¡QUE FUNNY!: HUMOR IN CONTEMPORARY CHICANA/O CULTURAL PRODUCTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the ways contemporary Chicana/o cultural productions such as Chicana Falsa, Ugly Betty, and La Hocicona Series deploy humor to critique longstanding, stereotypic, and monolithic depictions of Chicanidad, around the notions of hispanophobia and the “Chicano family romance.” This study contends that contemporary Chicana/o cultural productions posit Chicana/o subjectivities that are flexible, at times contradictory, and but always in flux. Ultimately, this thesis theorizes humor as a limited but powerful tool of resistance for borderlands subjects.
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INTRODUCTION

Hispanic, Latina/o, and Chicana/o signify a heterogeneous group of people under a single overarching ethnic identity, downplaying the fact that the people they signal may have distinct cultural and national backgrounds. Since the 1970’s census, “Hispanic” (and later Latina/o) has signaled hispanophone people from Latin America and the Caribbean (Cuba, Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico). What subjectivity narratives do these labels present? What do we understand a Latina/o or Chicana/o to be? What image(s) do the word Chicana/o or Latina/o conjure? Perhaps images of brown-skinned, brown-eyed, brown-haired, Spanish-speaking people? In this thesis I contend that contemporary Chicana/o cultural productions—those produced by and/or about Chicana/o people—specifically Michele Serros’ collection of short stories and poetry *Chicana Falsa* (1999), American Broadcasting Company’s (ABC) dramedy *Ugly Betty* (2005-10), and Adelina Anthony’s tripartite performance *La Hocicona Series* (2010), depict Chicanidad as a subjectivity in flux rather than a static, monolithic, knowable identity.

Humor is the primary discursive mode running across all three of these post-Chicano texts. Briefly, “post-Chicano” functions two-fold: it signals that these texts are created by a generation of cultural producers that were born after the height of the Chicano Movement and/or the main characters in the texts are born at least one generation after

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1 I should note that for U.S. Census purposes, the racial term “Hispanic” and “Latino” encompasses the Spanish Peninsular region in addition to U.S. Latinos and people from Latin American countries; however, few people from the Spanish Peninsular region living in the U.S. self-identify as ethnically Hispanic or Latina/o.
the Chicano Movement generation, and that these texts are willing to, temporarily, disidentify with the label Chicana/o in order to (re)consider its contemporary cultural and sociopolitical currency. This thesis will trace the ways these texts reimagine Chicanidad in more variegated ways by satirizing and lampooning traditional Anglo and Chicana/o constructions of Chicanidad around the tropes of hispanophonia—the idea that all Chicanas/os speak Spanish—and what Rosa Linda Fregoso calls the “Chicano familia romance”—the myth that strong family values are characteristic of and integral to Chicana/o people’s ethnic and cultural identity. Situated at the intersection of humor and Chicana/o Cultural Studies, this thesis seeks to understand how these texts deploy humor in order to contest and refashion long-established representations of Chicanidad. Building on the work of Chicana/Latina feminist scholars like Rosa Linda Fregoso, Juana María Rodríguez, and Michelle Habell-Pallán, this thesis looks at Ugly Betty, Chicana Falsa, and La Hocicona Series as models of contemporary Chicana/o cultural productions that deploy humor as a tool for critical ethnic interrogation.

Michele Serros’ Chicana Falsa, an autobiographical collection of poetry and short stories, is set in Oxnard (a suburb of Los Angeles) and narrates encounters with family and community members who critique her performance of Chicana subjectivity and challenge her Chicana self-identification. The provocative and paradoxical title gestures towards the overarching issue that runs across the collection—the

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2 I will use “humor” as an umbrella term that encompasses more specific forms of humorous discursive modes including: irony, satire, jokes, parody, etc.
performativity of identity\(^3\)—and raises the following questions: What does it mean to offer a “false” or fraudulent performance of Chicanidad? What does a fraudulent ethnic performance look like? What might be the implications of thinking about Chicanismo as a performance for the historical socio-political struggle for recognition and self-definition? In carnivalesque fashion, Serros brazenly calls into question and challenges nationalism, Chicana/o Studies, and Chicana feminist thinkers and foundational texts. She embraces the pejorative title “Chicana falsa” and dedicates her collection to exploring stereotypes, exoticization of Chicana women, compulsory Spanish, and activism, among other issues.

\textit{Ugly Betty},\(^4\) produced almost a decade after \textit{Chicana Falsa}, portrays the tribulations of a Mexican-American family that lives not in the Southwest but in New York City.\(^5\)

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\(^3\) My understanding of ethnic performativity is informed by José Esteban Muñoz’s work. In “Feeling Brown: Ethnicity and Affect in Ricardo Bracho’s \textit{The Sweetest Hangover (And Other STDs)}” he writes, “The inquiry I am undertaking here suggests that we move beyond notions of ethnicity as fixed (something that people are) and instead understand it as performative (what people do), providing a reinvigorated and nuanced understanding of ethnicity” (70). Thinking about ethnic identity as something that can be performed—which I argue \textit{Chicana Falsa}, \textit{Ugly Betty}, and \textit{La Hocicona Series} all do—avoids the trap of essentialism (which can hinder critical analysis) and allows us to see ethnicity as a subject that can and should be critically examined.

\(^4\) \textit{Ugly Betty} is the U.S.’s adaptation of \textit{Yo Soy Betty La Fea}; a very transnationally successful Colombian soap opera that has been adapted into multiple languages across the world.

\(^5\) Communications scholar Isabel Molina-Guzmán argues that \textit{Ugly Betty}’s ambiguous Latinidad is part of the show’s panethnic universalist marketing strategy and further evidence of cultural commodification as informed by globalism. In \textit{Dangerous Curves: Latina Bodies in the Media} (2010) she examines U.S. media representations of Latina women. In the chapter dedicated to an analysis of \textit{Ugly Betty} she argues, “Interestingly, the decision to cast the New York family as specifically Mexican is perhaps more indicative of audience aspirations that its centrality to the show’s story lines. Mexican residents make up the largest U.S. Latina/o ethnic group and the largest Latin American
The show is anchored around the comical travails of Betty Suarez, the ugly duckling who must balance work in a leading fashion magazine and her endless, immigrant, working-class familial duties. *Ugly Betty* explored various themes over its four-season run, but this thesis will concentrate on examining the ways Betty navigates her Latinidad in a predominately white space and how the show queers Latino masculinities and family. To this extent it is necessary to note that none of the Mexican-American characters ever self-identify as Chicana/o. Despite their ambiguous self-identification, the show’s portrayal and wide circulation of Mexican-American identity necessitates

population in the United States, even though they are not the majority Latina/o population in New York City” (126). While Molina-Guzmán correctly notes that Mexican-Americans, or Chicanas/os, do not comprise the largest portion of the Latino population, I offer that there is much to be appreciated in the ways the show disrupts the homogenous representation of Mexicans as Southwest inhabitants. Due to the fact that Chicanas/os have long populated the present day Southwest (which was part of Mexico before the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo), Chicanos are mostly depicted as living in the Southwest. There are few depictions of Chicanas/os living outside the Southwest, although that is changing and *Ugly Betty*, with its broad circulation, is certainly contributing to changing that representation. Molina-Guzmán continues, “Among New York’s racially and economically segregated boroughs, Queens has historically been associated with working-class white ethnic immigrants. Indeed, it is interesting that the program locates Betty’s family in Queens, a borough not usually linked with Latinas/os in the popular media. According to a 2006 U.S. Census estimate, Queens is still predominantly non-Latina/o white, making up 31.3 percent of the population, with Latina/o residents the second largest category at 26.5 percent. Additionally, Mexican immigrants are most likely to live in Manhattan’s East Harlem barrio, a particularly classed and racialized space once predominantly inhabited by Puerto Rican migrants. By choosing to cast the characters as Mexicans living in Queens, the show acknowledges that U.S. Mexicans make up the country’s largest Latina/o population but erases the current racialized geopolitics of New York City. Puerto Rican migrants followed by Dominican immigrants are the city’s largest two Latina/o groups. Constructing a New York space with a Mexican family living in a historically non-Latina/o neighborhood allows the show to situate Betty’s character within a less racially determined and more universally resonant setting” (137). Molina-Guzman raises important questions about the show’s decision to situate the family in Queens as opposed to the historically Latina/o Harlem neighborhood.
critical engagement particularly for the ways it deploys humor to expand our understanding of Chicanas/os, or Mexican-American, peoples and families.

Xicana-Indígena performance artist Adelina Anthony showcases her remarkable acting and comedian skills in *La Hocicona Series*: six three distinct, one-woman, stand-alone performances that are sutured as a triptych, or series, by recurring themes and motifs. Each performance has a different eponymous primary character—La Angry Xicana?!, La Sad Girl, and La Chismosa—who weaves drama, stand-up comedy, history, Chicana feminist theory, Woman of Color feminisms, politics, sex positivity, and popular culture to offer inter- and intra-cultural critiques of topics including misogyny, racism, homophobia, and transphobia. “La Angry Xicana?!” reappropriates the stereotype of the angry woman of color and “weaves together critiques on Hollywood, the U.S. corporate media, purported lesbian gang epidemics, The L Word, conservative politics, health issues, religious icons, post-welfare life, examines possible sources of contemporary and historical anger among womyn of color…” (Adelina Anthony). Mixing gothic and BDSM aesthetics, “La Sad Girl” “turns the political tables on homophobia, higher education, anti-immigration…” and dating politics (Adelina Anthony). “La Chismosa” (the third performance and character of the series) dons a pregnant belly, black bandana, dark lip-liner, and a tear-drop tattoo next to her left eye.7

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6 My discussion of *La Hocicona Series* is based on the November 12-14, 2010 live performances at the McCadden Place Theatre in Los Angeles, Ca.
7 Chismosa is the feminine form of gossiper and it can function pejoratively as a tool to silence someone who speaks too much. La Chismosa, as a discursive subject, recovers the term and uses it to announce and assert her voice and critical perspective as a queer Xicana.
Without saying a word, at the level of the visual, La Chismosa plays on the media-driven construction of Latinas as excessively fertile and criminal parasites on the welfare state. In this performance, Anthony “interweaves migratory border issues, the juxtaposition of Xicana-Indigeneity with pop culture, Facebook chisme, single motherhood, intra-cultural dialogues about in-fighting and tokenism…” (Adelina Anthony). Adelina Anthony’s hybrid strain of stand-up comedy and performance art models a keen understanding of humor’s critical potentiality.

