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Towards Black Accompaniment: Deconstructing “Subtle” Anti-Blackness in a Chicanx/Latinx Podcast

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Towards Black Accompaniment: Deconstructing “Subtle” Anti-Blackness in a  
Chicanx/Latinx Podcast

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Master of Arts  
in Linguistics

by

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## ABSTRACT

### Towards Black Accompaniment: Deconstructing “Subtle” Anti-Blackness in a Chicanx/Latinx Podcast

by

Jazmine Exford

With the rise in visibility of AfroLatinidad and the global reach of the Black Lives Matter movement, non-Black Latinxs have increasingly considered anti-Blackness as an inter- and intra-community issue. Accordingly, attention has been placed on the subtle ways in which anti-Blackness within Latinidad permeates the very discourses that construct a Latinx identity as *Brown*, resulting in ideologies that displace AfroLatinidad and render all Latinxs as “people of color” who cannot contribute to anti-Blackness. This thesis highlights counter discourses of Blackness and Latinidad that were redistributed by a Chicanx/Latinx podcast called the Bitter Brown Femmes (BBF). Specifically, I focus on episode 11 where hosts Cassandra and Ruben discuss a controversy surrounding a tweet that actress Gina Rodriguez posted after the trailer release of the film *Black Panther*. I begin with an analysis of the outrage that Rodriguez’s tweet erupted, linking it to the conceptual mutual exclusion of Blackness and Latinidad. I continue with an analysis of one of Rodriguez’s interviews in which she defends herself against being anti-Black by evoking discourses of mestizaje (racial mixture in Latin America), linking it to the denial of anti-Black inclusivity. I finish with a

juxtaposition of how the BBF podcast uses their platform to deconstruct “subtle” (i.e., non-overt or seemingly non-violent) forms of anti-Blackness via community-internal discussions, using two major strategies that I call “highlighting the micro” and “collecting (y)our people”. In doing so, I highlight various discursive strategies that the hosts rely upon to move towards productive allyship for Black communities or what I title, *Black accompaniment*, which requires the renegotiation of ideologies surrounding Latinidad.

## Introduction

Discourses of anti-Blackness within Latinx communities have increased in concern with the simultaneous rise in visibility of AfroLatinx consciousness and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement. Correspondingly, emergent discourses surrounding Latinidad are increasingly highlighting anti-Blackness as both an intra- and inter-community issue (Haywood, 2017a), often presenting itself in “subtle” (non-overt or physically violent) forms through discourses afforded by mestizaje or racial mixture in Latin America. Specifically, how these discourses of mestizaje may inadvertently exclude Black diasporic communities in Latin America via the centering of “Brown” as well as deny non-Black Latinxs the capacity of contributing to anti-Blackness via the blanket “person of color” racialization applied to Latinx people in the United States. Suitably, both conversations disrupt two major themes of seemingly non-violent forms of anti-Blackness which I explore as the *conceptual mutual exclusion of Blackness and Latinidad* as well as *the denial of anti-Black inclusivity* among non-White “people of color”.

In this thesis, I look at counter discourses of Blackness and Latinidad recirculated by a popular Chicanx/Latinx podcast called “The Bitter Brown Femmes” (BBF), which is hosted by two queer and femme non-Black Chicanx people, Cassandra (@\_xicanisma<sup>1</sup>; she/her) and Ruben (@[queerxicanochisme](#); he/they). Specifically, I focus on the hosts’ discussions of a controversy involving the lead actress of the CW’s show *Jane the Virgin*, Gina Rodriguez, to illustrate the phenomenon of subtle anti-Blackness. Rodriguez, a non-Black Puerto Rican woman from Chicago has become emblematic of an “anti-Black Latina” due to several problematic comments she has

made while championing Latinx advocacy. This thesis focuses on one of her first scrutinized comments – a tweet in which she alluded to the lack of “Latino” representation in the Marvel and DC franchises after the announcement of the *Black Panther* film, which prompted lengthy debates on Latinidad and suspicion regarding Rodriguez’s Latinx advocacy. Through this controversy, I link the outrage to ideologies of the conceptual mutual exclusion of Blackness and Latinidad through discourses of mestizaje that center Brown within Latinidad. Additionally, this thesis discursively analyzes an interview Rodriguez did defending herself against being anti-Black where she evokes discourses of mestizaje among Latinxs to aid her claims of not being anti-Black, a discursive framework I connect to the denial of anti-Black inclusivity.

Subsequently, I juxtapose how the BBF podcast hosts are using their platform to deconstruct subtle anti-Blackness via community-internal discussions, using two major strategies that I call “highlighting the micro” and “collecting (y)our people”. The former refers to underscoring how seemingly individual incidents connect to hegemonic issues, and the latter refers to educating one’s own community in order to negotiate ideological shifts alongside those who benefit from similar social structures as oneself. For highlighting the micro, I identify the hosts’ use of various counter discourses of the body, which consists of discursive strategies that decenter “Brownness” and interrogate the ideological dichotomy of Blackness and Latinidad. For collecting (y)our people, I identify the hosts’ use of tactics of intersubjectivity (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004), specifically *adequation* and *distinction*, in order to formulate allyship discourses that identify non-Black Latinxs as the people with whom they seek to negotiate ideological

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<sup>1</sup> Cassandra’s Instagram, @\_xicanisma As of December 2020, Cassandra’s Instagram page is removed from public view.

shifts concerning Blackness and Latinidad. While online debates about the aforementioned controversy concerning Rodriguez have since ceased, by revisiting her seemingly trivial comments with a consideration of Black Lives Matter and an unearthed resistance of the suppression of AfroLatinx visibility, we can focus on not only the frustration that erupted in Black communities with and without Latinx heritage, but also how the response of some non-Black Latinx people may serve as a framework to approaching the subtle and often overlooked deep-rootedness of anti-Blackness in Latinidad. This response aims for productive allyship towards Black communities, or what I call *Black accompaniment*.

## **Literature Review**

### ***The conceptual mutual exclusion of Blackness and Latinidad***

Blackness and Latinidad are typically framed as mutually exclusive sociocultural and ethnoracial experiences in U.S. racial discourses. This mutual exclusion is constructed and maintained by those with and without Latinx heritage (Dasche et al., 2019) and remain particularly sustained by institutions that require people to identify racially for the purposes of population tracking (e.g., hospitals, schools, legal systems). While in academic literature, Black denotes a racial category encompassing various cultural and ethnic backgrounds (including Latinx), Latino/a/x denotes a cultural or ethnic experience based on heritage from Latin America that encompasses various racial categories (including Black). While these terms technically capture different aspects of identity, *Black* and *Latinx* remain sociocultural identities that are used simultaneously in discourses of *race* that privilege the convenience of their mutual



exclusion, affecting particularly AfroLatinxs (Dache et al., 2019; García-Louis, 2016; 2018).

In the United States, a *Black* identity often correlates with an African American (henceforth Black U.S. American<sup>2</sup>) experience. This is reflected in sociopolitical endeavors surrounding Blackness in the U.S. which privilege Black U.S. Americans or Black people of various heritages who foreground a Black U.S. American experience. As a case in point, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement is concerned with combatting the ways in which Black lives are devalued nationally and globally. Yet, in public discourses, these concerns are often reduced to police brutality against Black U.S. Americans, specifically cisgender and heterosexual Black men. Accordingly, the BLM movement may ignore or marginalize state violence against Black people in the U.S. immigration system, for example, because issues concerning immigration status do not typically affect Black U.S. Americans<sup>3</sup>. Additionally, even when BLM activism is led by AfroLatinx people, who are ideologically excluded from Blackness, their racial experience is seldom included in larger discourses of anti-Blackness in the U.S. context

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<sup>2</sup> I use this term somewhat differently from terms such as *ADOS* (*American descendent of slavery*) or *FBA* (*Fundamental Black American*). While I myself identify with the technical meaning of ADOS and support ADOS people as a unique ethnic group like other Black ethnicities, I propose an additional term with which I identify more, *Black U.S. American*. Like ADOS and FBA, I use *Black U.S. American* to ethnically identify Black people in the U.S. who may have some ancestors who date back to enslavement in the United States. However, I also use Black U.S. American for Black people in the U.S. who have some ancestors who date back to enslavement in the Americas. With this, my intention is to highlight ethnic diversity among ADOS or FBA people which might be erased with these terms. Additionally, there are Black families of other heritages who have resided in the U.S. for several generations and who have integrated with ADOS communities, making them identify predominately with a Black experience in the U.S. that is heavily influenced by and contributes to the culture of ADOS or FBA. Thus, *Black U.S. American* has a reduced focus on a nearly impossible trace to “origin” and an increased focus on identifying with a lived Black experience in the U.S. that is informed by the legacy of Black peoples’ first social, political, and cultural experience as enslaved people to the United States.

