



TRANSCRIPCIÓN ORIGINAL DE STUDIO OCHENTA

MIJA ON THE MIKE - LA GORDA FEMINISTA

00:08 LORY

Hey everyone! Lory aka Mija here.

It's exciting to start any new season of our show, especially when we're trying something new, so thank you so much for listening to this brand new season of Mija on the mic.

Today, I'll be joined by our first guest, a fellow daughter of immigrants whose experiences in a feminist household inspired her to create content around body positivity, to empower girls and young women to feel good about their bodies.

00:34 LORY

Miriam Lara-Mejia AKA La Gorda Feminista is a leading voice on body positivity for the Latino community. I've been following her activism on TikTok and Instagram for a long time, and seeing her content, I immediately felt a connection to her messaging.

You are worthy, your body is beautiful. I think one of the things we struggle with as daughters of immigrants is feeling like we fit in, both culturally but also physically, feeling like our bodies deserve to take up space. And that's why I wanted to share Miriam's work with you today.

01:04 LORY

I asked Miriam to send me a story that touched her heart and she recorded it in Spanish. Afterwards, I'll translate.

01:17 MIRIAM

Cuando tenía diez, mi mamá, Mary, empezó una nueva dieta. Una nueva dieta de tantas que había antes y que haría en el futuro. En esta nueva dieta, recuerdo perfectamente bien que una de las cosas que tenía que desayunar y era medio plátano. Y Mary en vez de cortar el plátano en el centro, a la mitad, cortaba el plátano a lo largo. Quedaba una tira larga de plátano.

01:46 MIRIAM

Y ella decía que lo hacía porque así sentía como que estaba comiendo todo un plátano cuando en realidad era solamente la mitad. Y esta historia, tomamos foto y todo se convirtió en alegoría familiar.

01:59 MIRIAM

Y de hecho es algo de lo que pienso mucho cuando pienso en mi mamá. Pero es este momento, precisamente este momento, donde inicia mi relación con las dietas, inicia mi relación de rechazo con mi cuerpo, inicia mi relación de entender cómo nuestra sociedad celebra a las personas gordas solamente cuando hacen dietas, solamente cuando hacen dietas, solamente cuando quieren cambiar su cuerpo.

02:21 MIRIAM

Y siempre regreso a ese medio plátano, a esa imagen de mi mamá con medio platano en la mano.

02:30 LORY

Miriam's memory is about seeing her mother's dieting as a young girl. Her mother went through a phase of eating half of banana. She cut it the long way instead of in half. And even though it was funny, for Miriam, it was a moment that made her reflect on how many people celebrated her for actually doing this, for dieting, and feeling this way about her body. It's a moment she carried with her to this day as she creates body positive content.

02:56 LORY

And now without further ado, here is Miriam, aka la gorda feminista.

03:02 LORY

Welcome Miriam.

03:03 MIRIAM

Hola, hola. Thank you for having me here. I'm so excited to be part of this conversation.

03:09 LORY

Thanks for being the first of many "MIJA ON THE MIKE" guests. So Mija is a show that really highlights cultural heritage and our unique relationships with our languages and cultures. So my first question to you, Miriam, is what is your culture? Tell us about your heritage.

03:23 MIRIAM

Yes, it's hard. You know, I've been trying to come up with the right term, but I identify as an American immigrant to Mexico, mostly because my mom was from Wisconsin, you know, Irish, German, heritage. And she and my dad fell in love with Wisconsin. He's from Mexico City and he went and a study abroad in the 60s. Fell in love had a very exciting, you know, I can tell the story another time, you know, moment of how my mom made it to Mexico. But part of my siblings grew up in Mexico City, but I grew up in a small town in central Mexico and my mom just sort of tried to have her life as an American, but in our little tiny town in Mexico. So I grew up bilingual in this sort of haphazard bilingual.

04:12 MIRIAM

I know now a lot of people, I'm a parent too in the US. So we're all trying to figure out how to be bilingual. But I grew up in this sort of like I got all the languages, all the books, all everything at the same time.

04:23 MIRIAM

My father has a long heritage of a lot of mix of things, right? So he has like Belgian blood of people who came to do businesses in Mexico, like, you know, in the 20s and French blood and spack or Spanish blood and indigenous blood. So there's like a lot of mixing going on, a lot of different cultural heritage. And I'm very proud that both of my families have been interested in knowing their history. So it's kind of incredible to be kind of aware of that.

