Editorial **Obesity/ies: bodies, foods and inequalities**

IN JUST TWO DECADES, obesity has become a matter of interest, concern and controversy in practically all dimensions of social life. The main multilateral health organizations identify it as a serious disease and as the epidemic of the 21st century due to its global nature. The relevance of this condition became more evident when the Covid-19 pandemic generated an unprecedented global health contingency, which has had to be managed from the specific conditions of the health systems of each country, in a world increasingly interdependent. Scientific and epidemiological information was showing the close link between the unfortunate deaths of sick people from Covid-19 and their obesity condition. Inevitably, it was confirmed that this condition, as an associated comorbidity, builds a profile of subjects whose chances of becoming seriously ill and dying are greater than those who do not have it (Kass *et al.* 2020; Sattar *et al.* 2020).

However, the condition of obesity in Mexico has a history prior to Covid-19, with a social narrative around the immense number of people considered obese, more women than men and with a third of childhood diagnosed with said disease state (INSP 2018). This narrative, based on recent epidemiological information, has introduced into everyday language a series of terms that come from the medical-nutritional sciences, but that today are part of the conversations between people and non–expert groups, which resignify them until they are made part from day to day. Terms such as diet, eating habits, healthy nutrition, lifestyle, physical activity, risk factors, nutritional education, obesophobia, obesogenic environment, gordophobia, lipophobia, constitute a set of words that not only expand our lexicon, but also represent us in various ways, expanding and question-ing their meanings.

But not only the words constitute new meanings, also the images. An example of this is the immense number of "memes" that plagued the networks at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, referring to gaining weight during confinement. It goes without saying that most of these images presented fattened female bodies... but that deserves another analysis, since in addition to misogynistics, a large part of these images contains subtle and sometimes obvious age–discriminatory messages. Traversed by humor, irony and sarcasm, the images circulated at unimagined speeds (they went viral) giving account of the socialized perception of obesity. Over the months, the circulation of such images has decreased, without for this reason, eventually, they reach our social networks again in a repetitive circularity or perhaps a new one appears to us.

It is not the purpose here to catalog such mechanisms of dissemination of ideas, satirization and construction of a collective imagination in relation to fat, which crossed borders during the health emergency, only to mention how humor, sarcasm and finally, irony, they contributed to shaping socialized vehicles, units of cultural transmission (Collado 2020) that mirror society itself and become tangible and global manifestations of the anonymous and collective gordophobic narrative.

The set of articles that are collected in this issue is aimed at presenting brushstrokes of this multiple landscape. Some come from the approaches presented at the colloquium *An interdisciplinary look at obesity: global epidemic or individual responsibility*?¹ Others were prepared at the express invitation, precisely to add points of view, to dialogue with a critical and updated vision on an unavoidable theme.

Faced with the disturbing epidemiological information available for our country,² it is inevitable to consider that, in addition to the medical–nutritional aspects, there is something social and something cultural in the life trajectory of people whose weight is considered above the so–called normality, which leads them to have this condition and be diagnosed as such (Navas *et al.* 2014). However, considering the sociocultural dimensions of social groups with overweight and obesity ambiguously or wrongly,³ brings with it the danger of interpreting them in a simplistic framework of individual responsibilities regarding food and health, life practices that can be modified at will with a considerable dose of effort and personal sacrifice (called with the neologism *échaleganismo*) that will reward the mistakes of the past.

¹ It was held at the CEIICH and had the participation of D. Elsa Muñiz from UAM-X, D. Esperanza Tuñón from ECOSUR, D. Karine Tinat from COLMEX, M. Ana Gabriela Romero from INCMN-SZ, D. Marco Antonio Cardoso from FES-Zaragoza and D. Luis A. Sánchez from FFyL-UNAM. The table was organized as part of the activities of D. Monserrat Salas Valenzuela's academic stay in the Feminist Research Program, with the coordination of D. Martha Patricia Castañeda Salgado.

² Considering population over 20 years, in 2012 the 32.4% had obesity, where 26.8% were men and 37.5% women (INSP 2012); in 2016, the 33.3% of the population presented obesity, with a 27.7% of men and a 38.6% of women (INSP 2016), meanwhile, in 2018, the number increased to a 36.1% between population with obesity: 30.5% in men and 40.2% in women (INSP 2018).