<sup>3</sup> See for a very thought-provoking discussion on how the detention of Garifuna people, an Afro Indigenous group native to Honduras, in the U.S. prison system challenges the racial-indexical

(Garcia, 2015), reflecting an ideological separation between a Black experience and a Latinx experience.

Correspondingly, contemporary conceptions of Latinidad in U.S. racial discourses discursively create a separate ethnoracial or panethnic identity on the basis of having heritage from a Latin American nation<sup>4</sup> (Dasche et al., 2019), a process of ethnic collapsing (Bashi, 1998). In this process, Latinx identity is often mapped onto a *mestizx*-presenting person,<sup>5</sup> which causes minimal disruption to the existing Black/White racial framework in the U.S. That is, within the U.S. racial ideology, Latinx is framed as a distinct race (euphemistically referred to as “Brown”) that is usually conceived as comprising some combination of Indigeneity, Whiteness. The ideology of a separate, Brown race derives from Jose Vasconcelos’ concept of *mestizaje* which was first theorized in *The Cosmic Race/La Raza Cós mica* (1925). Mestizaje refers to an ideology that the gene pool of Latin American people and their diaspora are comprised of “all” the world’s so-called races and would eventually make up the fifth race. Vasconcelos, a Mexican writer, politician, and activist in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, developed this concept in response to anti-miscegenation discourses that used faulty eugenicist research as a justification for U.S. imperialism/European colonialism in Latin America (Hooker, 2017). As such, his use of *mestizaje* assumed the complex racial history of Latin America to theorize its people as an exceptional, separate race within the existing racial

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boundaries set up in paradigms of prison studies (U.S. centered Blackness), settler-colonial studies (U.S. centered Indigeneity), and migration studies (U.S. centered Latinidad).

<sup>4</sup> Nations with Hispanophone or Lusophone traditions.

<sup>5</sup> Based on media representations, Rodriguez (2000) describes the preferred representation of a Latinx person has been a person who is “slightly tan, with dark hair and eyes” (p. 1).

taxonomy of Western science rather than subverting the essentialist notions of biological race that fueled claims of Anglo White superiority.

Mestizaje was later adopted by Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) in her groundbreaking work *Borderlands/La Frontera*, in which she – like Vasconcelos – theorized mestizaje as a tool to develop pride. Anzaldúa used mestizaje to theorize a Chicana/o/x experience which consisted of living between various categories defined by the state, including race, gender, sexuality, language, and residency/citizenship. Anzaldúa’s repurposing of mestizaje was a metaphor for explaining how identities occur simultaneously. Furthermore, Anzaldúa showed how identities are strategies (i.e. social constructs and political tools) situated in their contexts that can and will shift as circumstances change. Hooker (2017) calls Anzaldúa’s appropriation of mestizaje as a “selective misreading” of *The Cosmic Race*, as it ignored how mestizaje was an anti-imperialism strategy for Latin American elites and was infused with anti-Blackness and anti-Indigeneity as Vasconcelos argued that the trigueña mixture was elevating Black and Indigenous people. Thus, while it is important to contextualize the emergence and repurposing of mestizaje as a racial ideology used by those with access to “Brownness”<sup>6</sup> to create counter discourses of Anglo White superiority, it also created folkloric tales of race mixture in Latin America and relegated Blackness and Indigeneity to a static ancestral past<sup>7</sup>, both of which have been harmful to the representation (or lack thereof) of existing Black and Indigenous communities in Latin America.

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<sup>6</sup> By access to “Brown”, I mean having a mestizx-presenting phenotype and cultural experience as opposed to people of Latin America who are Black or Indigenous.

<sup>7</sup> While this work provides a platform to critiques of mestizaje, I cannot stress enough the need to acknowledge and explore the immediate sociopolitical needs of those identified as or identify as mestizos/as/x as these needs have warranted (and still warrant) an exploration of a perceived or real

Nevertheless, the rise in visibility of AfroLatinx presence and consciousness (albeit not without critique) is forcing a greater disruption of both existing paradigms of Blackness and Latinidad in U.S. racial discourses, given their contributions to both Black diasporic consciousness and theorizing Latinx experiences in the U.S. (García-Louis, 2018; Haywood, 2017b; Vega et al., 2012). AfroLatinx scholars – especially AfroLatina scholars – have long informed the research community of enduring anti-Black projects within Latin America that have contributed to Black erasure in Latin America. Such projects remain embedded in common discourses surrounding Latinidad, including *mestizaje* and *the Brown race* (which harmonizes racial mixture and centers a mestizx phenotype and cultural experience) (Dizney-Flores et al., 2019, Candelario, 2007) as well as *blanqueamiento* and *mejorar la raza* (which are concepts that aspire towards Whiteness and reject contemporary Black and Indigenous presence) (Busey & Cruz, 2017; Jiménez Román & Flores, 2010; Cruz-Janzen 2007; and Loveman & Muniz, 2006). In doing so, AfroLatinx consciousness calls to account the deep rootedness of anti-Blackness within Latinidad that permeates the very discourses

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ancestral past to Blackness and/or Indigeneity in the quest for self-definition and community consciousness. While the construction of mestizxs as a social construct and political strategy engendered by the concept of *mestizaje* has contributed to the displacement of Black and Indigenous bodies, the often rigid and essentialist defines of Blackness and Indigeneity in many contexts (as social constructs and political strategies in their own right) have sometimes conveniently ignored “racial mixture” in our own lineages, displacing “mestizxs” and rendering bodies who exist at the margins (Anzaldúa, 1987) as *ni de aquí y ni de allá* (Lopez Oro, 2016). Nevertheless, this assumed right to claim Blackness or Indigeneity has rightfully been investigated by Latinx or Hispanic people who have bravely faced the critiques of Black and Indigenous people (with and without Latinx heritage) and I continue to encourage this. On the other hand, I hope this work and my future work prompts all of us who claim Blackness, Indigeneity, and/or Latinidad (because our bodies fit the localized context and confines of where and when these identities are situated), to allow ourselves to be challenged of our own rights or access to the identities we assume or embody and what existing structures surrounding these identities they may legitimize or delegitimize.

that shape Latinx identity as a separate, Brown race beginning with mestizaje and the conceptual mutual exclusion of Blackness and Latinidad.

*The denial of anti-Black inclusivity*

As AfroLatinx consciousness provides evidence of deeply rooted anti-Blackness within Latin America, the global resonance of the Black Lives Matter movement (which is also made of and not separate from AfroLatinx consciousness) shows that anti-Blackness is an ideology required of White supremacy that reinforces the global color line (Douglass, 1881; Du Bois, 1903). In 2015, the statement “Black Lives Matter” was introduced to the public by three Black U.S. American women (two of whom identify as queer) as a hashtag campaign against police brutality<sup>8</sup>. This statement eventually became the title of what was once just a U.S. movement but has since spread globally. Since 2015, BLM has remained active with several local chapters in the U.S. and around the world that attend to the immediate and long-term needs of protecting Black people at the social and institutional level. The movement gained peak coverage in the summer of 2020 after the senseless murder of yet another unarmed Black man, George Floyd (1973-2020). The public resurgence of Black Lives Matter seemed to resonate differently than previous murders given the civil unrest already prevalent in the context of COVID-19 and the U.S. presidential election against Donald Trump’s second term. Unlike other murders, a major outcome George Floyd’s death has been a shift in everyday discussions as well as academic and institutional discourses to center the ideologies of anti-Blackness embedded in the fabric of not only the policing system

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<sup>8</sup> See and consider donating: "[Black Lives Matter: Our Co-Founders](#)". *Black Lives Matter*

but in all existing institutions that remain triggered by negative biases against Black people. That is, instead of framing Floyd's murder as an isolated incident caused by one racist White man or even a potentially justifiable homicide upon further police investigation, many individuals and institutions immediately pronounced a commitment to being "allies" of Black communities by vocalizing support of the BLM movement, denouncing police brutality, and justifying the outrage of Black communities when it comes to our long history and contemporary experience with state violence.