04:49 MIRIAM

So as the moment I identify as I was 'Wiscoxican'. So I was dancing very Wisconsin person, but also very Mexican person.

04:58 LORY

Yeah, it's a really complex question. And I think there's so many layers to it. So thank you for sharing the complexity and being proud of it because I think a lot of the time things are, we always try to present things as black and white. I'm only one thing or I'm only the other or I'm half and half. But the truth is we are so many mixes of cultures. And I think that's really great that you're able to really live in both as well. And through your work as 'La gorda Feminista', really kind of, I guess, using that latinidad and that Spanish to also put forward this amazing message that you have.

05:33 LORY

Before we jump into your work for that, I really want to talk about what home is for you. Because you know, with all of that complex question on me, how about guys, you know, the main character of the show is always kind of asking herself, where do I fit in this cultural story? My parents are from here. I'm from here. We share something. It's blood. It's history. But you know, at some point there's going to be a disconnect. So I would love to hear about what home is for you because I know you say Wisconsin, Mexican, but you did grow up in.

06:06 MIRIAM

Wiscoxican.

06:07 LORY

Wiscoxican. Yeah. What is, where's home?

06:10 MIRIAM

Yeah. I was thinking about the logo for 'Mija Podcast' and how it's a tree, right? And I recently did a photo shoot for an underwear brand. And I have a little tattoo, a little tiny tattoo in my solar plexus that is a tree. And they asked me what it meant and it meant that I am home. I am the tree. Me, everything that of me, right?

06:35 MIRIAM

So for me, like Mexico is home, but so is Wisconsin and so is California. For me, the home, it's my identity and it's sort of where I choose to put roots in pieces of my life. And so yes, when I go to Mexico, it's very much home. And also it's not home anymore, right? Like at the same time, Mexico, and I don't know how it is in other countries, but Mexico as gone through such an incredible shift because so many people who migrated to the US are now back in Mexico, right?

07:04 MIRIAM

And so now Mexico feels like there's just a lot of crossover before, like when I was little, it wasn't like that. It was like very, like this is Mexico, this is the US and there was no blurring of the lines. And I also feel like it all depends on who you're with, right? I moved to the US and I went to a very small liberal arts college and I found my people. And that for me, that is the piece of this, right?

07:30 MIRIAM

Like when I go to Mexico, what I think of Mexico isn't Mexico. It's the people, the intellectuals, the activists that I, like, these are my soul and my connection. When I think of Wisconsin, I think of the people who like have built me and connect me and see me when I see think of California. So it is the place but is really more the finding your people and you will find your people.

07:51 MIRIAM

I've traveled, you know, to 21 countries. I have found my people in all of these different places because the world is so big, right? So I go back to the tree, the tree and the roots and the soul, because we carry so much, right? I'm carrying all my pieces of identity with me and now that I have a son, you know, I'm very focused and clear about what I want to share with him about what my identity is. And also what his identity is, right?

08:19 MIRIAM

As a child of two, you know, mixed people in the US, you know, for the very Latino name, I think that's another piece of like the identity, right? Like I grew up in Mexico, but I know whenever I never stumbled upon all this identity crisis things that happen in the US, but for many people, there's just such a demand to be a one, you know, just the one thing, you know, when we are all so many things.

08:45 LORY

The one narrative that's accepted.

08:47 MIRIAM

The one narrative, yes, yes, yes. And you have to kind of let go of your things. So but when you become the tree, you can hold on to all these things.

08:55 LORY

I love that. I love that because that is really what went into the thinking of the Miha logo actually is that I am my family tree and that's how I, and what I carry with me is, is their stories and wherever I am in the world, I will always be part of that. So I love that.

09:11 LORY

And so going from there, I would love to hear how you kind of take on all of those questions around identity, which is so many layers, right? Because you have all of these different, you know, experiences in these different cities, which obviously have different visions around body positivity, especially going from Latin culture and then coming to the US, especially in Wisconsin, and then California. I would love to hear kind of how did you start 'La Gorda Feminista, what was the moment? It was there an experience that you felt really kind of

pushed you to take this knowledge that you have and these roots that you have with your identity and your culture and kind of bring it in and start putting it together for this community.

09:50 MIRIAM

I grew up in a feminist home and also a fatphobic home because we all grew up in fatphobic homes, a 'machista' homes and racist homes because these are the structures, the paradigms of our society. But feminism was this big protector. So I actually noticed fatphobia.