³ In the case of adults, the World Health Organization (WHO) establishes a differentiation between overweight and obesity based on the body mass index (BMI), weight in kilograms divided by the square of the height in meters (kg/m^2). It is considered overweight when the BMI is equal to or greater than 25, it is considered obesity when the BMI is equal to or greater than 30. These definitions are important for medical science, nutrition and epidemiology, although we may wonder if they are equally significant for the general population.

So, how to also address the sociocultural dimensions of such practices? It is likely that we do not have a single answer, but at least we can establish certain starting points that contribute to a better understanding of what revolves around obesity, but above all, question the —apparently— obvious. We can initially propose that each practice, notion, custom and meaning makes sense only in its own shared cultural context and articulated with the global environment, avoiding singular and non–situated theoretical and methodological proposals. Therefore, a deep understanding of the obesity condition is not possible only as the sum of elements that surround the individual or social groups, but how they are articulated to elaborate representations and guide collective practices regarding their bodies, food and social life.

It is necessary to deconstruct the univocal notion of obesity as the axis of analysis, as an entity that exists in itself, thus omitting the presence/experience the diversity of subjects and groups that share this condition. In this way, it is also possible to question the standardization of the subjects, based on the weighing, measuring and counting triad, by means of which the body mass index (BMI) is constructed, which, although it is in almost generalized use, medical science, it is also discussed nutritionally, both because of the different distribution of body fat between individuals⁴ and when it comes to transgenerationally undernourished populations, at the cost of their own stature (Torre 2000).

Thus, we can propose an approach from complementarity, since no single approach could apprehend the diversity and particularities of the complex sociocultural and medical processes that underlie obesity. However, the challenge of complementing to build collective knowledge, puts on the table the epistemic dispute of views that are found in tracks of different disciplinary hierarchy, who and how can we know in depth that entity built from the medical and nutritional sciences that we know as obesity? Do we have a minimum certainty of approaching even a little to know the various manifestations in the subjects and in their bodies? Disciplinary boundaries are difficult to cross and, in this matter, they have not been as porous as required, even within the same discipline.

Recognizing that there is no absolute consensus on the issue of obesity, we continue to ask ourselves how to approach it without leaving anything aside, without privileging only one point of view, without closing our eyes to so many others. For the moment, we decided to offer this thematic number so that the set of texts allow those who read them to broaden their point of view, hopefully question their own and above all, contribute to continue the discussion. In an at-

⁴ "The BMI is the same for both sexes and all ages (in adults). However, *it should be considered as a not very precise guide, because it may not correspond to the same percentage of body fat in different individuals.* The BMI is not yet usable in children." https://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/childhood_what/es/. (Italics ours).

tempt to order the conversation, we will emphasize three axes that in our opinion cross the problem of the so-called obesity, contributing with questions and questions, although without yet offering all the answers.

Body/ies

Human existence is corporeal. Starting from this statement is not trivial; on the contrary, it involves putting the accent on the obesity locus. While it is true that multiple ideological, cultural and symbolic considerations have been developed around it, it is even more true that its materiality is found in the bodies of specific subjects and groups. Subjects whose lives are signified by sexed bodies that, at the same time, express the set of social conditions that define them as political entities. Thus, the person is in his body, which changes throughout life and shows the marks of the experiences accumulated by the transit of the person who carries it through multiple intersections of sex, gender, time, space, social position and power relations.