While previous discourses of anti-Black racism have been framed to be only deployable by White people<sup>9</sup>, current discourses are moving towards representing the larger complexity of White supremacy, which is one that recognizes the bearer of White hegemony as anyone of any color or cultural background who upholds White institutions and whose livelihood requires anomalizing non-White, Western frameworks and especially the unredeemability of Blackness (Washington, 1973). Correspondingly, the discourse surrounding anti-Blackness has shifted towards reflecting inclusivity. I use the term "inclusive" to describe anti-Black racism because anyone may participate, including Black people and especially non-Black people of color. For instance, anti-Blackness within Black communities is often defined as "self-hatred" and is usually deployed as an attempt to escape the burden of Blackness (Fanon, 1952). When it comes to more recent discussion on anti-Blackness in Latinx

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<sup>9</sup> See Bogado (2014) for a discussion of how anti-Blackness in Latinx or Hispanic communities influenced the murder of teenager Trayvon Martin (1995-2011), rest in peace, and the acquittal of his murderer who is of Anglo White U.S. American and Peruvian heritage. During this trial, the media and the prosecution team intentionally and persistently reinforced the murderer as White in order to legitimize his motivations as being race related.

communities, Garcia (2015) warns that White Latinx racism is only on the rise causing a dire need to form conversations about diasporic Whiteness. Haywood (2017a) makes a compelling case for why “Anti-Black Latino racism” in the Trump era needs immediate attention, and Dasche et al. (2019) reinforce an urgent need to interrogate anti-Blackness among Latinxs, specifically those who are/pass for White. Similarly, scholars of the Black Latinas Know Collective (BLKC) have called upon White Latinxs to not hide behind the protection of the “person of color” label that may absolve them of culpability for contributing to anti-Blackness, due to not being ideologically White. Therefore, by viewing anti-Blackness as inclusive, non-Black people of color have been forced to enter a conversation in their potential complicity towards anti-Black ideologies and practices in their own communities. For non-Black Latinx allies, viewing anti-Blackness as both an inter-community and intra-community issue produces a greater commitment to understanding the various intersections of anti-Blackness within their respective communities.

## **Data and analytical framework**

### ***Podcasts, counter hegemonic discourses, and allyship***

Since discourse is ideology, this thesis frames podcasts as useful resources through which community-based scholars may learn more about critical community-internal discourses that are reshaping notions of sociocultural identities and experiences. Podcasts have increasingly become a popular media platform due to their range of content as well as their relative consumer accessibility and start-up efforts. They usually have a series of episodes in the form of audio or video files, and they typically have at least one host who discuss a range of topics conferring to the theme(s)

of the podcast to provide social commentary that uses a linguistic genre or speech style that resembles radio talk shows. Existing literature on podcasts have revealed their efficacy for facilitating student activism (Gaden, 2010) and grass roots community activism (Ince et al., 2017), which follows the traditions of how other independent audio or video media have been used by some communities. For instance, many vulnerable groups have utilized digitized spaces to foster “online imagined communities” (Kavoura, 2014)<sup>10</sup> where internal discussions take place to negotiate ideological shifts or distribute information while providing a sense of belonging and comfort (Lingel, 2017; Casillas 2014). Therefore, many podcasts provide a space to challenge hegemonic discourses and negotiate sociopolitical strategies or new ways of knowing that encourage shifts in ideologies, practices, and social relationships.

The Bitter Brown Femmes podcast has gained significant attention among Chicanx/Latinx youth (and beyond) as a virtual space for counter hegemonic discourses. The podcast’s tagline is “dismantling shit while talking shit”, revealing an unapologetic approach to deconstructing social inequality. To date, the podcast has over 45 episodes that discuss a range of topics alongside social commentary and social justice, which are available on various audio distributors including Spotify and Apple Music. BBF has almost 20 thousand followers on its Instagram account ([@bitterbrownfemmes](https://www.instagram.com/bitterbrownfemmes)) and it was mentioned in an August 2019 article in *Oprah Magazine* titled “[The Best Spanish and Latino Podcasts for Learning and Laughing](#)”.

BBF is primarily concerned with community (un)learning and social justice. Therefore, the hosts Cassandra and Ruben embody what a consider a form of

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<sup>10</sup> Extended from the original concept of “imagined communities” in nation-state building introduced by Anderson (1983).



“accompaniment” (Tomlinson & Lipsitz 2013; Bucholtz et al., 2016), rather than allyship. That is, allyship is often critiqued for being affective (Radke et al. 2020) rather than material, making it more of a title people may take on to rid themselves of personal culpability for social, cultural, economic, or political inequalities. Significantly, allyship frameworks do little to account for intersectionality and the ways in which the distribution of power shifts based on context. That is, being an “ally” may imply that the ally is always in a position of power and does not experience their own forms of marginalization in a given context in which they will need allyship. Alternatively, it may imply that the allied group is always in a position of marginality, and individuals who are seen as needing allyship may never experience systems of privilege. This is particularly true for communities of color and other marginalized groups who may contribute to each other’s oppression based on inevitable shifting social contexts. Accordingly, this thesis uses *accompaniment* as an alternative term to allyship to encode the co-conspiratorial project of moving towards social justice in ways that recognize action and collaborative effort.

### ***Counter discourses of the body & tactics of intersubjectivity***

To analyze how Black accompaniment is accomplished, I examine strategies of highlighting the micro and collecting (y)our people. In this process, I rely on the appearance of simultaneous embodied and discursive tactics in Cassandra and Ruben’s discussions on Gina Rodriguez. In doing so, I use sociocultural linguistics literature about identity as discursively formulated through *(counter) discourses of the body* (Bucholtz and Hall, 2016) and *tactics of intersubjectivity* (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004). An embodied sociocultural linguistics framework argues that the body is not only material but

discursive (Butler, 1990) and that discourses are central to maintaining or contesting hegemonic or “ideologically salient interpretations of the body” (Bucholtz and Hall, 2016). Thus, this framework provides analytical tools to view how new bodily discourses emerge under contextualized identity concerns of social groups. In the context of Blackness and Latinidad, two identity concerns are at play in this thesis: the increased visibility of AfroLatinidad or Black consciousness in Latin America and the global spread of the Black Lives Matter movement, both of which force a deeper engagement with the ubiquity and inclusivity of anti-Blackness. Therefore, to recognize the agentic processes involved in discursively (re)shaping the body to achieve various social, cultural, and political goals, I focus on Cassandra and Ruben’s discussions of Gina Rodriguez challenge culturally dominant discourses of the Latinx body as “Brown” as well as automatically “people of color” who therefore cannot be contributors to anti-Blackness. Not only does this framework center the role of language in creating and transforming sociocultural subjectivities via discourse, it also highlights how the renegotiation of dominant discourses of Latinidad, including Latinx bodies and the subjectivities they are capable of assuming, is crucial to productive allyship or accompaniment towards Black communities.

In addition to an embodied sociocultural linguistics as an analytical framework, I also use tactics of intersubjectivity to look at how identity is discursively enacted via tactics of sameness/difference. Specifically, I examine how the hosts both obscure and highlight racial differences as well as sameness to construct discourses of Latinidad that combat ideologies of AfroLatinx erasure and of all Latinxs as people of color. I rely on Bucholtz and Hall’s (2004) first pair of tactics, adequation/distinction. *Adequation* is

defined as involving “the pursuit of socially categorized sameness” (p. 383) in which prominent differences may go unhighlighted in order to underscore similarities that are perceived to be more immediate to situations that require sameness. This likeness is formed on the basis of identity and is not an essentialist or static concept; rather, it creates an association to achieve immediate or long-term social needs. Adequation can be found in discourses of Latinidad which rely – in part – on the Spanish language and historical discourses of racial/cultural mixture (*mestizaje*) to form an ideology of sameness across groups who are in fact ethnically, racially, linguistically, culturally, and politically diverse.