10:05 MIRIAM

Yeah, I didn't actually, well, of course, I didn't even know the word. There was no sense of the injustice of living in a larger body in what society tells us we are worth because of that size. But being in a feminist home and an activist home, I've been part of a lot of, you know, in worker rights, labor rights, environmental rights, indigenous rights, women's rights. So it is only natural that like when I learn about how fatphobia is the structure that makes people believe that people in larger bodies are inferior humans, right?

10:37 MIRIAM

And we can all, anybody who's done any social justice work can like hear that and be like that's, that's all right. Like, how can we build a society that's built on the inhumanity of some of one group of people? So that's kind of part of like the mix, right?

10:51 LORY

What else inspired you?

10:52 MIRIAM

I would also say that one big part of the mix is traveling and, you know, the, that's how we learn about gender, for example, we learn that like what we think is normal is not normal in other places, right?

11:05 MIRIAM

So my first traveling experience was in a very fat, positive country, Tanzania. You know, I was in the, with the Masai community tribe and they would greet me as like woman in their language and all my thinner partners or colleagues, they would greet them as girls because for them, having a larger body meant you were, you know, more fertile, right? All these things, right?

11:30 MIRIAM

So this, this was kind of like building up, I mean, then I traveled in East Asia where it's, you know, incredibly just fatphobic communities were like having a body that's just really, really slender is important for us, a cultural norm.

So having this kind of dynamic of like in some places, my body is celebrated in some places as my body is rejected in the US, you know, I mean, anybody that grew up at, you know, my age like in the early 2000s, I mean, all these people we were told were so fat, you know, Britney Spears and, you know...

12:01 MIRIAM

Yeah, and it's like, oh my gosh, like they're not. So now I have the activist, I have the traveling and then I had a kid and you know, I've actually always been really comfortable with

my body, you know, of course, going through I think in the 20s, there's a lot of stages in your life, you know, as your bodies change and society, like doesn't really tell us like, hey, bodies change and that's okay, right? You're like, you have a baby and you're supposed to go back in time to another body that is no longer there, right?

12:31 MIRIAM

So for me, that one catalyst moment that I always share and I feel, you know, is really important to share, but it was talking to my mother-in-law who was Colombian and she was talking about someone that had six months, she was six months pregnant and she said: 'oh, yeah, you know, she's so skinny, she looks so good'. And to me, that was kind of the straw that broke the camel's back, the idea of like we celebrate, that's literally die culture.

12:57 MIRIAM

We celebrate and value thin bodies over healthy bodies, right? Because a healthy body of a six, you know, a person that has a six month pregnancy should be big. So I kind of put my mother-in-law as my epicenter. How do we talk about this incredible body shaming and, you know, fatphobia and weight stigma, die culture?

13:24 MIRIAM

And then I mean, I feel like this is kind of one of the pieces, like as soon as you start opening the door, I mean, like, okay, what, let me learn about this and you, you know, for example, I started doing more research around studies that relate to weight and health and really finding out that like we don't see the kind of language that we use around body and weight and health is just not supported by science, right?

13:44 MIRIAM

And then I learned about the background around fatphobia and all the way that is built on racism, the way that is built on the dehumanization of black people. And so when you start like kind of building all the pieces, for me, lo que me pasó a mí, what happened to me, Lory, was I went back and I was like, 'oh my god'. It started to build up this idea of like all the things I have experienced, right? Because when the moment that you kind of open your eyes, you realize, this is what I have lived.

14:12 MIRIAM

And the reason I chose to do it in Spanish is because I didn't see anything. I didn't see anything that I could share with my suegra or my husband. And you know, now I've done it for like a couple of years and it's taken different directions, what's really cool and I was reflecting on this is like so many people who first came to me and they're like, I knew nothing about this. Now I'm doing their own activism.

14:31 MIRIAM

So I'm just really proud to be part of a big network that is ever growing around body justice and body liberation.

14:39 LORY

That's incredible. I, when I hear you talk, I think a lot about my own experience and you know, you don't notice it until you notice it and then you go back and think about every single instance in which you were reminded that your body was not normal in that space.

14:57 LORY

And you know, you go back to the school yard and you know, I was a little chunky when I was younger and I had a kid call me, you know, fat and I took that so much to heart that. I, you know, dieted and I didn't even know what I was doing. I was just like, I'm going to drink more water or something like because I thought, you know, it would curb my appetite in some way.