Bodies and corporeality have been the object of permanent interest in all societies and cultures, either because is the body encloses the soul, offers strength, shows the existence of being, in short, because it is a multidimensional, multifaceted entity, although always uncertain. As Mari Luz Esteban points out, the body represents

[...] a different and alternative way of accessing the analysis of human existence and culture, of the relationships between subject, body and society, between nature and culture, between the organic and the cultural, of the constitution but also of the fragmentation of the subject. It is a body, as Foucault himself points out, prisoner of a device of domination but at the same time free from it; an identified body but free of limiting identities, a body that is probably many bodies [...], many bodies that argue among themselves [...]. (Esteban 2004, 24)

These many bodies can represent the corporality of different individuals, but they can also be the different forms that one's own body takes, due to different circumstances. When we enunciate the multiplicity of bodies, we are alluding to the way in which they express and synthesize processes and histories, processes among which body magnitude (which in simple terms refers to weight, height, body mass index, etc.) associated with values, capabilities, qualities, expectations and life possibilities. For this reason, in this issue of **INTER DISCIPLINA** we assume that bodies, corporeality, processes of incarnation, embodiment and corporeality are the immediate referents from which obesity is characterized. Hence, the name of this issue, **Obesity/ies**, aims to account for the close links between existence/ experience, being and being, of many bodies and corporeality. What are the questions we ask ourselves regarding the body, the bodies, when we are observing them under and with the condition of obesity? It is in the bodies where biomedical and nutritional science sets its gaze, just as it specifically does the aesthetic, ergonomic, sporty gaze. However, we insist, the body is not alien to the person who is the body and, at the same time, it is through the body, which is why obesity can only be understood as a complex historical phenomenon with specific connotations for each culture, class, gender or social group defined by ethnic, racial, age or body condition.

Therefore, the interdisciplinary perspective is essential to study and analyze the bio–psycho–social articulations that take place in the particular bodies. The corporal acts, the corporal interventions, the corporal cares, contribute to *make* the body, an apparently untamed entity, which takes its own course, particularly with regard to its physical expressions, its limits and the places it occupies in spaces.

One of the aspects of analysis that has been decisive for understanding the complexity of the body in its plurality is feminism. Starting from verifying that the body of women is at the base of their social condition, different feminist theoretical–political developments have addressed different connotations of female bodies. In recent years, in Mexico and Latin America, emphasis has been placed on the fact that women and their bodies are the subject of multiple meanings, some of which reproduce their subordination while others emerge as libertarian or emancipatory elaborations. In these analyzes, the distinctions between fat or obese women and fat or obese men are made explicit, since their evaluations reflect the gender inequalities that mark their lives, with the exception that in those cases body volume becomes expression of asymmetries. Women and men are influenced by shared models of beauty and, at the same time, divided by the gender culture that challenges them. At the same time, these models reproduce different streaks of discrimination and exclusion (Muñiz 2014), as we will see later.

Culture acts as a set of devices for the gendering of subjects, a process in which subjectivities and identities are formed that have the body as their primary reference, particularly with regard to their sexuation. This complex, contradictory, historical process leads subjects to occupy positions in the world in which hetero–assignment, identification, rejection and placement in chosen positions are put into play. But gendered refers to the sexed body and, consequently, to sexuality, which, as Luisa Elvira Belaunde points out, contributes to give the subjects a history and "is intrinsic to intersubjectivity. The openness to otherness, through eroticism, attraction and desire, is a way of being in connection with space and time. Sexual desire is a desire for history, therefore, a desire for the other and the other, for change, for experiences and meanings from which the subjects are intersubjectively constituted, in order to be able to tell their own and collective stories." (Belaunde 2018, 12-13).

Thus, given that contemporary societies exhibit westernized beauty models, unattainable for the majority, centered on the desire for hypersexualized bodies based on slimness, prejudices towards people with obesity also cross the fields of intimacy, they object their desirability, they object their active role in sexuality. And they diagnose, from the harshest point of view of common sense, that they replace their sexual deficiencies with food, which makes them appear as "dysfunctional".

Some responsibility has psychology, psychoanalysis and medical disciplines in meanings such as those mentioned in the previous paragraph, which has given rise to a notorious emphasis on the pathologization–medicalization of obesity. However, contemporary science does not look at the functioning of the human body in a simplistic way, at least discursively, since not all bodies have the same functionality and underlying causes that go beyond individual bodies cannot be recognized. In its social application, as obesity has been considered a health problem, it appeals to the articulation between science and governmentality, establishing the bridges to approach the population and individuals. This is one more dimension in which it is essential to recognize that bodies and corporeality do not exist in a vacuum, but rather in complex webs of interacting social, structural and subjective conditions.

