imagination and its visions (10). This is exactly how Aguilar shifts us to the last section of her video journal.



Figure 14: Laura Aguilar. The Body. Film Snapshot. 1995. Box 8. Laura Aguilar Papers and Photographs, Stanford Special Collections, Palo Alto, CA. 20, July 2018.

On Being Overweight and [Un]framing Discomfort

The last section of her video Aguilar *ibis* is almost complete antithesis of the previous clips because not only does she show us the most of her body, but in this section there are full body movements in tandem with her testimony. This last clip begins at 21:13 and is the longest of the four. It starts with her showing us her left profile with her arms hanging straight down and not covering any part her front. She holds silence, takes a deep breath (her stomach expands out), and release the breath.

“Well this body is not the body one wants to promote to have but it’s the body I have to need to be in and you know I started feeling comfortable being nude. And seeing myself and accepting myself and you know it’s comfortable” (21:20-21:49)

These statements are crucial to understand Aguilar’s disidentification because here is her facing the reality of her existence because she knows her body is not one that is being promoted as the most acceptable body to have. She identifies with this body because it is the body she needs to be

in and negotiates the need to be in this body and to be comfortable in it. In the transcription of her testimony she never uses the word empowerment, or really anywhere in her archives.

Disidentification, in performance can evoke empowerment for the audience, however I do not believe it is the reality of the performer. For Aguilar being comfortable and accepting is enough.

Her negotiation is obvious in this testimony here:

“It’s I mean It’s strange but even though you know I’m overweight and I this is not something one wants to aspire [sic] to be there is a comfortable comfortableness that I have found within my own body through doing my art work” (21:49-22:20)

While she does not aspire to be in this overweight body, she is making a choice to showcase it in her artwork. The last step of [Un]framing methodology is re-imagining, retelling, reconstructing truths through decolonial strategies, and for Aguilar that is reframing the object of the That is disidentification, and part of the process of [un]framing towards a liberatory possibly. Charlene Villasenor Black in “Reflections on Laura Aguilar” supports that Aguilar’s work is revolutionary. She posits that Aguilar’s nudes plays with the traditional “portraits of women...[that] originally intended to naturalize or essentialize gender identities” but by imposing herself as the object, in context to the traditional nudes of the Renaissance, “Aguilar revealed these constructs as fragile and tenuous, a revolutionary revision intended to make space for her large, brown, queer body” (1, 2). In thinking about our possessive investment in whiteness, these European nudes of women are part of the colonial framing of fat bodies in the Americas that established a standard of womanhood, that pushed people with female bodies to have and attain a certain body type. Aguilar’s radical objectification of her fat, brown, and queer body within this film and her artwork are decolonial body liberation possibly for other people like her.

In the previous three clips we do not see much movement from Aguilar, she is very intentionally keeping her forward facing pose consistent. This fourth section is unique because she is moving; She turns to show us the different shapes of her body but she is tenderly caressing her body at the same time. Villaseñor-Black argues that “her size, coupled with viewers internalized homophobia, blinds us to the latent eroticism of her work” (4). In *Laura Aguilar: Show and Tell*, Zuniga says that “the absence of clothing...often connotes adult experiences, nudity is not necessarily or sexual” (70). In removing the eroticism of nudity she argues that Aguilar’s work is able to be interpreted differently. Furthermore, Zuniga’s discussion of both this video, *The Body*, and her second expansion of it ten years later *The Body 2* (although in the Chicano Studies Research Center’s video compilation it is called *Untouched Landscapes*) concludes that these video journals reveal Aguilar’s person “complex, dark, sad, happy, childlike, alive” (70). Much of the literature about Aguilar has an aspect of infantilism, and she herself references these childlike trait in *Untouched Landscapes*, but by infantilizing an adult woman with disabilities and marginalized identities in academic literature it is akin to the racialized and ableist discourses that paint these bodies as incompetent, helpless, and desexualized. Villaseñor Black’s piece is one of the few pieces that alludes to the possibility of interpreting Aguilar’s work as having erotic components. She argues that “Aguilar brought to visibility the erotic life of people who are fat, queer, and brown” (5). While touching yourself does not always carry a sexual intention, the erotic is not always about sex but intimacy, vulnerability, and power. Aguilar move her arms from the top of her chest down to caress her breasts, wraps her hands gently around them, moves down her stomach and with her palm and fingers gently massages her stomach. She then moves her arms back in a circular motion towards her hips and back to the side of her stomach.

These movements do not show incompetence, helplessness, and powerlessness, but a sense of erotic for the self. As a queer woman those movements are familiar because the mirror lesbian and woman intimacy with ourselves and each other, so how can this not be part of her erotic power towards fat radical objectification.