15:16 LORY

And I, you know, go back to when I first came to France and I never saw anything above a size six in a shop and it's still to this day a problem. When I got married, I was looking for wedding dresses and it was so traumatic because I went to all of these shops and I'm a size 42, which is 12. It's not like I'm huge, but here I am a whale and it really, you know, when you're looking for something to make yourself feel beautiful for the most important day of your life to have that be something that you confront to make myself feel uncomfortable with my body because society here, I mean, France is its own case, right?

15:48 LORY

But you know, in, in every different society, you have these kinds of things that are just automatic and, you know, until you confront it with your "abnormal", quote unquote, body, you don't notice it. And then, what, buff, it just like hit me in the face like, oh my gosh, am I, am I giant? Am I, am I really that fat? Like, do my hips not fit in this country? Like, and, and, and yeah.

16:11 LORY

And so I, it resonates so much to hear, to hear you say that because, you know, once you notice it, you're like, oh, wait, this is because this is the construct that I've been living in and this is why, you know, I feel uncomfortable because it was made for me and that's, it is what it is.

16:28 MIRIAM

What you speak to and, and the fact that you use a word normal, right? We have this word normal. And when you start really researching, like, where, what does normal mean, right? Like in the, in the first studies, for example, of science where they were like normal was average. And it turns out like no one is average, right? Average is like a, you know, combination of all these different things, but no one falls exactly in that thing, right? And so normal is a construct.

16:53 MIRIAM

And one of the pieces that I do in my work around, I have this thing called, you know, crianza, body positive, you know, body positive parenting is about teaching and centering body diversity because the moment you look outside in the world, you see body diversity.

17:12 MIRIAM

And so when we can center body diversity, we can give our kids and ourselves tools to recognize ourselves in our value, you know, not in opposition or not in contrast and not in pursue, but just as we are. And so it's, it's, it's truly very powerful because it is so, it's just a crazy to think like, you know, normal. Normal is not exit.

17:38 LORY

Exactly. Exactly. And I think it's, you know, part of why I wanted to do this show and why I'm so excited to bring people like you on is, is that we're putting words to stuff that we've been dealing with for years, you know, that all of this trauma that comes from not being able to put words to all of these issues, right?

17:55 LORY

We weren't taught to talk about body diversity. We weren't taught to talk about our identity or talk about, you know, language being an issue. We weren't taught to kind of identify those things because you just encounter them in life and you kind of get over it.

18:10 LORY

In our show, we have stories about characters facing discrimination and it wasn't like their parents taught them about what, you know, one day you will be in this situation, you know, it's their first experience of it. And so you, you just go on with your life and then you realize how much it's affected you. And I'm so glad that now we're in this space and we have the power to kind of give a name to all of this stuff and think through it and talk about it with a community and not feel so alone in the experience and not feel like you're the only one going through it because Mija as everyone is going through it.

18:42 LORY

And I would love to continue and really just to kind of get a sense of what you think is the future of this whole movement, artists like Lizzo or very popular. I went to her concert recently and there was a mom and her two teenage daughters there and I was like, this is amazing. Like if I had had that when I was younger to like have this visual of someone who looks like me and like doing that, you know, and just having this girl who's so proud of her body.

19:10 LORY

So I would love to, yeah, just to hear your thoughts and, you know, where do you think this is going, this movement of body positivity and what's the future of it?

19:18 MIRIAM

Right. So I always think like to kind of go a little bit back and remember where body positivity comes from, right? And it comes from the body politics of the 60s. That was the connection of like, you know, second wave liberation, feminist liberation and, you know, fat acceptance and calibration movements and disability justice and the civil rights, you know, so it took a long time to get to a place where it feels like we're now with the celebrating bodies of all kinds.

19:48 MIRIAM

The US has a longer history with this, right? Like this is where a lot of this movement starts and, you know, Latin America, for example, is more recent, right? "Gordofobia" doesn't come into the lexicon in Latin America until like 10 years ago, right? Where it's been in the lexicon for like seven years in the US and weight stigma and all these different words that you can use.

20:09 MIRIAM

So I think that we are seeing now kind of a different way, right? And also I'm very connected to my colleagues in, for example, Korea. So Korea has this own other thing, right? They're going through their, you know, current second wave of feminism that's coming with all these different politics around there. So there's like, I feel like it's really segmenting and I kind of really love that because it's based on the realities of each community.

20:31 MIRIAM

I think what's going to happen is I do think that seeing body diversity and centering by diversity is a big piece of this whole thing, right? We're going to see more people like, you know, this mija pod, like so many people, so many mijas are breaking cycles.