Conversely, *distinction* is defined as a “mechanism whereby salient difference is produced” (p. 384). With this tactic, differences may be highlighted, and similarities may be ignored for the purposes of distinguishing identities. Distinction can be found in discourses of Blackness in the U.S. which separate Black Latinx experiences from non-Latinx Black U.S. American experiences due to – in part – the racialization of Spanish speakers and/or Latin American descendants as “Brown”. While adequation has been salient in discourses of Latinidad, visibility of AfroLatinidad reflect tactics of distinction to highlight the distinct ways in which Black people of Latin American heritage experience Latinidad and racial identity. While adequation and distinction are opposing tactics, they form a pair in that they are not preestablished social realities but are implemented via semiotic processes of identification achieved through simultaneous discursive and embodied strategies of ideology, practice, indexicality, and performance to accomplish contextually situated social, cultural, and political goals. With both analytical frameworks, I identify discursive identity construction by Cassandra and

Ruben as non-Black Latinxs who use their podcast to index – among other things – their commitment in Black accompaniment.

In my analysis, I first review the controversy surrounding Gina Rodriguez’s tweet on the lack of Latinx representation in Marvel and DC projects after the release of the *Black Panther* film trailer. After discussing how this incident framed public suspicion of Rodriguez’s Latinx advocacy, I analyze her response to an interview she gave to defend herself against claims of being anti-Black after making a controversial comment about the gender/race pay gap. Subsequently, I juxtapose these controversies with their coverage in episode 11 of the Bitter Brown Femmes podcast. I analyze seven excerpts in particular in which the hosts deploy the strategies highlighting the micro and collecting (y)our people”. Together, these two strategies are foundational to Cassandra and Ruben’s accompaniment of Black communities with and without Latinx heritage, as they see anti-Blackness within Latinidad as a deeply rooted community-internal issue that requires ideological and discursive shifts to both unpack and reimagine Latinidad. In doing so, Cassandra and Ruben rely on counter discourses of the Latinx body as well as tactics of intersubjectivity to imagine who their “people” are in the context of working towards Black accompaniment.

### **Gina Rodriguez, Latinx advocacy, and “subtle” anti-Blackness via mestizaje**

Gina Rodriguez rose to fame in 2014 as the lead actress on the highly acclaimed CW show *Jane the Virgin*. Since 2017, she has received persistent adverse publicity due to comments that uncritically evoke Blackness in her pursuit of Latinx advocacy. While none of her incidents reveal an overt sense of hatred towards Black communities, her comments have made her an example of subtle anti-Blackness by non-Black Latinx

people. The goal of this section is to connect her anti-Black accusations and her defense against being anti-Black to both the conceptual mutual exclusion of Blackness and Latinidad and the denial of anti-Black inclusivity, respectively. I begin with her first public controversy: a tweet (Figure 1) that she posted in anticipation of the Marvel film *Black Panther*, the first Black superhero movie with a predominantly Black cast of various ethnic and national backgrounds. This tweet sparked a heated discussion on social media surrounding not only who is “Latino” and consequently what constitutes “Latino representation”, but also Rodriguez’s seeming lack of support for a historical moment in film.



Figure 1: Where are the Latinos?

Rodriguez acknowledges the film’s “[racial] inclusion and women”; however, she implies a lacking by asking, “where are the Latinos?”. While the question might have intended to spark a legitimate conversation on insufficient representation of *mestizx-presenting* Latinx people within large film franchises, her tweet lacks nuance surrounding what *Latino* and adequate *Latino representation* mean. Many AfroLatinx, non-Black Latinxs, and non-Latinx Black people problematized this tweet on social media for turning a positive moment of embodied Black representation towards the lack of representation of Latinx (presumably *mestizx*) people. Many people believed that

Rodriguez's tweet intended to shift the celebration away from rare Black representation insinuating that since Black people got exceptional and rare representation in these high-profile films (notably *Black Panther*), Black people no longer face issues of representation in the film industry. Thus, her attention is not focused on racial power structures but towards Black people's rare success with Black hyper-representation in a film. Figure 2 is a comment from a twitter user who critiqued the timing of Rodriguez's tweet.

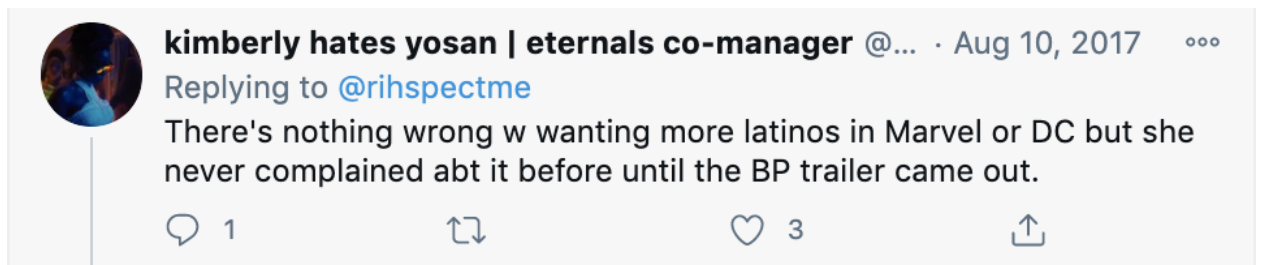


Figure 2: We're here for Latinx representation

While this twitter user acknowledges the legitimate desire for “Latino” representation, they also draw attention to the fact that the release of the *Black Panther* film trailer is what ignited Rodriguez's public comments on the lack of this representation in Marvel and DC films. However, for many AfroLatinxs the critique stemmed from being exhausted by the continuous erasure of AfroLatinidad through the centering of an ideological mestizx body, which they believe was encoded in Rodriguez's use of “Latinos”. For instance, Rodriguez phrases her tweet in a way that does not take into account that there have been Latinx people featured in high profile Marvel and DC films including Afro-Panamanian Tessa Thompon in *Thor*, Afro-Dominicana and Puertorriqueña Zoe Saldana in *Guardians of the Galaxy*, Afro-Cubana Gina Torres as the voice for the animated *Wonder Woman* series, among others.

However, since these actors have phenotypic features that identify them as racially Black rather “Brown” – at least in the U.S. context – her tweet was critiqued for implying a definition of “Latino” that correlates with an idealized mestizx phenotype. Despite these actors being casted in roles that did not depict them belonging to any contemporary sociocultural or ethnoracial group, people accused Rodriguez of not counting them as authentic or preferable Latinx representations. In short, the scrutiny Rodriguez came under stemmed from people believing Rodriguez did not acknowledge AfroLatinxs as Latinxs and implied Black people have greater media representation than other racialized minority groups. The discourse of this tweet follows a long tradition of the conceptual mutual exclusion of Blackness and Latinidad within U.S. ethnoracial discourses, which typically treat them as not only as distinct racial communities but also competitors for the limited “people of color” media representation.

This comment, alongside others that are not outlined here, set a precedent for people’s automatic suspicion of Rodriguez’s cultural advocacy. In November 2018, Rodriguez also came under scrutiny for a panel interview she participated in with three other actresses (Ellen Pompeo, Emma Roberts, and Gabrielle Union) who talked about the gender pay gap for a social media special that was filmed and released by the United Kingdom based company, Net-A-Porter. While this controversy, unlike Rodriguez’s tweet on *Black Panther*, was not extensively covered by the BBF podcast, I highlight Rodriguez’s public response to provide an analytical framework for her identity work in navigating her Latinidad and person-of-colorhood in relation to Blackness. Specifically, Rodriguez juggles competing racial ideologies of Blackness and Latinidad afforded by

discourses of mestizaje in Latin America and the one-drop rule in the United States. By doing so, she not only inadvertently forms a conceptual mutual exclusion between Blackness and Latinidad in her Latinx advocacy, but she also draws upon these racial ideologies to aid her in navigating accusations of anti-Blackness as both a Puerto Rican Latina and non-White person. In the panel interview for Net-A-Porter, Rodriguez states:

“I get so petrified in this space talking about equal pay especially when you look at the intersectional aspect of it, right? Where white women get paid more than Black women, Black women get paid more than Asian women, Asian women get paid more than Latina women, and it’s like a very scary space to step into.”