All three texts vary in terms of budget production and circulation. *Ugly Betty*—a Disney Corporation production—is broadcasted nationwide on primetime television and thus has the broadest circulation, reaching a wider audience. *Chicana Falsa* was originally published in 1993 by Lalo Press, a small independent publisher. The book was purchased and reissued by Riverhead Books (a subdivision of Penguin) in 1998. Adelina Anthony, an award-winning performance artist, performs her dramatic and comedic works in small community theatres, cultural centers, and on college campuses. Anthony’s decision to perform in small independent venues and cultural centers reflects her commitment to making her work available to the working-class Chicana/o community she often writes about. One of the most important ways these texts challenge normative representations of Chicanidad is through centering female and queer voices. Despite differences in budget production and circulation, this collection of cross-genre texts offer a great overview of self-reflexive critical Chicana/o humor invested in disturbing stereotypic representations of Chicanidad.

**Humor Theories**
Humor studies is a slow but growing field of study. Humor has and still is often considered to be mere entertainment, and thus has not received much scholarly critical attention. Within humor studies, the three most widely accepted but not mutually exclusive theories are the superiority theory,\(^8\) incongruity theory,\(^9\) and relief theory.\(^{10}\) All three theories are interested in exploring why we laugh or the larger social function of laughter. Under this rubric, humor’s primary function is to entertain—to elicit laughter. In fact, in *Performing Marginality*, Joanne Gilbert argues that “comic success is determined by audience laughter” (2). Such a myopic focus on laughter, I argue, ignores humor’s other various potentialities, including its critical potentiality. Thus, I am not interested in exploring *why* we laugh, but rather seek to understand how humor becomes a venue through which Chicana/o cultural texts challenge dominant constructions of Chicanismo and Latinidad. In other words, this thesis seeks to understand why contemporary Chicana/o cultural productions like *Ugly Betty*, *Chicana Falsa*, and *La Hocicona Series* employ humor to critique inter- and intra-cultural constructions of Chicanismo.

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\(^8\) Proponents of the superiority theory (including Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes) believe that people laugh at the expense of someone or something else. Laughter is a sign of a feeling of superiority; we laugh because we feel superior to the butt of the joke (could be the joke teller or a third party).

\(^9\) The incongruity theory proposes that people laugh at the unexpected or the bizarre: the disconnect between two objects or ideas causes laughter.

\(^{10}\) The most famous proponent of the relief theory is Sigmund Freud, who believed that jokes allow us to express feelings, thoughts, and desires that are generally suppressed. When we laugh we release the psychic energy required to repress those feelings, thoughts, or desires.
Theorists like Sigmund Freud, Mikhail Bakhtin, and José E. Limón recognize humor as spatial and temporally limited tool to subvert power that operates within the confines of hegemonic power. Freud’s theorization of humor, particularly as expressed through the joke, recognizes the joke’s subversive potential. In *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud writes that the joke “[enables] criticism or aggression towards persons in high places who claim authority…The joke then represents a rebellion against such authority, a liberation from the oppression it imposes” (100). In other words, the joke is a particularly useful discursive mode for subordinated or marginalized individuals. Humor—the joke, satire, or parody, among others—offers a way to speak back to power. José E. Limón, Chicano folklorist and literary scholar, similarly points to the subversive possibilities of joking in “Carne, Carnales, and the Carnavalesque.” In this chapter, Limón explores humor and joke-telling practices in Chicano homosocial circles in Texas. Limón posits that there is a subversive element at the heart of the men’s joking and jesting. He argues that their collective play (momentarily)

Negate[s] the alienating constraints of the historically given social order that exists for *mexicanos* and affirms the possibilities, at least, of a different social order. The participants momentarily overturn the alienating effects even while reminding themselves of the real aggressivism in the world, that of *los chingones*, such as the upper middle classes of Brownville. (135)
Limón’s reading of the men’s joking sees humor as temporally and socially disruptive. Joking disrupts the preset and reimagines “a different social order” where Mexican men do not have such a low social standing.

In *Disidentifications*, José Esteban Muñoz examines humor through his concept of “disidentification” and theorizes “comedic disidentification” as a performative tool of resistance especially useful to queers of color and other minoritarian subjects who are always already subject to various kinds of violence. He writes, “comedic disidentification accomplishes important cultural critique while at the same time providing cover from, and enabling the avoidance itself of, scenarios of direct confrontation with phobic and reactionary ideologies” (119). Comedic forms of disidentification work on multiple registers; they embed their ideo-sociocultural critique in humor and thus force their audience to actively participate in decoding the joke in order to unearth the critical. Muñoz avers that disidentification, as a strategy of resistance, challenges hegemonic ideologies from within. Like Bakhtin’s theorization of the medieval carnival Feast of Fools, Muñoz sees disidentificatory comedic performance(s) as sanctioned event(s) whose potential to subvert or disturb the status quo is not affected by temporal limitations.

Joanne Gilbert discusses humor’s unique rhetorical qualities in *Performing Marginality*, where she argues that “humor is an important rhetorical tool; it arms speakers and disarms listeners, limiting options as it amuse, diverting while it deceives” (12). The (thin) protective shield the aforementioned theorists describe or allude to is a
product of what Gilbert describes as humor’s “antirhetoric” (12). Quoting Gilbert at length:

Unique to humor is its function as what might aptly be called “antirhetoric,” that is, a rhetoric that always simultaneously promotes and disavows itself—renouncing its intent even as it amuses audiences and advances agendas…regardless the level of confrontation, even hostility, in a comic’s performance, he or she can always say, ‘I’m just kidding’ or ‘Can’t you take a joke?’ Although this disclaimer is sometimes a fairly thin veneer, it nevertheless functions as a rhetorical safety net. (12)

The “rhetorical safety net” Gilbert describes reflects humor’s cultural value. We believe that humor is empty; that it has no substantive content, and that its sole purpose is to invoke mirth. But as Gilbert rightly argues, our biased assumptions actually work in humor’s favor, since our assumptions dissuade us from objecting comedic content lest we be accused of not having a sense of humor.

In her analysis of Chicano performance artist Robert Lopez “El Vez,” the Mexican Elvis, Michelle Habell-Pallán argues that by mixing humor and political activism, El Vez “avoids alienating his audience” (189). Again building on the idea of humor as a protective shield, Habell-Pallan argues that El Vez’s satirical and political performances via the Elvis persona “address serious questions of social inequality in an unconventional, flashy style in order to bring in alternative ideas about social structure ‘though the back door’ when audiences’ guards are down” (189). In other words, the
familiar Elvis persona and the comedic genre of the performance create an ambiance that disarms audience members and provides a cover through which El Vez, and other Chicana/o performers who similarly deploy humor, can present (or perform) socio-cultural and political critiques that might otherwise be seen as unpleasant or be unwelcome.

Like Habell-Pallán’s analysis of El Vez’s performances, this thesis seeks to explore the role of humor in contemporary Chicana/o cultural productions. More specifically, this study investigates the ways Ugly Betty, Chicana Falsa, and La Hocicona Series deploy humor to challenge traditional representations of Chicanas/os. Chapter One: Hispanophilia as “Linguistic Terrorism”: Must all Chicanas/os speak Español? will examine the ways Chicanas/os have been constructed as linguistic and cultural Others through hispanophobia. It also interrogates the ways Chicanas/os valorize Spanish proficiency and use Spanish speaking abilities to measure and limit access to the Chicana/o identity label. This chapter will look at the ways Ugly Betty, Chicana Falsa, and La Hocicona Series use humor to challenge hispanophilia and demonstrate compulsory hispanophobia’s negative impacts. Through a humorous critique of compulsory hispanophobia, this chapter argues, these texts demonstrate how ludicrous it is to use Spanish language proficiency to limit Chicana/o ethnic identification or to assess an individual’s commitment to Chicana/o culture.

Chapter Two: Caught in A Bad Romance: Chicana/o Family Myths will look at the ways Chicano Movement rhetoric and U.S. media present Chicanas/os as a community with exceptionally strong family values. In turn, it will give an overview of Chicana/o
feminist and queer responses to and critiques of this trope, which Rosa Linda Fregoso aptly terms the “Chicano family romance.” This chapter will analyze the ways and extent to which Chicana Falsa, Ugly Betty, and La Hocicona Series use humor to challenge the myth of the strong, united, and supportive Chicana/o family unit. The Chicana/o family, in both Chicano Movement rhetoric and hegemonic media productions, is often if not always a heterosexual, reproductive, nuclear unit that adheres to strict gender scripts. Chapter two will pay particular attention to the way these three texts challenge dominant representations of heteronormative Chicana/o familial relations by privileging and centering female and queer voices. Essentially, this chapter will examine how Chicana Falsa, Ugly Betty, and La Hocicona Series deploy humor to demonstrate the extent to which traditional (read: heteropatriarchal) constructions of the Chicana/o family are romantic idealizations that do not accurately reflect the majority of Chicana/o families but rather suppress the heteropatriarchally-driven physical, emotional, and sexual violence that children, women, and queer people experience. Instead, these texts produce comedic scenarios and narratives that offer audiences a more variegated picture of Chicana/o familial relations and interactions.

This thesis will examine how contemporary Chicana/o cultural productions deploy humor to challenge longheld stereotypes used to define Chicanindad including the myth that all Chicanas/os speak Spanish and have strong, loving families with unbending gender and sexuality scripts. Thus, one objective of this study is to explore the critical possibilities of humor in contemporary Chicana/o cultural productions in order to better understand the extent to which humor is a limited but powerful critical tool for the
contemporary borderland subject. Ultimately, this thesis will demonstrate the ways contemporary Chicana/o cultural productions such as *La Hocicona Series*, *Ugly Betty*, and *Chicana Falsa* use humor to fissure monolithic constructions of Chicana/o subjectivity and refigure Chicanidad as something complex, varied, sometimes contradictory and constantly in flux.
CHAPTER ONE: HISPANOPHILIA AS “LINGUISTIC TERRORISM”: MUST ALL CHICANAS/OS SPEAK ESPAÑOL?