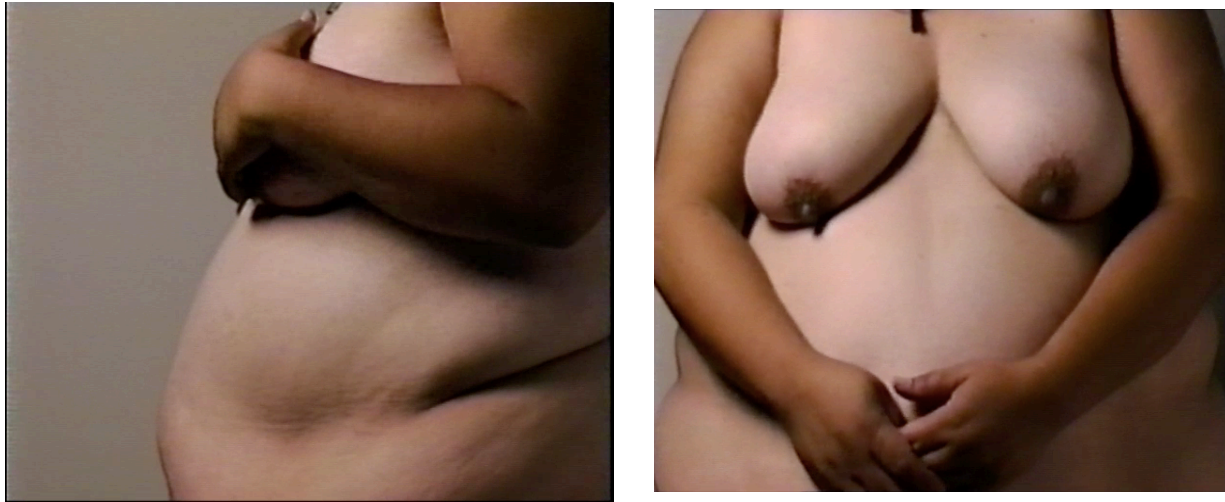


Figure 15: Figure 16: Laura Aguilar. *The Body. Film Snapshots. 1995. Box 8. Laura Aguilar Papers and Photographs, Stanford Special Collections, Palo Alto, CA. 20, July 2018.*

Tracy M. Zuniga in “Daring to be more Honest: Laura Aguilar’s Video Testimonios” recognizes that Aguilar “bares herself in various ways to her audience, using art as a vehicle of communication and survival” (67). I agree with her understanding of Aguilar’s videos as communicative and survival tools for the artist, I contest the idea that “cropping of the artist’s face from the frame gives the viewer some distance” (68). In this same section, Zuniga alludes that Aguilar is maintaining her narration during the shots of her body she is establishing herself as the “producer of meaning” and guides the viewers with her images. I agree that she, in her objectification, establishes herself as the dominant, or holder of power, with how us, the viewers, are given the consent to view her. But I disagree with her argument that by removing her face from the frame she is setting distance from us. If she is using radical objectification to engender a sense of acceptance, then, removing her face from the frames in which her body is most in

display is tactful of her artistic process and body liberation process. When Aguilar is touching her body she is touching herself as art. Aguilar's art is not meant to be uninviting, but rather captivating and inviting us to engage.

For fat audiences, specifically fat queer brown women audiences, this video is not a barrier but an invitation for touch. In section three where the camera is zoomed into her nipple, there is a physical openness for us to engage with her. In sections one and two her clothes and her arms across her chest creates a barrier, one which we are not to cross. With these last two sections the barriers are gone and we left with her nudity, her presenting herself to us. The distance from between us is gone. In these sections I am not removed from her but I am mirrored by her. My body looks like hers and as I watch the video journal over and over again I find myself tracing her curves with my finger. I am guided by the shadows that define her shapes and the light that highlight her excess. If she is a mirror then I am right in front of her and I touch myself in the ways she does, and with just a stretch of my arms I can touch her too. Therefore, for her fat audience she isn't hiding from us, she is inviting us to touch her body and ourselves in an exploration of our excess. This openness is then part of a radical decolonial reframing of fatness because "particularly for people whom society labels underserving of love because of their weight, sexual, or skin color" the erotic life of them (in all its different manifestations) is necessary for liberation (quoted in Villaseñor-Black 5)

Audre Lorde argues "the erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed and unrecognized feeling" (53). Aguilar access her erotic resources through her nudes to better understand, express, and recognize the feelings of her body and her mind. Lorde calls the erotic as the "beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings...for having experienced the fullness of this

depth of feeling and recognizing its power, in honor and self-respect we can require no less of ourselves” (54). In the beginning of *The Body* Aguilar shares that most of her bodies of work come out of her deep bouts of depression. These moments of deep feeling are part of the erotic because it is a “the life force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which [she] is now reclaiming” (55). Aguilar uses her ability to feel so much as the motivation to create art that supports her survival and thriving. More so, if the erotic also engenders a sense of honor and self-respect we can see that she has been working on asserting that since the *Clothed/Un clothed* series and most definitely in this video. In a letter to long term friend and chosen family Gilbert Cuadros just the year before this video, she asserts that she is deserving of a friend: “I deserve a friend to be happy for me and I pick up your not really and I understand but it hurt so I don’t want to share with you cause it hurt so I’m move away too”(Letter to Gilbert Cuadros, *Laura Aguilar Papers and Photographs*, 1994). Her ability to understand and ask for so much more than she is being offered from her friend is proof that while she may be sad and depressed she values herself enough to be treated the way she wants to. Aguilar accessing her erotic, using touch to decolonize her relationship to her body, and disidentifying with the expectations of being fat in as a public object this video is an example of an [un]framing methodology towards body liberation for the fat brown queer.