20:44 MIRIAM

They're breaking cycles. Now, I do think that a lot of the politics of stuff like I mean, Argentina, for example, in the United States, there's a lot of places in like New Zealand is very in the forefront against body weight discrimination.

20:57 MIRIAM

We need rules. We need laws that are preventing people from being discriminated because of their body size in all of spaces in school and work in medical offices. We're definitely going to see a shift in how we treat people, fat people in the medical office and we have to see it because the studies are very strong. That weight stigma is what's leading to, you know, the worst health outcomes.

21:20 MIRIAM

So, you know, we're seeing all of these things. However, it always comes a little bit to this, right? There's a lot of money to be made in drugs for weight loss. There's a lot of money to be made. So that is not going to go away, you know, and it's we're always going to be bombarded with this. But I do feel like, you know, as a person that is kind of working in the space around parenting and, you know, repairing ourselves and also parenting the idea of really seeing body liberation as part of this massive thing of cycle breaking that we're all doing.

21:55 MIRIAM

I do think that that is something that is a big shift. It's a big shift for everybody. I always say people like continue researching, continue connecting, continue celebrating, continue centering people. Like, just be aware, you know, like what body liberation gives us is something that no one can take away from us.

22:12 LORY

Amazing. Amazing. Thank you so much for sharing that. And we're coming to the end. So, there's this thing that I want to do with all of our guests, which is kind of speed round questions. See if you can answer really quickly.

22:24 MIRIAM

Okay.

22:25 LORY

One first thing that comes to mind. All right? So, first question.

What language do you swear in when you accidentally touch a hot plate?

22:32 MIRIAM
Definitely Spanish.

22:34 LORY
What's your favorite food?

22:35 MIRIAM
I can't decide, Korean Mexican and German.

22:38 LORY
Wow. Okay. Song that you've had in your head this week.

22:42 MIRIAM
It's Pink's "I'm never not going to dance again". It's a long title, but it's a really beautiful song.

22:48 LORY
Okay. What's your last Google search that you're comfortable sharing?

22:53 MIRIAM
My last Google search was about summer camps for my son.

22:57 LORY
Would you rather be trapped in a romantic comedy with your enemies or trapped in a horror movie with your friends?

23:03 MIRIAM
Oh, no, romantic comedy with my enemies.

23:05 LORY
With your enemy.

23:07 MIRIAM
Yes.

23:09 LORY
If you could hang out with any body positive character protagonist from TV or cartoons, who would that be?

23:17 MIRIAM
From the show "La Flor Mas Bella", Netflix show from Netflix. I can't remember now. Miche. Her name is Miche. Miche. Yeah. That's it.

23:28 LORY
Thank you so much for your time, Miriam. One last thought for all our Mee has out there. What is your advice for girls struggling to be body positive right now?

23:35 MIRIAM

There is no mandato. There is no mandates to be anything. The gift of noticing body diversity and the gift of accepting or celebrating and knowing your body is just about you being able to take care more about yourself. There's a lot of freedom, but if anything, you see a mind that's not make you feel good, you know, makes you feel bad about yourself, muted, cancel it, go away from it. It really is powerful to curate your spaces.

24:04 LORY

I love that. Thank you so much. Now, tell us where we can find you.

24:07 MIRIAM

Yes. So I am @lagordafeminista in almost everywhere. They, you know, TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, Discord. I mean, wherever you are, you can also look me up at lagordafeminista.com and email me at myriam@lagordafeminista.com.

24:28 LORY

Thank you so much, Miriam. And that's it. Thank you. And Ciao.

24:34 MIRIAM

Ciao.

24:35 LORY

Thanks for listening. This is Mija on the Mike, a season of reflection on our shared experiences as daughters of immigrants. Over the next couple of weeks, I'll be sharing stories like these and inviting guests to share theirs.

24:52 LORY

Follow us on Instagram at @mijapodcast. That's M-I-J-A podcast and leave us a note if you like this story.

24:59 LORY

Tune in every Wednesday for a new episode. This is a production of Studio Ochenta, a Latina-owned multi-lingual podcast studio dedicated to raising voices across cultures. For more from Studio Ocenta, follow us at @ochentapodcasts on Instagram. That's O-C-H-E-N-T-A podcast with an S on Instagram.

25:17

P.S. Don't forget this season is also about you. If you have a story you'd like to share or if you'd like to be a guest on the show, I invite you to reach out on Instagram at @mijapodcast and leave us a message with a short story or memory of yours that warms your heart. We'll read it out loud on the show. Hasta pronto. Ciao!