Prior to the mobilization and organization of the civil rights movement, including the Chicano movement, speaking Spanish at school was a punishable offense. Vicki Ruiz’s From Out of the Shadows, a study of Mexican-American women living in the U.S. during the 20th century, documents English-only movements prevalent in schools throughout the southwest (Ruiz 53). Part of a larger Americanization project, English-only movements reflected an American xenophobic ideology, which sought to erase difference under the guise of the inclusive and accommodating American melting pot. Underlying any kind of restrictive linguistic policy is the belief that a nation, and consequently its cultural productions (read: culture), has, or ought to have, a single shared language. In other words, a designated official language functions in favor of the nation-state, which is invested in creating and maintaining the illusion of a unified, cohesive, culturally homogenous citizenry. To this end, beginning in the early 20th century, the United States used hispanophonia to construct Chicanas/os not only as linguistically but culturally other.11 Henceforth, Chicanas/Latinas and Hispanophonia

11 In Spain’s Long Shadow: The Black Legend, Off-Whiteness, and Anglo-American Empire (2005) author María DeGuzmán argues that the U.S. defined itself as an independent nation and imperial power through a complex antagonistic and exoticizing relationship with Spain (xxvii). The oscillation between antagonism and exoticism focused on Spain’s “Other-ly” qualities including the vestige of miscegenation from Moorish rule, its large Roman-Catholic populace, and hispanophonia. About the latter DeGuzmán writes, “this myth of ‘American independence,’ requiring and courting a persistent agon with Spain and things ‘Spanish,’ masked the facts of domestic crises and
have been intertwined in the U.S. cultural imaginary. I call this practice the “hispanophone Latino myth,” which I will explore in more detail later in this chapter.

Chicano Movement goals and strategies, as reflected through documents like “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlan,” reveal an acute awareness of the larger implications of the regulation of and (in)direct attack on Spanish. Thus, “El Plan’s” organizational goals included education reform; more specifically, the creation and implementation of a bilingual and bicultural curriculum that would presumably nourish Chicana/o culture and its Spanish linguistic expression and ensure its continued growth. While the Chicano Movement sought to defend and preserve a Chicana/o’s right to express her/himself in a language other than English, “El Plan’s” rhetoric reveals that the Chicano Movement inadvertently corroborates the Anglo hegemonic construction of Chicanas/Latinas as other. In this chapter I will explore the relationship of Chicana/o culture and Spanish in the hegemonic U.S. and Chicana/o imaginary. Through a close reading of Michele Serros’ *Chicana Falsa*, ABC’s dramedy *Ugly Betty*, and Adelina Anthony’s performance triptych *La Hocicona Series*, I will demonstrate that contemporary Chicana popular culture challenges hispanophilia, rejects compulsory hispanophobia, and instead presents a more diverse and complicated understanding of international conflict and dependence. The drama of the repulsion of and attraction to figures of Spain has evolved to include Latinas/os and the Spanish language itself” (xxi). The historical Othering of Spain and all things Spanish, which begins in the 18th century according to DeGuzmán, has important implications for Chicanas/os and Latinas/os who are tied to Spain in the U.S.’s cultural imaginary through a history of Spanish colonization and hispanophilia. In other words, we can see the contemporary Othering of Latinas/os (which encompasses Chicanas/os) as an extension or modern manifestation of an Othering of Spain and all things Spanish with roots in the 18th century.
Chicana/o cultural expression, which raises questions about the political economy of language.

Chicanas/os are marked by and tied to other people with Latin American origins through a shared history of Spanish colonization and hispanophonia. However, Juana María Rodríguez’s *Queer Latinidad* contends that Latinidad is a discursive construct. Rodríguez complicates the most common ways we understand or define Latinidad, proving the impossibility of a single cohesive definition of Latinidad in terms of region, nationality, racial signifiers, and language. I am most interested in looking closely at the ways Rodríguez thoroughly challenges the myth of a hispanophone Latinidad.

Rodríguez deftly points to the linguistic heterogeneity of Latin American countries, thus shattering the myth of a monolingual hispanophone Latin America. Citing Rodríguez at length:

> Even when we think of South and Central America, do we forget the English- and Creole-speaking countries of Guyana, Surinam, and Belize, or the polylingual regions of Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama? How do we categorize the huge Portuguese-speaking anomaly of Brazil? If we decide that Spanish or at least a shared linguistic ‘Latin’ heritage is the common thread that unites us, it is a precarious thread indeed. Clearly there are other official and unofficial languages spoken in Latin/o America and the Caribbean…(Rodríguez 13-4)

Despite the prevalence and circulation of non-hispanophone languages in Latin America, peoples with Latin American origins are believed and expected to speak
Spanish. *Queer Latinidad* questions the existence and continued prevalence of the hispanophone Latino myth. María DeGuzmán argues that the term Hispanic, which like Latina/o and Chicana/o—I argue—is tied to the hispanophone myth, is part of a historical U.S. legacy of Spanish Othering. She writes, “The racial term ‘Hispanic’ created by Anglo-America to mark all those U.S. citizens with Spanish descent of any kind, as well as anyone from Latin America, refuses to differentiate between generations, language groups, cultures, identities, and identification” (xxiii). Instead, Hispanic and Latina/o homogenize a heterogeneous group of people into a vague collective “threat from south of the U.S. border” (xxiii).

Generations of diasporic movement and migration uniquely undermine the fantasy of a homogenous hispanophone Latinidad. Rodríguez writes, “The question of language and colonization is further complicated within a U.S. context by displacement resulting from generations of immigration...Latinas/os in the United States speak or don’t speak Spanish, other native languages, and standard English with vastly varying degrees of proficiency” (19). While U.S. media and marketing insistently construct Latinos as primarily Spanish speaking (Dávila 4), here Rodríguez points to structural factors that affect Latinos’ ability to perform the expected role of Spanish speaker. Generational histories of migration are particularly true for Chicanas, many of whom can trace their origins to the present-day southwest prior to the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Thus, many contemporary Chicanas do not speak Spanish.  

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12 Suzanne Oboler challenges the myth that all Latinas/os speak Spanish, especially after more than one generation in the U.S., in her book *Identity and the Politics of*
Rodríguez brilliantly links institutionalized language practices and the project of
Empire. She reminds us, “Castilian, or castellano, is the language of empire; however,
in most of Latin/o America it is commonly referred to as español, or Spanish,
evidencing the conflation of language and nation achieved through the colonial project”
(15). In other words, hispanophone expression and its taxonomy continuously reinscribe
a history of Spanish colonialism. Ironically, Chicanos continue to aver the importance
of speaking Spanish. What are the implications of continuing to define and measure
Chicanismo in terms of Spanish speaking abilities, especially when we consider that
Spanish is a vestige of Spain’s colonial presence in many parts of Latin America?

American studies scholar Arlene Dávila argues that U.S. marketing and
advertising construct Latinas/os as a distinct, Spanish-speaking community (4).
Interestingly, Chicana/o/Latina/o cultural productions too present themselves as
distinctly Spanish-speaking. In U.S. hegemonic representations, this trope highlights
Chicanas/os as always linguistically-foreign Others. Latinidad, then, in both U.S.
hegemonic and Chicana/o productions, is inextricably and ideologically tied to the
ability to speak Spanish. I contend that Spanish-speaking abilities then become
compulsory and are used as a regulatory tool which sets up the idea of authenticity.

(Re)Presentation in the United States (1995). She writes, “studies have shown that not
all Latinos in the United States are Spanish dominant. In fact, increasingly, a significant
number among the second and later generations are English dominant, and there are
some, although relatively few; who do not speak Spanish at all” (xv-vi). Like
Rodríguez, Oboler contends that Latinas/os who have been in the U.S. for more than
one generation are less likely to have Spanish linguistic proficiency or dominance.
These observations are especially important for my study considering that all three texts
I analyze are produced by and/or about Chicana/o characters who are at least second
generation.
Under this rubric, Chicanas/os/Latinas/os who do not speak Spanish, or who do not speak Spanish well, get read as less authentic or as vendidas or sell-outs. In “Edwidge Danticat’s Latinidad,” Ricardo Ortiz offers a thought-provoking critique of the rigid definition of Latinidad in terms of a “perverse alchemy of language and geography,” which raises important questions about the policing of Latino identity (152). Like the texts I will analyze in this chapter, Ortíz suggests that an investment in hispanophonia serves mostly to police who can claim access to the Latino label and to the attention of Latino Studies scholarship.

Chicana theorist Gloria Anzaldúa uses the term “linguistic terrorism” to critique the way Chicanas/os “use our language differences against each other” (Anzaldúa 80). Anzaldúa writes:

We oppress each other trying to out-Chicano each other, vying to be the ‘real’ Chicanas, to speak like Chicanos. There is no one Chicano language just as there is no one Chicano experience. A monolingual Chicana whose first language is English or Spanish is just as much a Chicana as one who speaks several variants of Spanish. (80-1)

Writing in 1987, Anzaldúa champions linguistic tolerance amongst Chicanas/os by challenging Spanish as an essential expression of Chicanidad. She disentangles Spanish language from Chicana/o identity and thus creates a space where Chicanas/os can self-identify as Chicana/o without facing critique for their inability to speak Spanish.

_Ugly Betty, Chicana Falsa, and La Hocicona Series_ use humor to continue a critique of “linguistic terrorism” via compulsory hispanophonia. Their comedic
disidentification points out the ludicrous unfounded correlation between Spanish and Chicanismo. Furthermore, the texts’ socio-cultural criticism reveals the limitations and danger of an uncritically and overzealous investment in viewing the ability to speak Spanish as a vital expression of Chicanidad.

Michele Serros depicts the burden of intra-group expectations to speak Spanish and the shaming that occurs when one is not able to perform this so-called “cultural requirement” in her poems “La Letty” and “Mi Problema.” In “La Letty,” Letty, who had once gone by “Tish,” functions as a Chicana/o cultural gatekeeper; she accuses the speaker of being “A Chicana Falsa” (1). La Letty assumes a position of power, evidenced by the fact that she answers her own question, “You know what you are?/ A Chicana Falsa” (1). After transforming from “Tish” to “La Letty,” Letty feels imbued with the cultural knowledge and power necessary to distinguish a “false” Chicana (Chicana Falsa) from a “real” Chicana. La Letty grounds her accusation in the speaker’s inability to speak Spanish well enough to get a discount. She says, “that sloppy Spanish of yours/ will never get you any discount at Bob’s market” (1). Her reasoning garners laughs but also raises questions about her investment in speaking Spanish. La Letty’s logic presents Spanish as a commodity, a means to an end (in this case a discount at the market) rather than an extension or expression of Chicana cultural identity.