Food/s

The global care strategy to eradicate obesity is fundamentally focused on two issues: increasing physical activity (avoiding sedentary lifestyle) and improving diet. The social narrative, however, crosses the second aspect in a more powerful way, generating a link of significance between the ways of eating and their body imprints. That is why we ask ourselves: why do subjects and groups eat the way they do? considering that eating practices are carried out within frameworks of social inequalities and cultural specificities.

The fact of eating constitutes a complex, dynamic, varied socio–historical, economic and cultural phenomenon that deserves to be explained in depth. Human beings are omnivores, a condition that gave us "the gift and the condemnation" of the variety, as explained by Aguirre (2010), gift because an omnivorous species has a greater capacity to adapt to different habitats and condemnation because we need a wide range of nutrients and to make them accessible, collaboration is required, in specific forms of socialization, which build commensality. This is how we are counting on a great diversity of products that we recognize, accept and assume as edible, that we consider them food. Although omnivorism has offered autonomy and the freedom to consume a wide variety of foods (Fishler 1995), which has increased our abilities to face the constant changes in our

lives, in the current conditions of increasing dependence on the food industry, we can ask ourselves how to characterize this process today, when our bodies receive a large amount of ultra-processed products with excess calories?

The circumstances that currently condition our lives, trapped in the running of schedules and the few hours of rest, with little time to acquire, prepare and consume fresh food, constitute the most frequent argument to point out that contemporary diet is what has caused the obesity epidemic. As we mentioned, we can adapt to almost any food, but these are consumed according to the economic capacity to acquire them, or they are preferred according to cultural guidelines, availabilities and shared tastes. However, the huge and omnipresent offer of industrialized products, accompanied by their corresponding advertising, define the options in their favor, limiting other products considered healthier.

But we cannot stay with the idea that food consumption is made up of the simple sum of individual decisions defined by the market, but as Lang and Heasman (2004) point out, it is necessary to recognize the challenges for the implementation of public policies that allow the human nutrition is sufficient, healthy, sustainable, fair and democratic.

Nor can we rule out the hedonistic aspects, community enjoyment, shared commensality and the socializing function of food, wrapping foods with a veil of intrinsic risk and danger, the consumption of which will fatally violate the principle of "correct, adequate and innocuous" meals. We must remember that there are different types of these and that not all of them depend on the quantity and quality of the food that is eaten. Food is a source of enjoyment, an appreciation that leads to being reserved regarding the criteria that displace its pleasurable aspects, the ritual symbols and the genealogical nature of everyday food to privilege its "anomalous" character. Understanding obesity in its complexity makes it necessary to attend to all these views, and others, such as those related to aesthetics, politics and ethics.

Therefore, studying food and nutrition is not only the task of medical science and nutrition, it is also the task of those who seek to understand the sociocultural logic of food practices, social and gender organization in the different cuisine, socialization of behavior at the table, criticism around reproduction and care activities based on food, among other issues. Obesity also has strong links with these guidelines, which require in–depth analysis.

Inequality/ies

A few pages above we alluded to the discrimination that is exercised against obese people. There are many and very different ways in which these discriminatory practices live, but none is given for the mere fact of being "fat", since they respond to the confluence of the multiple dimensions of social inequalities in which these people are placed. Thus, the body condition is articulated with other conditions that carry with them disadvantages or privileges. Consequently, questions can be raised about the relationships that we can establish between the issue of obesity and the multiple inequalities, in particular we question: Is there inequality in the social distribution of obesity? If so, why is it?

The concept of inequality involves different meanings. Of all of them, here we take to those that suggest that: a) it is the result of inequity in access to resources; b) it is also the result of accumulated disadvantages, and c) that which characterizes it as a condition and result of the reproduction of the domination and hegemony. All three lead to the verification that social inequality synthesizes and articulates the effects of the unequal distribution of wealth and resources that guarantee a dignified life (Castañeda 2020). These resources are material, social, cultural, economic, political and symbolic. Access to them is expressed in the state of human rights in a given society, in general, as well as in the vital situation of individuals, communities, groups and social classes in particular.