While many reports on this interview used headlines suggested that Rodriguez stated that Black *actresses* are paid more than Latina *actresses*, Rodriguez never specifically stated actresses. By not specifying that she was referring to actresses specifically, Rodriguez frames this hierarchy as a broader, unmarked pattern of racial privilege and power, rather than an unusual hierarchy informed by the particularities of the film or entertainment industry. However, because her comments were recirculated in ways that implied that she meant actresses, many critics took to social media to hold Rodriguez’ accountable for what they believed to be her lackluster statistics. Some people referenced the Forbes list on the top 10 highest paid actresses on which there was one non-Black/non-Indigenous Latina, Sofia Vergara (#1) and one Black U.S. American woman, Kerry Washington (#8). Others noted that Rodriguez’s categorization of social groups places Latinas alongside other racial categories, which discursively frames Latinx as a separate race. In doing so, Rodriguez’s Latinx advocacy ignores racial diversity within Latinidad that largely shapes how one experiences the gender pay gap and socioeconomic inequality (Dasche, 2019). While Rodriguez did not



invent this discursive framework of Latinx as separate from both Black and White, her use of this framing as a Latinx advocate perpetuates the convenient centering of Brownness through its uncritical comparison to Blackness.

This sparked debate on social media, where many non-Latinx Black people, AfroLatinxs, and non-Black Latinxs expressed their frustration towards Rodriguez's comments, claiming they were examples of how her advocacy for Latinx people unnecessarily evokes Black U.S. American advances in ways that insinuate they are contributing to the problem or that they have successfully achieved equality. Figure 3 reflects the opinions of a Twitter user:



Figure 3: African American advances aren't the problem

In this thread (which is not reproduced here in its entirety), Sofia Quintero touches upon several themes that were foundational to the backlash against Rodriguez. Overall, the offense stemmed from Rodriguez's mentioning of Black communities in ways that erase Black Latinxs and frame Black U.S. Americans (or Black people without Latinx heritage) as competitors in the fight for social justice.

In January 2019, Rodriguez made an appearance on *Sway in the Morning*, a nationally syndicated hip-hop radio show that had welcomed Rodriguez several times for previous interviews. Just before excerpt 1 below, Rodriguez was asked about her comments on Black women being paid more than Latinas and in response she became visibly and audibly emotional when describing the impact of being accused as anti-Black for those comments. While Rodriguez's response appears to express genuine feelings of devastation upon being accused of anti-Blackness again, she engages with this criticism by evoking Blackness in Puerto Rican heritage to imply to she lacks the capacity to engage in anti-Blackness. In doing so, Rodriguez contributes to a larger pattern of the denial of anti-Black.



Figures 4 and 5 (left to right)

Gina Rodriguez, [Sway in the Morning Radio Show interview](#), January 2019

Excerpt 1: "To get anti-Black is saying I'm anti-family"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u119X9Oor1U&feature=youtu.be&t=800>

[13:20-15:10]

1        *RODRIGUEZ*                    *The backlash was devastating to say the least, because (pauses and starts to tear up, see image 4)*

2        *INTERVIEWER*                    *Take your time with it Gina (interviewers touch Rodriguez's arm)*

3        *RODRIGUEZ*                        *'cause, this is also my first-*

4                                               *Okay, I got this (Gina motions rolling up her sleeves)*

5        *INTERVIEWER 1*                    *You got it=*

6        *INTERVIEWER 2*                    *Mhm*

7                                               *=take your time with it*

8        *RODRIGUEZ*                        *Um because the Black community was the only community I looked towards*

9        *INTERVIEWER 2*                    *mhm*

10       *RODRIGUEZ*                        *growing up=*

11       *INTERVIEWER 2*                    *=Mhm*

12       *RODRIGUEZ*                        *We didn't have many Latino shows,*

14                                              *and uh,*

15                                              *and the Black community made me*

16                                              *feel like I was, I was seen*

17                                              *So uh, to get anti-Black is saying that I'm anti-family (nods)*

18       *INTERVIEWERS*                    *Mhm*

19       *RODRIGUEZ*                        *My father, is dark skinned (flips forearm and hands out)*

20                                              *He's AfroLatino, um (dries eyes)*

21                                              *And, my cousins are*

22                                              *And Puerto Ricans are African, Taino, and Spaniard*

23                                              *And, it's my blood*

24                                              *So that was really devastating to me?*

25                                              *Umm, and I know my heart.*

26                                              *I know what I meant.*

27                                              *And I really wish we weren't living in a culture where we're click bait,*

28                                              *because I have never said anything controversial about anybody*

29                                              *And far would I ever,*

30                                              *ever-*

31                                              *'Cause if anything, the Black community is my community*

32                                              *As Latinos, we are, we have- we have Black Latinos*

33                                              *Like that is what we are*

34                                              *I am not, right*

35                                              *So, I think when I speak about Latino advocacy,*

36                                              *people believe I only mean people my skin color*

37                                              *And little do they know that I'm very aware of what my culture is*

38       *INTERVIEWER 1*                    *mhm*

39       *RODRIGUEZ*                        *And the opportunities I create,*

40                                              *and who I put in those spaces*

41                                              *are both the Latino and the Black community*

First, Rodriguez projects an alliance with “the Black community” (lines 8-12) based on ties she developed from an early age. She states that she looked towards the Black community for representation in the media because “Latino shows” were lacking when she was a child (lines 8-10). Because she does not qualify “Black” or “Latino” in lines 8-12 with terms that specify ethnicity, race, or language, but instead talks about the relationship between these groups as racially distinctive, we can infer that these

primarily refer to Black people from Anglophone traditions (or generally without Latinx heritage) and mestizxs across Latinx ethnicities, respectively.

Lines 17-24 reveal how Rodriguez understands what it means to be an anti-Black Latina. She rejects this accusation, stating, “to get anti-Black is saying that I’m anti-family” (line 17). While this line landed well with her interviewers who extend her empathy with affirmation in line 18, this statement is undermined by the common problem of anti-Blackness within Latinx families. Garcia-Louis and Cortes (2020) collected narratives from AfroLatinx college students on how they negotiate identity and belonging on their campuses. The authors explore common experiences of anti-AfroLatinidad, or “beliefs, practices, and behaviors that communicate a deliberate rejection of AfroLatinidad that manifest in personal relationships and are upheld by society at large” (pg. 2), which they see as reflective of society’s general rejection of Blackness. In their accounts, AfroLatinx students recalled early and consistent experiences of anti-Blackness by family members including parents, siblings, and cousins. All narratives shared a common theme of Black inferiority in their households and community, constituting a hegemonic ideology of “Blackness as undesirable and not part of mestizx identity” (p. 7). Haywood (2017) also interviewed AfroLatinx college students who described “Latino spaces” having always been the “most violent”. Nevertheless, Rodriguez defends herself against anti-Black accusations by claiming a family-like connection to Blackness without acknowledging that AfroLatinxs experience marginalization in their families and in the media due to not fitting the mestizx archetype. Accordingly, Rodriguez renders her comments as blown out of proportion as she states, “I know my heart” and “I know what I meant” (lines 25-26).

Not only does Rodriguez rely on community and family-like ties to non-Latinx Black people while growing up to refute accusations of her being anti-Black, but she also draws on several discursive strategies afforded by mestizaje to position her Latina identity closer to Blackness via Puerto Rico's collective African ancestry, despite the apparent conflicts between those strategies. In lines 19-21, Rodriguez states that her father and cousins have dark skin and are therefore Afro-Latinxs, but that she is not because she does not have dark skin relative to her family members<sup>11</sup>. This is not in accordance with a U.S. racial framework of Blackness (one drop rule) which allows her father to be "Afro/Black" and not her. In lines 22 and 23, Rodriguez continues to juggle Latin American racial ideologies alongside U.S. racial frameworks. In line 22, she evokes ideologies of mestizaje by reminding listeners of Puerto Rico's ancestral history of "African, Taino [Indigenous] and Spaniard" mixture. She continues in line 23 and claims that Blackness is in her "blood". By doing so, Rodriguez positions her Latinidad in alliance with Blackness through blood quantum or so-called racial genetics to further delegitimize claims of her being anti-Black.

Rodriguez's identity work, however, creates problems for her claims regarding her connection to and understanding of Blackness. Towards the end of her response (lines 31-37), she mentions her awareness of AfroLatinxs and that people erroneously accuse her of not knowing her Puerto Rican culture. However, she has difficulty discursively placing AfroLatinxs in the dichotomous categorization of "Black community" and "Latino community" that she has set up in lines 8-12 and 41.