La Letty also accuses the speaker of being a “HOMOGENIZED HISPANIC” (1). The capitalization of every letter in “HOMOGENIZED HISPANIC” visually signals the pejorative use of the word and the glottal fricative sound produced by the alliteration of this word sequence further punctuates the gravity of La Letty’s accusation.
(especially given that in Spanish the letter H is silent). Homogenized describes the processing and treatment of milk in order to make it more digestible and give it a longer shelf life. La Letty’s use of “homogenized” implies that Hispanic is a processed, commodified, manufactured, more easily digestible, and less authentic identity than Chicana. Homogenized conjures the image of (white) milk, thus the juxtaposition of Homogenized and Hispanic links the latter to whiteness.

The speaker of “Mi Problema” shares the shame Chicanas/os make her feel for not speaking Spanish. Serros writes, “Eyebrows raise/ when I request:/ ‘Hable mas despacio, por favor.’” (31). One of the ways the face registers shock, surprise, suspicion, skepticism, and horror is through raised eyebrows. In the poem, fellow brown Chicanas/os do not hide their shock or disgust at the fact that a brown woman cannot speak Spanish. The speaker bewails:

My skin is brown
just like theirs
but now I’m unworthy of the color
‘cause I don’t speak Spanish
the way I should. (31)

Raised eyebrows denote the (laughable) belief that there is a relation between brownness—a simulacrum for Chicanidad—and the ability to speak Spanish. The speaker uses the neutral definite article “the” to refer to her brown skin (“the color”) rather than the possessive “their,” implying that brownness cannot belong to someone and therefore cannot be regulated by one individual or one collective. The ambiguity of
the line “the way I should” could refer to the speaker’s inability to speak Spanish at all or to speaking Spanish in a particular way. This line’s double meaning suggests that both possibilities are equally contemptuous and worthy of derision for Chicanas/os who consider Spanish speaking skills central to their identity.

A Chicana/o’s inability to speak Spanish is more than a cultural transgression; it can be read as an assimilationist gesture. Serros continues:

A white person gets encouragement,

praise,

for weak attempts at a second language…

My earnest attempts

make me look bad,

dumb.

“Perhaps she wanted to be white

like THEM.”

and that is bad. (31)

Serros critiques a double standard that celebrates a white individual’s “weak” attempt at speaking Spanish and condemns the “earnest attempts” of Chicanas/os who are trying to learn or recuperate the language. Instead of recognizing and encouraging their efforts, some Chicanas/os judge non-Spanish speaking Chicanas/os as assimilated individuals. They assume that non-Spanish speaking Chicanas/os “want to be white,” as though Spanish equates with brownness and English equates with whiteness. Simplistic assessments of attempts to speak Spanish as “good” or “bad” demonstrate narrow-
mindedness and also reveal that under this rubric there is no middle ground; no room to consider the various reasons why someone may be disconnected from the Spanish language. Serros concludes the poem, “And then one day,/ I’ll be a perfected ‘r’ rolling/ tilde using Spanish speaker./ A true Mexican at last!” (32). Serros’ quip lampoons the idea that “true” Mexicanness lies in phonetic (“‘r’ rolling”) and grammatical (“tilde using”) capabilities, or conversely, a command of Spanish speech and writing.

Despite admonitions that she “should know better” because “Spanish is in your blood,” the speaker finds sanctuary with her grandmother who “gives [her] patience/ permission to learn” (32). In Ugly Betty, Betty’s family too gives her patience and permission to make mistakes when she attempts to speak Spanish. In the show, the Suarez clan mostly speaks English; they slip into Spanish when they refer to Latina/o culture-specific things like food. Spanish, in the show, functions as an acoustic marker that complements the visual signifiers of the family’s shaky Mexicanidad. So while the show presents a variation of Spanish-speaking abilities, it still caters to expectations that all Mexicans speak Spanish by acoustically highlighting the family’s Mexicanness through the strategic incorporation of Spanish words into their dialogue.

In the episode entitled “A Tree Grows in Guadalajara,” the Suarezes must travel to Mexico in order to fulfill Ignacio’s visa requirements (this is the only episode that touches explicitly on the issue of speaking Spanish). On the day of their departure, Betty excitedly declares, “We get to meet all of our family members and practice our Spanish!” (Ugly Betty). Throughout this episode, it is clear that Betty does not know how to speak Spanish very well. She makes comical mistakes when speaking to her
family in Spanish. For example, she says “Estoy muy embarazada” (I am very pregnant) when she meant to say “Estoy muy avergonzada” (I am very embarrassed). Betty mistakes “embarazada” for embarrassed (avergonzada) because she is using cognates that fail in translation from English to Spanish. Betty struggles to transfer her thoughts across the English-Spanish language border. Her struggle to keep both languages separate fails, but it does not hinder her ability to communicate and bond with her family, a concern sometimes used to demonstrate the importance of maintaining Spanish fluency. On the contrary, the family benignly laughs and points out her mistakes. The scene’s jovial atmosphere, signaled by the characters’ smiles and upbeat music (and consistent with the dramedy genre’s lightness of tone), does not appear to be interrupted by Betty’s Spanish-speaking challenges.

In “Mi Problema,” like “La Letty,” Serros contests the idea that language, more specifically the ability to speak Spanish, is a measure of a person’s brownness or that language skills delimit an individual’s ability to self-identify as Chicana/o. Similarly, Ugly Betty depicts an accepting non-indigenous Mexican family who does not condemn their family member for not speaking Spanish well. These texts offer a spectrum of Chicana/o subjectivities (with equally diverse Spanish speaking skills) that challenges the essentialist correlation between Spanish proficiency and Chicana/o subjectivity. Ugly Betty and Chicana Falsa thus promote a cultural space that allows for more variation in the expression of someone’s Chicanidad.

Adelina Anthony’s performance piece “La Angry Xicana?!?” further disturbs the English-Spanish dichotomy and challenges the belief that Spanish is the Chicana/o’s
mother tongue. Towards the end of the piece, which critiques the ways the mainstream media represents Chicanas/os, Anthony performs three variations of a Chicana speaking directly to white America. She begins by stating “I could do without hardcore Republican Hispanics,” and continues, “gente, you know what I’m talking about! [Enacts. Hums a patriotic tune.] ‘I’m proud to call myself High-spanic: My name is Josephine Perez-Smith. Oh, white America, thank you for saying that I can be just like you…”’ (La Angry Xicana?!). Anthony’s complex mimicry performs a Chicana performing Anglicized discourse (most notably marked by the pronunciation of the Latino surname Perez as “Puh-res”). In this variation, the character willingly erases any sign of Otherness by changing her name from Josefina to Josephine and through her own Anglicized pronunciation of Perez. In other words, the character transforms her name to a more palatable variation that is easier for English speakers to pronounce. She continues, “Oh, white America, thank you for saying that I can be just like you. Because I too hate those illegal wetbacks...[whispers] even if two of them raised me” (La Angry Xicana?!). Here the character further demonstrates her identification with “white America” through the use of the word “those,” which distances herself from undocumented Latinos, including her own parents.

The proceeding performance has small variations that are supposed to identify the character as politically and ideologically Chicana, as opposed to Hispanic. Anthony says, “Orale, you better believe que me da mucho orgullo to call myself Chicana. My name is Josefina Pérez de Villalobos. Chiyao!” (La Angry Xicana?!). In this iteration, Anthony’s character incorporates Spanish words and slips into Spanglish. She proudly
announces her name as Josefina not Josephine. This character’s last name, “Perez de Viallalobos,” has two functions. On the one hand, it signals a union between two Spanish-surnamed individuals (in other words, we are to assume that both of her parents are Chicana/o/Latina/o). Secondly, it denotes commitment to Chicana/o/Latina/o heteropatriarchal customs regarding marriage and surnames whereby women do not change their first surname but rather add the preposition “de” followed by the partner’s surname to signal their union to another individual.

Rather than allow the Spanish-speaking Chicana to remain as the applause-worthy option, Anthony performs a third iteration that shatters the English-Spanish dichotomy and critically situates hispanophonia as a colonial project. In this variation Anthony says:

I am proud to call myself a daughter of mother earth, Tonantzin, Coatlicue. My name is Josefina Achcauhtli Zetazin—do not call me JAZ for short. If you cannot say my name, I prefer then you shut-up and listen...Still, I will speak to you in your pinche English, because for la Xicana-Indígena [Crosses her arms in an “X”] Spanish is after all, just the first colonizer’s tool. (La Angry Xicana?!) In this adaptation, the character’s verbal and embodied rhetoric demonstrates an indigenous consciousness evident through her Nahuatl last names and invocation of Aztec deities, and it is further physically punctuated by the fact that she crosses her arms in the form of an X whenever she says “Xicana.” Moreover, Josefina avers that “Spanish is after all, just the first colonizer’s tool.” Following the critique of linguistic
colonization set forth by this character, one can argue that hispanophone expression is not any more authentic or preferable than Anglophone expression. Thus, measuring one’s Chicana/o authenticity through Spanish-speaking abilities is unfounded, as Spanish, like English, is not native to Chicana/o people. Of course, this does not mean that Nahuatl is more “native” to Chicanas/os, as this would ignore the variation of indigenous tribes that populated and populate Mexico today, and would hearken back to a romanticized, pre-columbian time. Furthermore, as I will later describe, Anthony indiscriminately deconstructs language to signs with no inherent meaning or value. Instead, I argue that Anthony ruptures the English-Spanish dichotomy and creates a third space or form of Chicana/o linguistic expression, which can in turn open up multiple forms of expression.

In “La Angry Xicana,” Anthony performs a deconstruction of English that can be extended to any language, including Spanish and even Nahuatl. Anthony says, “I remember a time when English was an actual language. Lazy Americanos, tán huevônes, that today your language is quickly becoming a lexicon of numbers and acronyms. BTW for your 4-1-1 this is a 9-1-1. Now who’s L-O-L-ing?” (La Angry Xicana?!). If the English language, or any language for that matter, can be reduced down to “numbers and acronyms” (read: symbols), then how and why do we assign hierarchal values to different languages? While I do not mean to suggest that all language is apolitical, since in some places in the United States speaking a language other than English is defiantly political, these texts, I argue, demonstrate that there is a much more complicated relationship between politics, identity and language. Thus,
language, if taken seriously, challenges against falling on easy, simplistic assumptions about its possible relation to identity and/or politics.