Conclusion

Curing (Ill)usory Fatness Syndrome

(Ill)usory Fatness Syndrome is an internalization of a racist self-hatred caused by the disease, the Latino Obesity Narrative. The pathological national discourse of Latinos and obesity in the United States is rooted in colonial ideologies that demand a subordinate class to support white supremacist paradigms. The Latino Obesity Narrative, the inherent belief that Latinos are or will be obese to the extent of becoming diseased, engenders a medical paradigm that trickles down from the United States Center of Disease Control down into interpersonal familial, platonic, and professional relationships between Latinos and everyone else. The idea that obesity is infectious and an epidemic of international proportions leads to a fear, hatred, and ostracizing of marginalized communities that have high numbers of obesity, Latino and Black. In the current political climate of the last ten years, and really since American contact with Mexico in the west, Latinidad is a criminalized, othered, and in combination with the obesity epidemic produces a toxic Latino Obesity Narrative that is internalized by fat brown individuals which internalize (ill)usory fatness.

Chicana Lesbian photographer, Laura Aguilar, happens to be fat. In her archival letters, photographs, and videos she showcases what I conceptualized to be (Ill)usory Fatness Syndrome. She exhibits moments of self-loathing in *The Body* by revealing the fear she had when she first shared her nudes with a friend, because how “dare [she]” photograph herself in the nude. This fear builds into a disabling self-policing towards our fat brown bodies, which is evident in Aguilar’s experience, as explained by Gilbert Cuadro’s in a short article written by him. He was in awe of the moment when she showed up to his apartment dressed in a flowery skirt, with make-up and her hair made up. This is a moment where she stepped out of the fat girl uniform. In her work, almost all of the work where she is the object of her art, she is wearing oversized shirts and shorts that hide any specific curves of her body. That style of dress is typical

in the wardrobe of a fat person who is struggling with (ill)usory fatness, I would know, I had a closet full for years. The fat girl uniform that Aguilar and I shared in common hid our fat bodies; they covered our stretched marks, numerous belly rolls, the jiggles of thighs and stomachs, and the bulging pockets of fat in our upper arms and knees, to name but a few of our shameful body parts. The fat girl uniform was uncomfortable to wear but we wear it not for ourselves but to assimilate our blatantly obvious size to the thin world for their own comfort of us. We would not dare wear pretty skirts, make-up, or jewelry to avoid the stares and drawing attention to ourselves, so our uniform stayed put until we shed it. Aguilar shed her uniform and traded it in for nudity. In her *Clothed/Un clothed* series and *The Body* she used nudity to move through her decolonizing of (ill)usory fatness syndrome towards peace and acceptance of her body.

When I started my thesis I did not know how many mirrors I would have to break through to find the little girl in the house of mirrors. Every article and book I read on this topic forced me to look at my reflection of every mirror, the reflections contorting and disfiguring what I looked like and who I actually was. When I walked into the Vincent Price Museum, on September 16th, 2017, to see Aguilar's exhibition *Show and Tell: Laura Aguilar* I saw myself reflected, I found someone who was also breaking those mirrors. I do not believe she intended for a fat brown chicana femme dyke to use her work and her existence as a lifeline towards her body liberation, but it was. I know now that if I chose to go forward with bariatric surgery, or any kind of medical weight-loss intervention, it would not be because I hate myself it would be for a much more logical, necessary, and rational reason. While I still have many mirrors to break, as the thesis came to fruition and I continue to study fatness in the world and myself, the force that it takes to break them is not as draining, they break easier now.



Figure 17: Instagram Post by @Frutamala about Laura Aguilar's passing. April 2018. Used with permission from user.

After Aguilar passed away in April of 2018, there was a collective moment of grief from the fat queer of color community in Los Angeles. In this Instagram post by @frutamala's, a local fat chicana queer activist and model, sentiments reflect the not only the grief of Aguilar's loss but the importance of her work and life towards our own liberation. We connected to her body because it looks like ours, and we connected to her because we also experienced sadness and trauma due to the brownness and fatness of our bodies.

Many of us have numerous negative social interactions with our closed-knit networks and the public that which is often centered around our plans to lose the excess of our bodies, to shrink ourselves to be more acceptable. My research is crucial towards the body liberation process because establishes a foundation of how our bodies are bearing the brunt of the racist, fatphobic, xenophobic, and sexist system of oppression through the Latino Obesity Narrative.

This weight is crippling because it impacts the self-determination of the fat brown body that does not work towards a body liberation, a simple example is the fat girl uniform. My research is important because it provides an inkling into different approaches to break those distorted mirrors that plague our existence. We can all benefit from escaping the house of mirrors because no one body is exempt from the national consciousness of the obesity epidemic narrative.

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