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<sup>11</sup> After this interview, photos of her father circulated online where people pointed out that he has the same skin tone and other phenotypic features of Rodriguez that are not readily read as Black or AfroLatino. With this statement, I highlight how Latin American racial ideologies enable people in her immediate family to be Black while she is not. This is not in accordance with the one drop rule upheld in the U.S. as there exist people with similar

Throughout lines 32-41 she shifts by discursive framing AfroLatinx as belonging to the “Black community” and the “Latino community”. For instance, in line 32 she states, “as Latinos, we are, we have-, we have Black Latinos”. This phrase has a few false starts, suggesting that she is searching for the best way to conceptualize Latinx people who are Black. She abandons her initial construction, replacing ontology (“we are”) with possession (“we have”). In line 33, however, she returns to ontology stating, “like that is what we [Puerto Ricans] **are**”. This oscillation reflects a conception of Blackness within Latinidad that juggles two competing ideologies: 1) Latinx people may have African ancestry so Blackness is in all Latinx culturally or by “blood” (i.e., genetics), and 2) some Latinx individuals have African ancestry and reflect it phenotypically and are therefore AfroLatinxs, while others do not and thus are not. In either case, the historical and/or contemporary existence of Blackness in Latin America or AfroLatinidad is evoked to delegitimize claims of being anti-Black. That is, in the first ideology, perceived or real historical Black ancestry is evoked to refuse any culpability of being anti-Black and, in the latter, the contemporary presence of AfroLatinas/os/xs is selectively represented and showcased to again remove claims of anti-Blackness within Latinidad.

In sum, excerpt 1 shows Rodriguez’s strategic positioning of her Latina identity: both because she is Latina and because Puerto Rico has a history of racial mixing from its legacy of colonialism, she implies cannot be anti-Black. This is a different positioning of Brown/Latinx identity from her comments on the Marvel and DC films, which reveals the contradictions of her identity work. By critiquing Marvel and DC films for

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phenotypic features as Rodriguez who are identified as “Black” as their “street race”<sup>11</sup> (Lopez et al., 2017) or personally identify as “Black”, in part, via the concept of “one drop”.

not having Latinx representation despite there being Black Latinx actors in many prominent roles for movies like *Black Panther* and *The Avengers*, Rodriguez positions her Latina identity as distinctive and distant from Blackness. However, when explaining why she is not anti-Black, she strategically positions her Latina identity as overlapping with and closer to Blackness by mentioning her father having “dark skin” and Puerto Ricans having Blackness in “[our] blood”. In this case, she distinguishes herself from the generic Latinidad that is prevalent in her cultural advocacy by reminding the audience of her specifically Puerto Rican identity and African mixture since the inception of Puerto Rico.

### **Black accompaniment in a Chicanx/Latinx Podcast**

In the following excerpts, Cassandra and Ruben discuss a range of topics that lead to their interrogation of Rodriguez’ tweet on Marvel and DC films, framing it as emblematic of a larger phenomenon of subtle anti-Blackness within Latinidad. In excerpts 2 and 3, Cassandra and Ruben frame their social justice as primarily being concerned with collecting their people to improve their own communities. In excerpt 4, the hosts emphasize the importance of calling people out or problematizing their actions even if they are otherwise admirable, as this “highlights the micro” to facilitate difficult but necessary community-internal discussions. Finally, excerpts 5, 6, and 7, the hosts focus on Rodriguez’s tweet to interrogate ideologies of Latinidad, specifically the mutual exclusion of Blackness and Latinidad via AfroLatinx erasure and the inclusivity of anti-Blackness via compliance towards White normativity. In doing so, they deploy counter discourses of the Latinx body to make Latinidad more inclusive as well as

tactics of intersubjectivity, namely adequation and distinction, to form an alliance with non-Black Latinxs in the pursuit of Black accompaniment.

*Towards limiting one's labor*

Cassandra and Ruben begin the BBF episode 11 talking about a story that their social media followers kept sending them. The story is about an Anglophone White U.S. American (AW-USA) woman who sells traditional Mexican clothing or *ropa típica* online for fairly expensive prices, and she uses exclusively White children and adults to model the clothing on her website. This story sparked online debates surrounding the potential harm of cultural appropriation by White people who co-opt and profit from the culture of minoritized communities of color. Cassandra humorously asks the audience to stop asking for her and Ruben's input on this issue as they have grown tired of discussions of appropriation by Anglo White people. While they find these conversations important, they want to move beyond a form of social justice that is solely concerned with educating (i.e., calling out and collecting) Anglo White communities. Instead, they state they would rather spend their time educating their own communities and encourage Anglo White people who are involved in social justice work to do the same.

Excerpt 2: *White people need to collect themselves*  
[04:00-05:10]

1	RUBEN	<i>Like we've been here a million times.</i>
2		<i>And they [AW-USA] know better.</i>
3		<i>It's just that they don't wanna do better?</i>
4		<i>So at this point it's like I-</i>
5		<i>It's time for like gringos to collect their own people right.</i>
6	CASSANDRA	<i>Yes</i>
7	RUBEN	<i>I'm not gonna spend my time on White people</i>
8		<i>because I'm not invested in Whiteness.</i>
9		<i>I'm not invested in White people.</i>
10		<i>Like if White people wanna do better or be better,</i>
11		<i>they're gonna do better themselves.</i>



...  
 15 *My labor is for my people.*  
 16 *And for QTPOC,<sup>12</sup> primarily.*  
 ...  
 22 CASSANDRA *I don't know.*  
 23 *I mean,*  
 24 *if you wanna do that,*  
 25 *go ahead and do [that right]<sub>1</sub>.*  
 26 RUBEN *[yeah yeah]<sub>1</sub>*  
 27 *We're also not like demonizing people [wh-]<sub>2</sub>*  
 28 CASSANDRA *[Yeah.]<sub>2</sub>*  
 29 *If you wanna spend your energy and invest in that and-*  
 30 *call them out or-*  
 31 *whatever the case may be?*  
 32 *Like if that's what you wanna do, go ahead and do it.*  
 33 *But like me personally,*  
 34 *I'm fuckin' over it (laughs)*  
 35 *I'm fucking over calling like all these White—*  
 36 *if I just sat there and called out all these White people over*  
 37 *cultural appropriation,*  
 38 *like that's all I would be doing every single day.*  
 39 *Because there's so many of them.*  
 40 RUBEN *Literally, yeah.*

In this excerpt, the host's discussion of Whiteness and White people does not include ethnic, national, or linguistic markers to specify AW-USA people. However, their use of *gringos* makes it clear that the "Whiteness" they critique here is that of AW-USAs. In lines 4-6, Ruben and Cassandra agree that it is time for "gringos" to use their labor to "collect their own people". Ruben justifies his stance on diverting energy from White people in lines 2 and 3 by suggesting AW-USAs could do better if they wanted to, so spending his time to address the various ways in which they profit off the co-optation and erasure of marginalized communities of color via cultural appropriation, would exhaust his labor as this phenomenon is widespread. While diverting energy towards the improvement of White people might seem adverse to social justice work, the hosts are suggesting that this labor needs to be taken up by White people in order to engage in productive allyship towards communities of color. This perspective has been highlighted in Black radical thought as James Baldwin famously stated to White Anglo

America, “I am not a nigga. I’m a man. But if you think I’m a nigga it means you need it, and you need to find out why”<sup>13</sup>. Toni Morrison has also shifted anti-racism work onto White Anglo people in her 1993 interview with Charlie Rose, stating, “If you can only be tall because somebody is on their knees, then you have a serious problem.... White people have a very, very serious problem, and *they* should start thinking about what *they* can do about it. Take me out of it. (emphasis original)”<sup>14</sup>

In lines 7-9, Ruben states that he is “not invested in Whiteness”. Rather, his investment lies within his own people, which he defines as Latinxs and Chicanxs and those who share similar simultaneous gendered and racialized experiences (i.e., queer and trans people of color (lines 7-9; 15-17). In excerpt 5 (discussed below), the host’s discussion of Whiteness mainly occurs in the context of Latinidad, as they specify by using “White Latinx”. In excerpt 5, the hosts discursively construct sameness with White Latinxs on the basis of not being Black via tactics of adequation. In this excerpt, the hosts clearly separate themselves from non-Latinx White people (e.g., gringos) via tactics of distinction despite this tactic being abandoned for their connection to White Latinxs. Thus, their lack of investment in Whiteness specifically refers to Whiteness outside of Latinidad.