Underpinning the practice of measuring one’s Chicanismo via Spanish speaking abilities and/or proficiency is the assumption that Chicanas/os have the choice to speak English or Spanish, and more importantly that this decision is an extension of one’s politics or publically articulates political investments. Thus, to some, speaking in English, as Michele Serros illustrates and Anthony suggests, reflects an American nativist philosophy. Given the U.S.’s long history of linguistic discrimination (palpable and evident today through draconian legislation in states like Arizona and Virginia), one cannot completely disregard the ways that speaking Spanish—or any non-Anglophone language—disturbs the U.S.’s hegemonic linguistic project. However, we must be weary of any facile association between language and political ideology, especially when we factor the structural challenges towards which Juana Rodríguez points us. *Ugly Betty* and *Chicana Falsa* invite us to interrogate the language-politics collusion, as both texts reveal that there are many circumstances that can prevent Chicanas/os from learning Spanish, even if someone, like Michele, wants deeply to be able to speak it; while “La Angry Xicana?!” questions our allegiance to and continued investment in Spanish.
CHAPTER TWO: CAUGHT IN A BAD ROMANCE: CHICANA/O

FAMILY MYTHS

Hegemonic U.S. constructions of Chicanas/os depict this community as uniquely family-centered with "strong family values" (Dávila 2001). Arlene Dávila contends that U.S. marketing distinguishes Latinas/os from other market sectors by emphasizing “Hispanics’ supposedly greater spirituality, centrality of family, and ‘tradition’” (93).13 This fetishization of Latinos as distinctly family-oriented and driven mirrors Chicana/o cultural productions, especially those produced during the Chicano Renaissance, which too promote la familia as something uniquely (and revolutionarily) Chicana/o. In fact, during the Chicano movement, la familia was hailed as a weapon against Anglo racism and economic exploitation. While Chicano Movement rhetoric constructed la familia as an oppositional tool or space, ironically, today, Chicana/o culture’s supposed strong familial ties makes this group a palatable voter bloc to the conservative right-wing (who have co-opted the notion of family values).14

Dávila rightly points out that the stereotype of the family-centered Latina/o is less villainous than usual representations of Latinas/os as lazy, gang-involved, and

13 “Tradition” can have a positive value in terms of the survival and vibrancy of cultural form. In terms of temporality, tradition implies little movement or no change. Considering the prevalence of stereotypes of Chicanas/os/Latinas/os as lazy, slow, and backward, we must be cautious and critical of the ways “tradition” is deployed when talking about Chicanas/os/Latinas/os.

14 Reflecting on the sociopolitical and cultural climate of the 1980s and 1990s, Rosalinda Fregoso writes, “The New Right sought to cultivate the ‘Hispanic Vote’ during this moral panic, emphasizing the compatibility between the Republican social agenda and the strong family and religious values they perceived in Latino/a communities…” (MeXicana Encounters 72).
undocumented (98). However, like all stereotypes, this assumption reduces all Latinas/os, including Chicanas/os, to one identificatory quality—family—despite the fact that the strong, loving, and united Latina/o family stereotype may not be the norm for many Latinas/os. Moreover, Chicana/o families who do not fit the (limiting) mold of the loving and supportive united family are seen as aberrant. This chapter will investigate the origins of what Rosa Linda Fregoso terms the “Chicana/o family romance,” and seeks to understand why this myth has been so pervasive. In other words, what is the Chicano family romance’s socio-political economy? Has this myth changed since the Chicana/o Movement? If so, how? In order to answer these questions, this chapter will review the ways la familia and Chicana/o culture have been tethered in the United States’ social imaginary, and will offer an overview of the growing critique of the Chicano family romance. Finally, this chapter will turn to Ugly Betty, Chicana Falsa, and La Hocicona Series in order to understand how contemporary Chicana/o cultural productions navigate the cult of the Chicana/o familia, paying close to attention to the way these texts deploy humor to fashion a response to the longstanding Chicano family romance.

“El Plan Espiritual de Aztlan,” itself a Chicano Movement cultural production, models the Movement’s investment in challenging long-standing depictions of the Chicana/o family unit as unfit through depictions of la familia as robust. The manifesto reads, “the cultural values of our people strengthen our identity and the moral backbone of the movement…Our cultural values of life, family, and home will serve as a powerful weapon to defeat the gringo dollar value system and encourage the process of
love and brotherhood” (“El Plan”). Family figures as more than a set of biological relations: it is a specifically Chicana/o site (“home”) imbued with the affective capabilities to “defeat the gringo dollar value” and to reproduce nationalism (“encourage the process of love and brotherhood”). How, exactly, la familia does this is unclear, but “El Plan” suggests that it is the specifically Chicano iteration of family that is powerful enough to combat racism and exploitation. The way that family gets articulated as a culturally-specific concept or manifestation suggests that anyone who is part of the Chicana/o culture is by extension part of or has access to this kind of family. According to this construction, la familia is static and does not vary across individuals. However, “El Plan” is not the only Chicano Movement document that presents an unyielding image of the Chicana/o familia. In Next of Kin, Richard T. Rodriguez surveys and analyzes various regional-specific documents and artifacts that show how la familia “figured prominently in various organizational practices and discursive strategies put forth by movement leaders” (21).

The Chicano Movement’s near idolization of la familia was informed by the movement’s quest for cultural affirmation. Fregoso (2003) and Rodriguez (2009) both propose that Chicano Movement leaders (mostly male) heralded la familia partly as a response to the historically negative representations of the Chicana/o/Latina/o family in social science research. Fregoso writes, “the culture of poverty framework that came to dominate the social sciences led to even more pernicious interpretations of Mexicans in academic literature. Terms like ‘dysfunctional,’ ‘pathological,’ ‘authoritarian,’ and
‘fatalistic’ were common adjectives used to define Chicana/o culture” (81). Similarly, Rodríguez writes:

Claiming la familia in such politicized ways made sense given the racist terms in which Mexican and Mexican American communities were pathologically rendered…academic inquiry that by and large reflected popular beliefs in the United States often found Mexican American families ‘dysfunctional’ as a result of remaining mired in ignorance and prescribed traditions…Movement-era Chicano scholars were intent on wresting the family away from the possession of Western academic studies—especially those that uncritically adopted acculturation and functionalism paradigms. In turn, their hope was to charge la familia with currents fueled by resistance. (23-4)

Family, then, was yet another front that Chicana/o Movement leaders and scholars had to redress. In turn, Movement cultural productions and rhetoric, as evinced by “El Plan,” re-appropriated and challenged the idea of la familia as debilitating, and instead posited it as a fecund site of endurance and revolutionary inspiration.\textsuperscript{15}

The United Farm Workers’ movement’s success in mobilizing entire farm-working families into political action may have prompted Chicano Movement leaders to focus heavily on the family, Fregoso suggests (74). Rodríguez suggests, in turn, that due to the particularly harsh sociopolitical and economic climate Chicanas/os faced and

\textsuperscript{15} In Next of Kin, Richard Rodriguezcatalogues and critiques vast Chicana/o Movement cultural productions including literature, pamphlets, flyers, paintings, and murals that champion la familia as an important affective and political idealization.
endured, home was the place where many Chicana/o activists and movement leaders first learned about struggle. He writes:

the rampant despair of the disenfranchised Chicana/o communities was the motivating force behind the movements of the 1960s and 1970s. On the one hand, the families from which many Chicano student activists emerged were of poor or working-class backgrounds, a fact that jump-started in many an activist the sense of struggle. (21)

Thus, the Chicano Movement’s idolization of la familia was a strategic political move, and it became a tool through which the movement sought to increase participation and even indoctrination. Chicanas/os who expressed reservations or critiques about la familia were pressured into silence for the Movement’s sake.

All the while, Chicana feminist activists recognized and spoke up against the patriarchal structure undergirding the ideal Chicana/o familia as represented by Chicano Movement representations. As many Chicana feminists scholars have documented, Chicana feminists’ concerns were ignored and their voices silenced through accusations of brainwashing by the white feminist movement, and their concerns were dismissed as anti-familia lesbian rhetoric.16

Fregoso argues that la familia is not always loving and safe. In fact, she points out the ways that family can produce and perpetuate physical, sexual, mental, and gender violence, topics which remain a social taboo. She writes, “The Chicano familia

16 See Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands*; Moraga’s *Loving in the War Years*; Castillos’ *Massacre of the Dreamers*; Fregoso’s *MeXicana Encounters*; Blackwell's *Chicana Power!*
romance is uncritical of heterosexism and repression of queer sexualities; of intrafamilia violence, incest, pedophilia, rape” (86). Since the Chicana/o familia had endured years of negative Anglo representations, one can see why these kinds of critiques, which reveal the ways Chicana/o families are far from loving and safe, were discouraged by the Chicana/o Movement’s mostly male leaders. These leaders could not or most likely chose not to recognize the ways the newly-minted image of the Chicana/o family benefited men at the expense of women, children, and queer people.

Ralph Rodríguez’s essay “A Poverty of Relations: On Not ‘Making Familia From Scratch,’ But Scratching Familia,” launches a critique on the Chicana/o family through a discussion of mystery fiction writer Michael Nava’s depiction of la familia in *Rag and Bone*. Rodríguez writes,

For too long we have retreated to family as the bastion of Mexican American culture, a refuge from which the encroachment of the ‘dominant’ culture and its multiple oppressions might be escaped. It is less the reductive simplicity of the binary opposition between ‘dominant’ and ‘subordinate’ that provoked me than the notion that *familia* is a safe haven, an outside to society’s structuring power relations. Understood in this manner, *familia* has been the operative trope for forming Chicana/o social movements, once again missing the multiple ways in which family can itself be oppressive and generating a nostalgia for a family structure that might save us from the wicked world.(75)
Rodríguez’s raw articulation gets to the core problem with the Chicana/o family romance. Despite the plethora of representations that suggest otherwise, the Chicana/o family unit is not sacred or immune to violence and trauma. Promoting the idea that the Chicana/o family somehow transcends violence is disingenuous, and proceeding to build a social movement around a flawed romantic idea is bound to fail. Moreover, the nostalgia that undergirds the concept of la familia signals a desire to return to a time and place when la familia meant safety and protection. Nostalgia then suggests that this version of la familia was once real and can be re-accessed. As Fregoso, Richard T. Rodríguez, and Ralph Rodríguez demonstrate, la familia is a site of multiple violences for many Chicanas/os, particularly women, children, and queers. Using the historical findings and critiques of la familia in Fregoso, Richard T. Rodríguez, and Ralph Rodríguez’s work, this study turns to Ugly Betty, La Hocicona Series, and Chicana Falsa in order to see how contemporary Chicana/o cultural productions navigate the perennial strong, united, and loving Chicana/o family myth. Of particular interest is the way these texts deploy humor to demonstrate and challenge, to varying extents, the stifling myth of the Chicana/o family.