In this framework, obesity can be analyzed from the perspective of access to the right to health and education, but also as part of the so-called "third generation rights", which include, among others, the rights to the environment, of the consumer, of protection against genetic manipulation and a dignified death, as well as of the "fourth generation", among which we focus our attention on the right of access to the information society in conditions of equality and non-discrimination. This approach is indispensable since human rights are interdependent, an approach that is pertinent to the assertion that obesity is a multifactorial problem.

Making use of this approach allows an approximation to the knots that bind the body, sex-gender, obesity, structural determinants/conditioning factors (class, ethnicity, race, age and others), discrimination and inequality. These knots are evident (although there are those who do not want to see them) in the processes of health and disease, and care, but also in the forms of stigmatization and exclusion that are poured on obese people by those who relate to them since some position of power, authority, domination or hegemony (Lee and Pausé 2016).

The current social conditions, in which situations associated with different forms of modernity and overmodernity are combined, daily activities, work, rest, recreation and leisure are also determined by unequal access to human rights and their exercise. Excessive exposure to computers, video games and all kinds of screens that implies a sedentary lifestyle is accompanied by meals with inattention to what is eaten, when and how much is eaten; the extension of working hours dislocates the hours of meals and rest; the combination of excessive use of technology and modifications in work patterns results in stress, mental health disorders, sleep disorders, difficulties to enjoy the simple things in life, to socialize with loved and close people, to practice self–care and exercise the right to free time. At the end of the day, all this converges in enabling conditions of obesity and overweight that are the paradoxical result of excess and scarcity, depending on the socioeconomic, gender–gender, ethnic, racial and age position.

Inequality goes hand in hand with the valuation of the difference. In profoundly unequal societies such as Mexico, the recognition made of fat through social representations makes it difficult to attend to as an epidemiological indicator. The representations of voracious capitalists who make use of images of fat, white and rich men, whose corporeality echoes consumption by full hands (and mouths), goes hand in hand with the representations of rural and indigenous women whose corpulence is welcome because it expresses fertility, which coincides with the perception that migrants with bulky bodies realize, in the local eyes, that now they do eat well. These extremes of inequality are connected by different representations that appeal to women and men of all ages and socioeconomic conditions, giving rise to a kaleidoscope of shared social situations and individual life experiences in which the latter tend to weigh more because of the enormous significance that have in terms of self–representation of the person.

The above discussion should not lead to the belief that obese people are lacking in agency. On the contrary, in recent times we have witnessed the critical positions of those who demand regarding their body condition, have made their own inquiries into the biomedical foundations of obesity, have questioned the hegemonic representations of beauty that exalt thinness and make known to society their capacity for enjoyment, happiness, enjoyment of sexuality, well-being and health, as well as self-identification as "fat" people. We are talking about groups, collectives, organizations in which different sex-generic subjects find spaces to strengthen individual self-esteem and shared pride. From these places, they are promoting reeducation measures to break with the stigma, exclusion and discrimination, that they have experienced as part of the historical experience of obesity and fat.

The previous axes are present in the articles and contributions that make up this issue of **INTER DISCIPLINA**, which were prepared with different intentions and projections. We begin with the article by Esperanza Tuñón entitled "Migrants in the United States: testimonies on eating habits, health and the body", whose objective is to contrast the eating habits and the perception of health problems associated with overweight and obesity of migrant women and men from Mexico who live in the state of New York in the United States, which through testimonies seeks to identify elements of lifestyles, strategies for obtaining, preparing and consuming food, as well as the cultural belief system associated with models of beauty and health of this population. We continue with the one by Ivonne Vizcarra entitled "The nutrition–health of women in the Mexican countryside of the XXI century: challenges for food sovereignty from a feminist decolonial perspective", whose objective is to reflect on some social problems related to food, and the phenomena of nutritional and epidemiological transition (TAN-E) faced by women in the Mexican countryside in the face of the advance of capitalist rule in the agrifood systems, wondering if the current diet of women in the Mexican countryside compromises the compensation of food sovereignty in terms of good eating . Both works present ethnographic and qualitative approaches, in which first-person voices and collective subjective expressions stand out against the structural conditions in which obesity processes occur.