### ***Towards community internal (un)learning***

In excerpt 3, Cassandra and Ruben make it clear that they do not see discussions on cultural appropriation as useless. Rather, the framing and focus of these discourses including who and what gets addressed, are crucial if material outcomes (i.e., the

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<sup>12</sup> Acronym for queer and transgender people of color.

<sup>13</sup> Watch the clip here: <https://youtu.be/GmqJZg2il5Q?t=57>

improved circumstances of people of color) are desired in the context of social justice discourse.

Excerpt 3: *I'd rather discuss with my own people*  
[05:22-07:08]

1 CASSANDRA *We all know what it is [cultural appropriation] and what it looks like.*  
2 *But when we wanna talk about other topics that usually*  
3 *aren't talked about,*  
4 *no one wants to invest energy on those things—*  
5 RUBEN *Mm-[mm].*  
6 CASSANDRA *[bec]ause they don't wanna check themselves.*  
7 *So it's easier to just call out other people who are appropriating*  
8 *other cultures.*  
...  
22 RUBEN *Yeah.*  
23 *Because there's no discussions about how certain ropa típica*  
24 *and things like that belong to Indigenous peoples.*  
25 CASSANDRA *Mm-mm*  
...  
28 RUBEN *So if we wanna talk about cultural appropriation,*  
29 *then I think more effective discussions might be*  
30 *things that revolve around nationalism, mestizaje,*  
31 *anti-Indigeneity, and anti-Blackness as they pertain to these clothing.*  
32 *When it comes to cultural appropriation,*  
33 *I would rather have discussions with my own people than White people.*  
34 CASSANDRA *Yeah, and we wanna talk about cultural appropriation.*  
35 *There's just so many other things to talk about,*  
36 *that's just not calling out White people.*  
37 *like Ruben mentioned.*  
38 *For example nobody wants to talk about Frida K-*  
39 *Frida Kahlo's appropriation of Indigenous [peoples in] Mexico*  
40 RUBEN *[Bi:tch] (laughs)*

In this excerpt, Cassandra and Ruben agree that they would prefer to focus on topics “that usually aren’t talked about” (lines 2-3) as little energy is invested there (line 4). Such topics include “nationalism, mestizaje, anti-Indigeneity, and anti-Blackness” (lines 28-31) as these pertains to cultural appropriation, for example, which would require community internal discussions among Latinx people. While the hosts believe many Latinxs involved in social justice work recognize cultural appropriation when it comes from AW-USA people (line 1), they may not consider how their own

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<sup>14</sup> Watch the clip here: <https://youtu.be/6S7zGgL6Suw?t=134>

participation in certain cultural traditions may also have roots in historically marginalized communities that have been co-opted and erased. Furthermore, Latinx's ownership of these traditions may also make them culpable of perpetuating existing power structures which fit is more acceptable for non-Indigenous bodies to partake in traditional Indigenous customs as alluded to by Ruben in lines 23-24. While only partially represented in this excerpt, Cassandra explains that her previous investment in cultural appropriation was easy because it did not require her to critique her Mexican nationalist perspective. Accordingly, removing her energy from educating Anglo White people allowed her to be more critical of the ways in which she was also invested in discourses of mestizaje and nationalism that she now connects with inadvertent anti-Indigenous<sup>15</sup> and anti-Black sentiments. By reflecting on this growth through (un)learning and self-critique, Cassandra acknowledges that she is also in a process of learning. This process sets the precedent for calling out problematic discourses such as those that erase the complexity of the late Mexican artist, Frida Khalo's legacy (lines 38-39).

While the hosts make it clear in excerpt 2 that they are not "demonizing" people who choose to call out and educate Anglo White people on cultural appropriation, in excerpt 3 they explain to their audience their intention for shifting their focus towards community internal work (lines 35-36), which may be more difficult but is also more useful in their pursuit to productive social justice work.

*Towards becoming neither disposable nor above criticism*

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<sup>15</sup> See Alberto (2016) for a provocative critique on the use of "Indianness" in the Chicano movement.

In excerpt 4, Ruben has just finished talking about how much he admires Frida Kahlo. However, he believes that he must also critique the fact that she received critical acclaim for her artwork which, was largely inspired by Indigenous communities in Mexico – a form of cultural appropriation that he believes is conveniently ignored by other Mexicans and Chicanxs who also admire her. He argues that Kahlo’s co-option of Indigenous artistry in her own art allowed her to separate herself from non-ethnicized White people while being accepted into global markets because her Whiteness was unthreatening. As there is no shortage of Indigenous artists, Ruben implies that it is not a coincidence that Kahlo’s interpretation of Indigenous art is celebrated and world-renowned, given that she is a light-skinned woman with partial German heritage. Excerpt 4 begins with Cassandra acknowledging the realness of Ruben’s contradiction and foregrounds that liking Kahlo and critiquing her is an example of the sort of necessary contradictions to ignite important conversations. It is at this point that she mentions Gina Rodriguez.

Excerpt 4: *We’re not saying you can’t like Frida*  
 [43:52-44:53]

1	CASSANDRA	<i>That’s real</i>
2		<i>Yeah and when we critique Frida,</i>
3		<i>when we critique anyone,</i>
4		<i>that’s also not to say that you’re not allowed,</i>
5		<i>to enjoy them.</i>
6		<i>We’re not saying Fuck Frida and if you like her,</i>
7		<i>you’re this or you’re that,</i>
8		<i>or you can’t enjoy her art or she wasn’t a good artist.</i>
9		<i>Or not-</i>
10		<i>And especially that we’re not erasing that she was a queer,</i>
11		<i>disabled,</i>
12		<i>awesome woman who like did challenge gender norms.</i>
13		<i>That was all of these things,</i>
14		<i>but at the same time she could be problematic,</i>
15		<i>and she did appropriate Indigenous culture.</i>
16		<i>And she did-</i>
17		<i>You know-</i>
18		<i>So she can be all of these things at one time.</i>
19		<i>We’re not trying to erase those things.</i>
20		<i>We’re just trying to point these out to have bigger</i>

21 *conversations of what we're seeing today.*  
 22 *Right*  
 23 RUBEN *Yes!*  
 24 CASSANDRA *Because this was years ago,*  
 25 *but we're still having these conversations right now*  
 26 *because no one wants to critique people.*  
 27 *Especially if it's artists.*  
 28 *Especially if it's people that you admire,*  
 29 *and you hold to the standard.*  
 30 *And one of those people (laughs) is currently Gina Rodriguez.*  
 31 *So—*

In lines 1-5, Cassandra emphasizes that critiquing someone for uncritically using their privileges at the expense of someone else's marginalization does not mean that the privileged person becomes disposable. Furthermore, being interested in such a person is not wrong (lines 5 and 6), and that the person under critique may also face their own challenges or may contest hegemony in their own right (lines 11). Rather, Cassandra asserts that people can do great things and problematic at the same time. In lines 28 and 29, Cassandra ushers in topic of Gina Rodriguez, implying that she serves as a micro level example to initiate a larger conversation on subtle anti-Blackness within Latinidad.

In excerpt 5 below, Cassandra and Ruben introduce Rodriguez to their audience for those who might not know of her or her controversial remarks. This excerpt illustrates how the hosts frame anti-Blackness as not necessarily obvious., but rather, as something that may go unnoticed through its subtle appearance in discourse. Cassandra and Ruben identify non-Black Latinxs as people who often engage in anti-Blackness, a phenomenon they take ownership of and consequently move forward with discourses to dismantle it.