Adelina Anthony addresses the way larger U.S. socio-economic structures negatively impact working-class Chicana/o families in each part of La Hocicona Series. When La Sad Girl shares the history of her depression, she says:

And, yes, of course, I had thought about suicide maybe once or twice before in my life when things were super fucked up, like when I was 17 and I didn’t find the right shoes for my prom. Oh, and that’s the same
year I discovered that the scary rapist we’re all taught to fear as girls and womyn can be your own father, uncle, abuelo, brother, or primo. (“La Sad Girl”)

Anthony juxtaposes fashion problems (finding the right shoes) with incest for comedic effect, but she signals the intense and enduring emotional trauma caused by familial sexual violence. Through this performance she publically broaches the incest taboo and invites her audience to temporarily laugh at such a serious topic while simultaneously respecting the trauma of incest survivors.

Instead of fighting the pervasive pathologization of the Chicana/o family by hailing la familia’s strength and love, in “La Sad Girl,” Anthony re-appropriates the idea of dysfunctionality and situates it within a larger, systematic structural context. La Sad Girl says, “And not to essentialize, but…we [Xicanas] come from divorced or dysfunctional families. In fact, I’ve never met an authentic Xicana with two parents. That’s just so… middle class. No, real authentic [winks at audience] genuine Xicanas make family and friends from all the broken pedacitos of our life experiences” (“La Sad Girl”). Audiences laugh at Anthony’s tongue-in-cheek disclaimer because they know that proceeding this phrase will inevitably be an essentialist observation. Anthony uses her body (the winking action) to highlight her second use of the term “authentic,” drawing attention to the way the phrase is playfully deployed. La Sad Girl suggests that a dual-parent household is a middle-class privilege: it is a privilege to share economic and emotional familial burdens with someone else, as opposed to shouldering these duties alone. Furthermore, describing marriage as “middle-class” situates unions as part
of a larger socio-economic practice. Anthony refuses to promulgate the idolization of the united Chicana/o family. She invites her audience to laugh at the notion of “dysfunction,” which has a historically negative connotation when used to talk about la familia. Instead, Anthony demystifies the word and situates “dysfunctional” families (read: single parent households) as products of an economic system that negatively impacts working-class people.

Anthony continues to situate Chicana/o familial interactions within U.S. capitalism throughout La Hocicona Series. In “La Chismosa,” La Chismosa states that working-class Chicana/o mothers practice tough love in order to prepare their children for life’s “fucked up” conditions. She says, “I think that’s why they [Chicana mothers] subscribe to tough love, to prepare us. Our mothers do not baby us and say, ‘Oh, honey, darling, apple of my eye, don’t go near the water…” (“La Chismosa”). In this part of the sketch, which alludes to the figure of La Llorona, the child in question drowns because the mother prevents the lifeguard from intervening in order to make the child “learn the hard way” (“La Chismosa”). Anthony suggests that parenting styles (like the kind heralded by most depictions of the Chicana/o family) are informed by class positionality. The working-class Chicana mother, then, will not usually perform the nurturing, over-protective parental script, which is socially coded as representative of a loving, nurturing parent. Of course, Anthony does not mean to suggest that working-class parents or poor parents are not or cannot show affection. Rather, Anthony seeks to play with constructions of parenting, questions the way certain parenting styles are socially coded, and seeks to put these questions within a larger socio-economic
structural critique. Anthony’s playful and comic representation of Chicana mothers and their corporal punishment tactics, especially in this skit, contrasts with traditional representations of the Chicana mother as all-loving and sacrificing.

Michele Serros shatters the myth of the loving and supportive Chicana/o/Latina/o family in “Annie Says” (the collection’s second poem) by focusing first on extended family. Serros depicts a despondent aunt who discourages the young speaker from pursuing her dreams of becoming a writer. “Annie Says” documents all the reasons Tia Annie uses to support her claim that “you [the speaker] could never be a writer,” and that, “Nobody will ever buy [her] books” (5,6). Among the reasons Tia Annie gives are:

You got a D on your last book report
you gotta be able to write English good,
use big words…
Your family doesn’t have money to travel.
You never will…
You don’t know about pain,
anguish,
outrage,
protest…
You weren’t born in no barrio…
Bullets never whizzed
past your baby head. (6)
There is a sad humor in the many reasons Tia Annie lists, a humor that discloses how very little Tia Annie knows about the craft of writing and the publishing industry. Tia Annie believes that writers must lead extraordinary lives: writers must be rich (“Writers travel/ all the time/ New York, Paris, Rome…”) or must have survived extreme conditions (“You weren’t born in no barrio…Bullets never whizzed/ past your baby head”) (4, 6). The latter reason is significant given the way that Chicanas/os are often typecast as Cholas/os or as coming from dangerous, working-poor neighborhoods where violence is rampant. It is poignant that Tia Annie has internalized this representation and, with valid reason, believes that a Chicana/o writer could only write and sell books that reaffirm the stereotypes of Chicana/o cultural violence. While “Annie Says” challenges the romanticization of la familia, it does not assail Tia Annie. Instead, the poem lends itself to a Marxist critique of the cultural capital of reading and education. Tia Annie’s comedic remark that New York, Paris, and Rome are the places where “they make Oil of Olay” marks her position on the lower end of the socio-economic ladder. She does not maliciously discourage the speaker from pursuing her literary aspirations. Her reasoning, albeit equally dispiriting, springs from her limited knowledge of the book publishing industry.

Underlying Tia Annie’s claims we find, simultaneously, a nuanced feminist critique and internalized gender oppression. She says, “Sure, some famous poets,/ they say/ wrote longhand/ but that was long ago,/ and they were men./ Men have it so easy,/ worthless lazy dogs…so put your pencil down/ and change the channel for me,/ it’s time for As the World Turns” (4). Tia Annie is aware of the way a patriarchal society,
like the U.S., allots men privileges that are not accessible to women. These privileges are further inaccessible to women who inhabit multiple marginalized identity positions. Despite her astute critique, Tia Annie does not encourage the speaker to challenge sexist and class-based inequalities, but rather advises the speaker to drop her pen and tune into the soap opera. Serros thus presents an image of family that contrasts with the trope of the strong, supportive Chicana/o/Latina/o familia.

Like Chicana Falsa, Ugly Betty demonstrates that it is hard for Chicana/o family members (and, I would argue, most people) to support what they do not know or do not understand. Ugly Betty depicts Latina/o and white families’ difficulties in accepting a family member’s homosexuality. In doing so, Ugly Betty evinces that a family’s homophobia, regardless of race, fractures familial bonds.

Justin’s sexual orientation remains undefined throughout most of the show’s four seasons. However, from season one, the show depicts family and community members’ anxious responses to Justin’s sexual ambiguity. The show’s male characters, with the exception of Ignacio (Justin’s grandfather), are the most vocal about their discomfort with Justin’s gender-queer proclivities. In the episode entitled “Lose the Boss,” Santos, Justin’s estranged father, returns, and has difficulty accepting his son’s interest in craft-making and Broadway musicals. Justin sits in front of the Christmas tree and talks about the Christmas ornament he made out of “chenille sticks…[he found] at a fabric store” (Ugly Betty). Justin’s craft-making and patronage of fabric stores function as an allusion to the stereotypical assumption that gay men are interested in fashion. The camera turns to a clenched-jawed Santos who taps his foot and punches
his right fist into his left palm. He invites Justin to play football—a sport well-known for its violence and hyper-masculinity (Miller 121). Santos barks, “Yeah? Well give the glitter a rest. Come on. Come out and be a normal kid for an hour” (Ugly Betty). He implies that a boy’s interest in glitter and craft is abnormal, especially in contrast to a normative interest in sports.

Santos critiques Hilda (Justin’s mother) and the Suarezes’ support of Justin’s queer hobbies. He says, “Who the hell is taking him to fabric stores?…You want me to just sit by and watch him play with chenille and not say anything about it?…Look, if this family doesn’t put a stop to this then I am!” (Ugly Betty, my emphasis). Santos’ use of pronouns (“it” and “this”) refers to Justin’s queer gender performance but also expresses the unsayable: that Santos thinks Justin is gay. Santos’ outburst exposes his refusal to accept, even as he acknowledges, Justin’s queerness. While Ugly Betty initially portrays Santos as an unaccepting father, by the end of the first season Santos quotes Broadway facts and surprises Justin with tickets to attend a performance of Hairspray. The show wavers between dismantling the romanticized image of la familia and offering a narrative of hope by portraying Santos’ acceptance of Justin’s potential queerness.

Initially, Ugly Betty depicts Hilda, Justin, and Santos as a family that does not entirely fit the mold of the loving and supportive Chicana/o familia due to Santos’ homophobia. In the show, homophobia and transphobia strain the Anglo-familial relations of Marc St. James (the villainous Wilhelmina’s gay sidekick) and Daniel and Alexis Meade (heirs of MODE magazine). However, Santos’ homophobia dissipates by
the end of season one, while the Anglo families’ prejudices take longer to be assuaged (Alexis and Daniel’s family) or are never clearly reconciled (Marc’s family). Within the larger tension of homophobia and familial acceptance, the show sets up the Suarez family as the most loving and supportive to queer family members: despite their working-class economic status, the Suarezes are the family the other queer, wealthy, Anglo characters wish for.

The show also offers a more detailed account of Marc, and Daniel and Alexis’ fractured familial relationships in the episode entitled “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.” In this episode Marc’s impending “coming out” is the most important narrative thread. Hoping to maintain a heterosexual façade for his mother, Marc convinces Betty to pretend to be his girlfriend. After an orchestrated family dinner at the Suarez residence goes comically and painfully awry, Betty takes Marc to the side and attempts to convince him to come out, using the rhetoric of the unconditionally loving and supportive mother. After a long pause, Marc looks down, frowns, and says in a slow, sad, low tone, “My family is not your family, okay?” (Ugly Betty).

Marc is inspired to come out to his mother after she makes offensive, racist and classist remarks about the Suarezes, and disdainfully refers to Justin as “that” due to his “swishy,” or effeminate, behavior. After Marc avers that he is gay, his mother coldly replies, “Well, if this is the life you’ve chosen, I have no interest in knowing the real you” (Ugly Betty). Marc correctly predicted that his mother’s homophobia would be stronger than familial ties, and reason to disown him. Betty attempts to comfort Marc: “I learned something about family tonight. They’re not the ones who love you the most,
sometimes it’s the family that you make for yourself” (Ugly Betty). Through Betty’s insight, the show acknowledges the ways family members fail each other.