Sara Elena Pérez-Gil Romo, Ana Gabriela Romero Juárez, Itzel Candiani Rodríguez y Lizbeth Montserrat Martínez Pimentel present the text entitled "Obesity in Mexico: an approach to the social view in the last 16 years", whose objective was to organize various articles published in Mexico, in which overweight and obesity have been objects of study from a socio-economic and cultural perspective, and identify the predominant variables and concepts in research on this subject, through a careful bibliographic review of 93 published texts. Karine Tinat and Maribel Nuñez offer us the work entitled "Obesity and gender: a research proposal", in which they review the recent scientific literature on obesity in Mexico and analyze how the gender perspective has been approached (or not) in the different works, to point out the need to include it as an interdisciplinary tool in the comprehensive study of food processes. Both articles contribute to present the current situation of this topic, with a description that allows re-interpreting the information offered in order to contribute critically to the advancement of knowledge and to ask new critical questions that consider the points of view generated not only from the medical sciences (nutrition, epidemiology) but from the sociocultural views produced in recent decades around obesity.

The works of Martha Kaufer with Fernando Pérez and Luis A. Sánchez get done this dossier. The first, entitled "Obesity: pathophysiological and clinical aspects", presents it as a chronic, recurrent disease of complex etiology, characterized by an energy imbalance due to a sedentary lifestyle, excessive energy consumption, or both; and defines it as the abnormal or excessive accumulation of adipose tissue in relation to weight that can be detrimental to health. That of Luis A. Sánchez, "Obesity: global epidemic or individual responsibility?", suggests that from the history of the pathologization of fat, the notion of 'obesity epidemic' is an artificial construct formed as a discourse of moral panic, based on of a constellation of interests and motives of various orders, together with a general prejudice against fat people. Both articles are an invitation to look at the wide range of possible approaches to obesity, since they highlight the progress of medical scientific efforts contrasted with the discussion about whether it is a disease or a pathologized condition.

This issue is accompanied by the interview conducted by Monserrat Salas Valenzuela with Dr. Mabel Gracia Arnáez, professor at the Rovira e Virgili University (Tarragona, Spain), a scholar of food, health and gender in Spain and Mexico, as well as the reviews of two key books for delve into the subject, prepared by Pilar Torre and Rebeca Cruz Santacruz.

In this way, this dossier, entitled **Obesity/ies** is configured. The plural sense of the title appeals, in its first composition, to the fact that it is made up of various voices and positions, while the second part plays with the plural and the conjugation of the verb "to be" to recognize the important subjective burden that is socially deposited on individual subjects or population groups that are diagnosed with this condition, whose lives pass with the "is", in their fat, obese bodies.

As often happens at the end of a collaborative work such as this, we find that a general look reveals analytical lines that could have been included and are not present, either for reasons of space or for particular interests of the group of authors, either because of the situation in which they were written. Thus, we estimate that among the issues and problems that can be addressed in future studies would be a critical vision regarding food production processes, both in the smallscale dimensions, as well as in the macro dimension of large agri-food companies, based on the exploitation of labor of peasant origin and how this production has been directed to shape a market for products whose consumption has been related to the patterns of change in body dimensions and their effects on collective health. Closely related to this point, a critical analysis of the discourses and marketing mechanisms of these food products would be pending, especially in the formulation of specific messages by age groups, as well as the analysis of the commercial strategies of the companies in the sector, taking into account the socalled marketing mix, which proposes to emphasize price, product, distribution and promotion (advertising), even due to the discussion around labeling in Mexico. Finally, consider that the issue of obesity has not only physiobiological manifestations according to the age of those who are diagnosed, but that in the course of life these may be modifying and also resignifying themselves according to that variable and sex, which it forces to formulate a panorama of specific analysis, crossing issues of gender and social distribution of activities and responsibilities, such as, for example, that in the young population, it is precisely the condition of obesity that can claim more lives at the time of greatest vital plenitude .

The coordinators of this dossier hope that these and other lines of research continue to make contributions that allow obesity to be unprejudiced based on indepth knowledge of the implications it brings at an individual and social level.

> Monserrat Salas Valenzuela Martha Patricia Castañeda Salgado *Guests Editors*

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