

LATINA/LATINO STUDIES WORKSHOP

"Reading Agency and Defiance in Young Working-Class Mexican Women's Experiences of Institutionalization and Sterilization in California, 1920s-1950s"

Wednesday, April 20

3:30-5:00pm

1207 W. Oregon, room 133



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Between 1909 and 1952 approximately 20,000 people were sterilized in California state institutions for the mentally ill and "feebleminded." This figure represents one-third of all sterilizations performed in the country at the time. During this period Mexican-origin women were viewed as threats to the racial health of the state and were thus targeted for institutionalization and sterilization. Combining disability studies with a Chicana feminist lens I propose a reading of sterilization requests that reframe diagnoses and descriptions of deviance as evidence of agency. I draw qualitative and quantitative evidence from Mexican-origin women's sterilization records to show how these women defied social and institutional control by acting on their sexual desires, calling on parents and allies to defend them, refusing to cooperate with institutional authorities, filing legal suits against institutions, and even escaping the institution all altogether.

For a copy of the paper, contact lls-studies@illinois.edu or (217)265-0370.