Ugly Betty wavers between challenging constructions of loving and supportive families, Latina/o or white, and upholding Latina/o families as substantially more loving and understanding that their white counterparts. For example, the show’s final scene montage juxtaposes the Suarezes laughing and playing cards around the coffee table with dystopic images of Marc, Alexis, and Daniel’s fractured families. While the Suarez family’s strong and loving descriptors are temporarily challenged by Santos’ homophobia, his issues are, in true dramedy form, quickly recovered and the Suarez family is once again the exemplary loving family. By setting up the Suarezes as the ideal loving and accepting family, the show heralds the Chicana/o/Latina/o familia as distinctly loving and supportive, and most importantly as superior to Anglo familial structures, replicating Chicano Movement rhetoric.

La Hocicona Series rejects and Ugly Betty and Chicana Falsa complicate, albeit sometimes only momentarily, the romanticization of la familia by acknowledging intra-familial violence and juxtaposing images of non-supportive and supportive family members. Ugly Betty depicts homophobic family and community members alongside ones who are loving and supportive. Similarly, in Chicana Falsa, an encumbering aunt coexists with an encouraging mother who gives up “Friday night KFC dinners…Saturday mall excursions, big Sunday breakfasts and… night school art classes” in order to buy her daughter an expensive mahogany “writer’s desk” (74, 73).
In this short story, the mother asserts her belief in the narrator’s writing talent. All three texts use scenarios of conflict, overridden with comedic tones, to simultaneously rupture and re-create the image of the strong and loving Chicana/o/Latina/o family. Although they do not completely reject the romanticization of la familia, *Ugly Betty*, *Chicana Falsa*, and *La Hocicona Series* offer audiences a more variegated picture and narrative of Chicana/o/Latina/o families that acknowledges intrafamilial emotional, physical and sexual violence.

Further, I contend that *La Hocicona Series* and *Ugly Betty*’s focus on queer narratives and support networks can serve as models to queer the compulsory heteroreproductive idea of the Chicana/o family. Moreover, these texts show alternative groupings and networks of people who support each other without replicating heteropatriarchal familial structures and ideologies.

**Queering La Familia**

This chapter began with an historical overview of the political function of la familia, as articulated by Chicano Movement cultural productions evinced by “El Plan Espiritual de Aztan,” and reviewed critiques of the “Chicano family romance” by Ralph Rodríguez, Rosa Linda Fregoso, and Richard T. Rodríguez. Although these scholars

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17Note how the mother is depicted as the most loving, supportive, and resilient family member in all three texts. A sex-based analysis of this trope would surely be instructive, considering the way women, mothers in particular, are represented as self-sacrificing and all-loving in Anglo- and Chicano-produced representations of la familia. Could it be that Chicana/o cultural producers are willing to scrutinize the mythic construction of the strong Chicana/o familia but are reluctant to give up or challenge representations of the supportive, sacrificing (almost Virgin-like) Chicana mother? Are these misgivings present in Chicana/o scholarship? If so, how might this complicate our understanding of the gendered function of the Chicana/o familia romance?
agree on the inaccurate, heteropatriarchal, and stifling qualities of the Chicano family romance, not one proposed doing away with la familia. Instead, Richard T. Rodríguez and Ralph Rodríguez, like earlier Chicana feminist and queer critics, turn to queer articulations of la familia as models for a more flexible—yet equally politically useful—iteration of family. This final section looks critically at claims in favor of la familia, as articulated by Chicana/o cultural theorists, *Ugly Betty*, and *La Hocicona Series* (the latter of which are heavily focused on queer characters and engage in queering la familia), in order to evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of revising la familia.

The proliferation of the term “queer” in academic studies mandates, I believe, definition and clarification of the ways “queer” is used. In this study then, “queer” can, and sometimes does, describe sexual identities, but it also describes expressions beyond sex acts and sexuality that deviate from normative standards. Juana María Rodríguez defines queer as the:

- breaking down of categories, questioning definitions and giving them new meaning…the critical practice of ‘refusing explication’… ‘Queer’ is not simply an umbrella term that encompasses lesbians, bisexuals, gay men, two-spiritied people, and transsexuals; it is a challenge to constructions of heteronormativity…it creates opportunity to call into question the systems of categorization that have served to define sexuality. (24)
Part of queer’s function, according to Rodríguez, is to question taxonomies of sex, gender, and desire. Queering “X” brings attention to “X’s” constructedness and calls into question the taxonomies that construct and define “X” within larger (hetero)normative power structures. To this end, this thesis argues that *Ugly Betty* and *La Hocicona Series* deliberately queer la familia to interrogate the structure and political economy of la familia as an Anglo and Chicana/o political ideology.

Richard T. Rodríguez’s *Next of Kin* offers an extensive critique of the heterosexist and homophobic qualities of the Chicana/o family romance as articulated by Chicana/o Movement rhetoric and cultural productions. He explicitly states that while *Next of Kin* denounces the “Chicana/o family romance’s” various shortcomings, the book does not “result in its [the Chicana/o family] dismissal” (3). He writes, “the book necessarily considers the crucial familial attachments—attachment predicated upon diverse modes of kinship by various constituencies—maintained by Chicanas and Chicanos at historical moments in which economic exploitation, racism, sexism, and homophobia persist…” (3). In other words, Rodríguez does not want to get rid of the Chicana/o family because la familia has offered and continues to offer Chicanas/os support in the face of socio-economic antagonisms. In regard to completely rejecting la familia, Rodriguez writes, “the stakes are especially high when one considers the importance of family in countering the subordinating forces of racism and economic exploitation” (5). Rodriguez is hesitant to “dismiss” the Chicana/o family, especially those articulations which offer “diverse modes of kinship” like those modeled by queer Chicana/o cultural producers, and he correctly acknowledges the way la familia
cushions or offers support from the blows of racism and economic exploitation (5). His reasoning, although valid, mirrors the very rhetoric Chicano Movement leaders used in favor of the heteropatriarchal Chicana/o familia romance (which Rodríguez himself documents).

Using a different strategy, Ralph Rodríguez too warns against hastily dismissing “la familia.” Rodríguez (as informed by Derrida) proposes that la familia be “crossed out” in order to highlight the term’s limitations and lack of a better word, idea, or concept with which to replace it. Quoting Rodríguez at length:

[La familia] is an important signifier for discussing certain personal and social relations, but at the same time it can never do all the work many Chicana/os want it to do. It is both an excess and a lack. It is complete with significations that exceed its lexical and material boundaries, yet simultaneously never replete enough to fulfill the political, social, cultural, and economic ends to which it is set. In placing familia under erasure, I argue that despite its shortcomings it would be premature to walk away from family…Whether or not we imagine them otherwise, families will persist, and they will continue to be used as the building blocks of community and nation. Thus it strikes me as politically naïve and dangerous to concede valuable ground. (75)

Rodríguez approaches the issue of la familia through the lens of political strategy. He acknowledges that the term is overdetermined and bound to fail in meeting the expectations of Chicanas/os. However, he also recognizes that la familia is a powerful
political tool for constructing and maintaining community. Thus, he cautions againstceeding la familia for the possibility it can continue to uphold heteropatriarchy.

Cherrie Moraga—Chicana lesbian feminist playwright and public intellectual—is one of the most vocal critics of the heterosexist underpinnings of la familia. Yet, she too insists on reforming rather than forgoing “la familia.” Moraga’s essay “Queer Aztlán” (part of The Last Generation—a collection of poetry and essays) muses over the benefits of maintaining and rehabilitating nationalist ideologies such as Aztlán and la familia. In light of overwhelming familial and cultural rejection, queer people, Moraga argues, have been forced to “actively redefine familia, cultura, and comunidad” (165). She states that Chicana/o queers have created support systems informed by “more egalitarian models of Indigenous communities” (166). These alternative familial structures, inspired by Native American tribes, offer “an alternate socioeconomic structure that holds considerable appeal for those of us who recognize the weaknesses of the isolated patriarchal capitalist family structure” (166).

Like Richard T. Rodríguez and Ralph Rodríguez, Moraga does not offer a blueprint for queer articulations of Chicana/o family. Though a more detailed description of the structure and workings of queer Chicana/o familia might better engender this queer version of la familia, “queer” exceeds molds and delimitations. Unlike the rigid and limiting Anglo- and Chicana/o- produced templates of la familia, Moraga’s ambiguity leaves room for definitions and articulations of familia in flux.

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18 Elsewhere she describes the practice of queer familial formation as “making familia from scratch.”
La Hocicona Series centers the experiences and voices of Xicana lesbians: La Chismosa, La Sad Girl, and La Angry Xicana are all Xicana-Indigena lesbian characters. In fact, in “La Angry Xicana?!?” (the first play in the tripartite La Hocicona Series) the audience members are continually addressed as “mariconas,” or lesbians. Audience members laughed the first time La Angry Xicana refered to them as “mariconas,” partly as a response to La Angry Xicana’s hostile tone, but perhaps also because not everyone in the audience identified as lesbian. Regardless, Anthony as La Angry Xicana states, “tonight you’re all my mariconas” (“La Angry Xicana”). Thus, not only does each of the performances center on a lesbian character and offer socio-cultural, political critique from a working-class, Xicana, lesbian perspective, “La Angry Xicana?!?” situates audience members as “mariconas” and thus facilitates their temporary identification with Xicana lesbians. Each performance describes scenes of Xicana lesbian collectives that offer emotional support and advise (“La Sad Girl”) or collectives that pool and share resources together even if it is to buy cable and see the only television show, albeit racist and classist, that focuses exclusively on the lives of lesbian women (“La Angry Xicana?!”).

“La Angry Xicana?!?” critiques Chicana/o culture’s phallocentrism and argues that the privileging of men and their penises starts at an early age when Chicana mothers marvel at and encourage boys to play with their penises. La Angry Xicana says, “imagine if we had that kind of encouragement.” And re-imagine La Angry Xicana does. She revises an earlier description of Chicana/Latina teens in the gym locker room as the “original Houdinis” because, “in a record five seconds we can take off our bras,
change our sanitary napkins—because according to our Mexican mothers only putas use tampons—and slip into our gym chores without ever removing a single layer of outer clothing” (“La Angry Xicana?!”). Anthony’s hilarious scenario may ring true for Chicanas/Latinas who have been personally shamed by the lack of discourses around the sexual body and sexuality of Chicanas. Anthony ends “La Angry Xicana?!” by gesturing toward and enacting a future where teenage Chicanas can publically examine and talk about their own bodies and lesbian sexualities in a locker room.

_Ugly Betty_ constructs queer campy, Chicano/Latino masculinities for Justin and Ignacio Suarez. Most scholars agree that camp is marked through “flamboyance and extravagance; excess and exaggeration; artifice and parody. Moreover, its relation to popular culture is itself extravagant, exaggerated and, on some level, parodic” (Jarman-Ivens193). Jarman-Ivens’ critical discussion of Susan Sontag’s original descriptions of camp, specifically as apolitical, are useful to my analysis of the way _Ugly Betty_ relies on the recognizable markers of camp in order to demonstrate Chicano/Latino masculine gender scripts as constructions (of course, this critique can and should be extended to the construction of all gender scripts).

_Ugly Betty_ showcases three different performances of Chicano/Latino masculinity in the episode entitled “Four Thanksgivings and a Funeral.” Through comedic entanglements and symbols that fail to symbolize masculinity, _Ugly Betty_ queers Chicano/Latino masculinities and _la familia_, and calls into question traditional (read: heteropatriarchal) gender scripts as they organize familial interactions.
The juxtaposition of these three different Latino masculinities begins with a gift box containing a football, basketball, jerseys, and other sports gear—emblems of U.S. masculinity. Instead, Justin queerly re-appropriates the cup and reads it as a theatre prop. While this demonstrates the slipperiness of signs, the producers rely on stereotypes (gay men’s supposed fascination with the theatre) in order to critique Western heteronormative masculinities. A furrowed-browed Santos replies, “Actually, it’s a uniform man. [chuckle] From the Jets, they’re the best” (Ugly Betty). Santos’ facial contortion and laughter express that he is confused and amused by the fact that a pre-teen boy does not recognize a pro-football team jersey or the primary use of a sports cup. Justin’s queer re-appropriation of the sports gear challenges compulsory heteronormative readings of signs.

In this same scene, Ignacio Suarez wears an apron and kneads dough for buñuelos. Ignacio’s location in the kitchen, a space that has been conventionally coded as feminine especially within a domestic context, challenges the stereotype of Mexican men as the ultimate macho. Interestingly, his spatial location (kitchen), attire (apron), and “domestic” activities do not attract confused looks or laughter: his heterosexuality is never called into question. Ignacio verbally demonstrates his knowledge of and

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19 In a discussion of western constructions of masculinity, Toby Miller argues that “HM [hegemonic masculinity] model seems to fit sport’s ideological apparatus, where aggression, bodily force, competition, and physical skill are primarily associated with straight maleness” (Miller 121). Santos gift is very apropos considering his masculinity most closely mirrors Anglo and Chicano/Latino constructions of hegemonic masculinity. The gift for his ambiguously queer son, is supposed to clearly signify hegemonic masculinity. One cannot help but laugh at Justin’s failure to “correctly” decode/recognize the gifts or at his reading of the sports cup as a Phantom of the Opera mask.
participates in American Football culture when he responds to Santos’ claim that Jets are the best with the quip “except for the Giants” (*Ugly Betty*). The camera never focuses on Ignacio when he speaks, but we can make him out folding napkins and setting the table in the long screen shot. This scene’s cinematographic construction demonstrates that a masculinist sports culture can coexist with a Latino masculinity that actively participates in care-giving and domestic duties.

Throughout the series, Ignacio is portrayed as a caring and gentle male figure who cooks, does his daughters’ laundry, and enjoys watching telenovelas (Mexican soap operas). Isabel Molina-Guzmán argues that the show combats stereotypes of Latino hypermasculinity through Ignacio’s effeminate familial duties and participation in “Oprah’s women-centered book selections,” and thus creates a more palatable, “less brown and therefore less threatening masculinity” (139). Ignacio’s feminized gender performance (duties, chores) certainly makes him less threatening and more palatable; however, I contend that his campy performance of the “gentle” Latino father implodes “tenderness” and “feminine duties,” to show their arbitrary construction. As part of the show’s larger commitment to representing queer subjectivities and narratives, *Ugly Betty* queers Latino masculinity through Ignacio and Justin’s campiness, and depicts a Chicana/o/Latina/o family with flexible and varying articulations of masculinity.

Despite various critiques against the inherently heteroreproductive undertones of the Chicano family romance, Chicana/o scholars and contemporary cultural productions do not appear ready to let go of la familia as a political concept, one which is particularly useful to Chicanas/os. Unlike early representations of la familia,
contemporary cultural productions, as evinced in my analysis of *Ugly Betty, Chicana Falsa*, and *La Hocicona Series*, use humor to bring attention to intra-familial emotional, physical, and sexual violence. These three texts oscillate between depictions which affirm the Chicana/o family as an affective source of strength and preservation, and depictions of hurtful and even destructive Chicana/o families. Unlike the Chicano Movement’s heteroreproductive articulations of *familia*, *Chicana Falsa, Ugly Betty*, and *La Hocicona Series* privilege the disenfranchised voices and narratives of women, children, and queer people. These texts bring *familia*’s compulsory heteroreproductive and patriarchal undertones under scrutiny. Furthermore, they reject the notion of a single, homogenous Chicano family romance, and posit various diverse, and at times contradictory, Chicana/o familial forms that can coexist without the need to hierarchize and label one as more authentically Chicana/o or politically useful than another.
CONCLUSION

In a New England college where I taught, the presence of a few lesbians threw the more conservative heterosexual students and faculty into a panic. The two lesbian students and we two lesbian instructors met with them to discuss their fears. One of the students said, “I thought homophobia meant fear of going home…”

--Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera

Anzaldúa’s Borderlands/La Frontera is by no means (or stretch of the word) funny, yet the anecdote about a student’s belief that homophobia meant “fear of going home” always makes me chuckle. Rather than laughing or dismissing the student’s mistake, Anzaldúa finds a brilliant and insightful observation behind the student’s gaffe. She says, “And I thought, how apt. Fear of going home. And of not being taken in. We’re afraid of being abandoned by the mother, the culture, la Raza, for being unacceptable, faulty, damaged” (42).

Chicanas/os, I contend, invoke one another’s fear of going home (and home of course can be a physical, a place, a family, or a culture) when they adhere to rigid definitions and use ahistorical constructions of Chicanidad to measure one another’s authenticity and to police who can identify as Chicana/o. Taking cue from contemporary Chicana/o cultural productions like Chicana Falsa, Ugly Betty, and La Hocicona Series’s funny and critical representations of hispanophobia and the “Chicano family romance,” this thesis interrogates the political economy of these tropes within Anglo- and Chicana/o- productions. My analysis of the representation of Chicana/o subjectivity, especially as articulated via humor, demonstrates that contemporary Chicana/o cultural productions are critical of longstanding, stereotypic and monolithic
depictions of Chicanidad. They offer instead versions of Chicana/o subjectivities that are flexible, at times contradictory, and constantly in flux.

The function and sociopolitical purpose of ethnic labels mandates the erasure of difference and the homogenization of heterogenous groups of people in order to fit under a single, “unifying” label. Suzanne Oboler correctly argues that ethnic labels themselves are not problematic in *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives*. Rather, labels pose a problem when there is:

little understanding of the conditions under which each label was created and through which its meanings and social value have been shaped and change over time. Lack of historical contextualization and of recognizing the shifting meanings of a term becomes particularly important when the label in question connotes that the group has or is assumed to have a presumed negative attribute of some kind—a “social handicap” (lack of English skills, for example) or a perceived or real cultural, social, or racial difference. (xvi)

As this thesis has thoroughly argued, Anglo productions of Chicanas/os that reproduce compulsory hispanophobia use Spanish to mark Chicanas/os as linguistically and culturally Other. María DeGuzmán’s study of U.S. and Spain relations argues that the U.S. wavers between romanticization, exoticization, and demonization of Spain and Spanish traditions, including hispanophobia. Informed by DeGuzmán’s work, this thesis interrogates Chicanas/os’ use of Spanish proficiency to gauge Chicana/o authenticity, political investments, and affiliations. *Ugly Betty, Chicana Falsa*, and *La Hocicona*
Series each depict comedic scenarios where Chicanas/os use Spanish language and grammar proficiency to police Chicana/o self-identification.

Contemporary scholarship on literary and film representations of the Chicana/o family reveal that the Chicano Movement’s mythic and romantic construction of la familia was a political tactic informed by the Movement’s desire to combat and replace Anglo representations of the Chicana/o family as bankrupt and destitute. I argue that we must be suspect of both Anglo- and Chicano-produced representations that insist on the unity, strength, and tradition of the Chicana/o family. What voices, histories, and experiences of family are silenced when we uncritically uphold the Chicano family romance? Ugly Betty, Chicana Falsa, and La Hocicona Series suggest that the experiences of women, children, and queer people are silenced by traditional constructions of the Chicana/o, which serve the endeavors of nationalist movements and the nation-state. The texts examined are unwilling to completely part with the Chicana/o familia due to its long-standing political utility. However, Chicana Falsa, Ugly Betty, and La Hocicona Series detrude the idolized Chicana/o family and subject it to satiric and comedic intervention.

Ugly Betty, La Hocicona Series, and Chicana Falsa deploy humor to invite audiences to laugh at qualities and tropes heretofore revered as integral to Chicana/o cultural identity. These texts use varied combinations of satire, irony, jokes, and camp in order to lampoon and implode stereotypic representations of Chicanas/os around hispanophonia and the Chicano family romance. José Esteban Muñoz argues that “comedic disidentification accomplishes important cultural critique while at the same
time providing cover from, and enabling the avoidance itself of, scenarios of direct confrontation with phobic and reactionary ideologies” (119). These Chicana/o/Latina/o cultural producers, I contend, use humor as comedic disidentification. They deploy humor as a safeguard that allows them to ridicule and question characteristics believed to be intrinsic to Chicana/o people. In other words, humor allows cultural producers and audiences to critique and interrogate the contemporary use-value and political economy of hispanophobia and the Chicana/o family romance without fearing alienation, ostracization, or cultural exile (outcomes Chicana feminists faced when they brought attention to or critiqued misogyny and homophobia during the Chicano Movement). Thus, this thesis urges us to consider the political risks these Chicana/o cultural producers take when they critique entrenched Chicana/o beliefs, and to consider the ways humor functions as a limited but powerful tool of resistance for borderlands subjects. Humor is a limited tool because it is always vulnerable to failure—humorous material can always fail to be read as funny—and simultaneously powerful for the protective veil humor it affords minoritarian borderlands subjects susceptible to structural, intra-, and inter-cultural violence.
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