Excerpt 5: *Introducing Gina Rodriguez*  
 [46:35-48:08]

1 CASSANDRA *(laughs) So Gina Rodriguez is on Jane the Virgin.*  
 2 *She is also someone who a lot of people see representation in her.*

3                    *That she's Latina, she's Puerto Rican, she has her own show,*  
 4                    *she's doing amazing things. Which is awesome for her.*  
 5                    *However, Gina Rodriguez has some history of (sighs)*  
 6                    *I don't wanna say subtle, but, of anti-blackness.*  
 7                    *And I'm saying subtle because sometimes anti-blackness doesn't look like Gina*  
 8                    *Rodriguez is on the internet saying the n-word or talking shit about Black people*  
 9                    *directly.*  
 10                   *When we talk about anti-blackness, that can look a lot of ways,*  
 11                   *and sometimes, obviously, we don't know that these things are anti-black.*  
 12                   *It doesn't excuse it,*  
 13                   *but a lot of people don't realize that it's an anti-black sentiment or narrative.*  
 14                   *But when we address it,*  
 15                   *people still wanna act like they don't know what's happening,*  
 16                   *or they wanna tune it out.*  
 17                   *So, Gina Rodriguez.*  
 18                   *Let me pull up the receipts here of her tweets.*  
 19    RUBEN           *That was a great way to introduce it,*  
 20                   *because... yeah.*  
 21                   *A lot of the times, it's so embedded that we don't know it's happening.*  
 22                   *And we can't recognize it.*  
 23    CASSANDRA   *Exactly.*  
 24    RUBEN           *So that was a really good way.*  
 25    CASSANDRA   *Thank you, thank you.*  
 26                   *So, for example, (sighs)*  
 27                   *Gina Rodriguez, like a lot—she's not the only person*  
 28                   *A lot of non-black Latinx, especially non-black Chicanxs,*  
 29                   *We always have to call you out, directly—*  
 30    RUBEN           *Because that's our people!*  
 31    CASSANDRA   *That's our people.*  
 32                   *We gotta call you out.*  
 33    RUBEN           *(laughs)*

In lines 1-4, Cassandra describes Rodriguez as a Puerto Rican actress who has “her own show” and is “doing amazing things”. In lines 5-6, Cassandra juxtaposes Rodriguez’s Latina identity and trailblazing accomplishments with her “history of subtle anti-Blackness”. Through this juxtaposition, Cassandra underscores the complexity and significance of this issue. That is, while Rodriguez is a proud Latina and a woman of color who is a source of representation for young people who look like her, her continued presence in the spotlight due to “subtle” anti-Blackness is also harmful. Cassandra clarifies the potential subtleties of anti-Blackness in lines 7-9, stating that “anti-Blackness doesn’t look like Gina Rodriguez is on the internet saying the n-

word<sup>16</sup> or talking shit about Black people directly”. Yet, Cassandra acknowledges that anti-Blackness “can look a lot of ways” (line 10) and she therefore recognizes that many people (including her listeners) might not know that they are perpetuating “an anti-Black sentiment or narrative” (line 13). Ruben chimes in to acknowledge Cassandra’s framing of anti-Blackness as a “great way to introduce it” (line 19), as it is often “so embedded” and consequently unrecognizable, making some people confused as to how Rodriguez’s rhetoric warrants being called “anti-Black”. While they both acknowledge that not knowing a practice or discourse is anti-Black does not “excuse it” (line 12), they approach anti-Black deconstruction by generating conversations that highlight the specific anti-Black issue in question as one example of a larger problem. At the same time, they emphasize that once a person has been told that something is anti-Black, “act[ing] like they don’t know what’s happening” (line 15) becomes unacceptable.

Following this framing, Cassandra highlights the micro by using adequation with Rodriguez and other “non-Black Latinxs”. For instance, in lines 26 and 27, she pulls up Rodriguez’s tweet and states, “So, for Gina Rodriguez (sigh). Like a lot– she’s not the only person”. Through these lines – juxtaposed with Rodriguez’s accomplishments and the subtleties of anti-Blackness in lines 1-6 – Cassandra acknowledges Rodriguez’s identity as an accomplished Latina woman of color, but also someone accused of reproducing harmful discourses. In lines 28-30, Cassandra states, “non-Black Latinx, especially non-Black Chicanxs, we have to call you out directly–, because that’s our people”. Here, by calling directly to non-Black Latinxs and specifically non-Black Chicanxs (the group with whom they share the most sameness)

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<sup>16</sup> This episode was released a year before Rodriguez actually did get on the internet and say the n-word which was also discussed by the Bitter Brown Femmes podcast in episode 32.



they deploy adequation with non-Black Latinxs such as Rodriguez. Because they specify “non-Black Latinxs”, they also create distinction with Black Latinxs on the basis of racial experience. I argue that Cassandra and Ruben do not use adequation with non-Black Latinxs and distinction with Black Latinxs to confine “Latinx” to non-Black and thus further perpetuate the exclusion of AfroLatinidad. Rather, they deploy these tactics strategically to frame non-Black Latinxs as sharing a non-Black racial experience, making them the people whom they must “collect” for community (un)learning in the context of Black accompaniment. Thus, community-internal anti-Blackness that may be (re)produced by AfroLatinxs or non-Latinx Black people is not addressed here as this is not an experience to which they can attest and thus deconstruct.

### *Towards decentering Brown*

After establishing their goal to collect fellow non-Black Latinxs for community (un)learning, in excerpt 6 below Cassandra critiques Rodriguez’s style of Latinx advocacy by connecting it to the conceptual mutual exclusion of Blackness and Latinidad. Specifically, she traces the anti-Blackness of Rodriguez’s tweet to the erasure of AfroLatinx people in order to center an ideological Brown, mestizx identity. In doing so, Cassandra uses several discursive strategies to frame this as a micro level issue that speaks to larger, macro problems of anti-Blackness within Latinidad. Accordingly, the hosts use this example as an opportunity to form a collective among non-Black Latinx people to interrogate the centering of Brownness in Latinidad at the expense of Black rejection.

Excerpt 6: *You want a version of Latinx that looks like you*  
[49:55-51:12]

1            CASSANDRA    *So, from Black Panther.*  
2                            *And those are just Marvel.*

3 *Because she brought up superhero—*  
 4 *anyway, the point we're getting at is that first with that statement*  
 5 *what you're doing*  
 6 *or what we're doing is erasing Black and AfroLatinx*  
 7 *who have been in these movies.*  
 8 *So how are you gonna be like,*  
 9 *"Where are the Latinx?" when they're fucking right there.*  
 ....  
 15 CASSANDRA *So there were Black Latinx in these movies, but you don't see them as Latinx.*  
 16 *You don't see yourself.*  
 17 *That's what we're talking about.*  
 18 *Like, we want the specific color.*  
 19 *What you're saying is that you want non-Black Latinx.*  
 20 *You want a version of Latinx that looks like you.*  
 21 *And like you're erasing that Afro and Black Latinx exist,*  
 22 *and they've been in these movies.*  
 23 *And they've been in the media.*  
 ...  
 41 CASSANDRA *So Gina Rodriguez, with those statements that a lot of us make all the time,*  
 42 *erases Afro and Black Latinxs.*

In lines 1-4, Cassandra foregrounds the multiple problematic discourses embedded in Rodriguez's "statement" and the hosts' general suspicion of her Latinx advocacy. In lines 4-9, Cassandra addresses the first problem: the lack of acknowledgement towards the admittedly few AfroLatinx actors who did appear in various Marvel and DC films. Cassandra continues in lines 10-16, stating that mestizx Latinx people may not have been able to see themselves in these AfroLatinx actors because they don't look like them and "the specific color [of Brown]" is desired<sup>17</sup>. She not only problematizes the centering of an idealized mestizx phenotype, but she also uses racial markers in lines 6, 15, 21, and 42. (Black or AfroLatinx and non-Black Latinx) to relay – as I argue – counter discourses of the Latinx body. In doing so, she

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<sup>17</sup> While this discussion could lead to how AfroLatinxs are frequently cast in ways that still erase their Latinidad because films typically do not reflect their AfroLatinidad (but solely an embodied Blackness), here I focus on how the hosts contest non-Black Latinx people perpetuating anti-Blackness by making Latinx representation inaccessible to AfroLatinxs via the conceptual mutual exclusion of Blackness and Latinidad. Furthermore, Marvel and DC projects typically don't involve characters who embody any contemporary sociocultural or ethnoracial identity. Thus, despite the inclusion of AfroLatinxs, these films addressed neither their Blackness nor their Latinidad. In *Black Panther* – a Black superhero film – the characters embodied Blackness from a fictional nation likely situated in Africa, which arguably did not center a contemporary identity.

disrupts the pan-ethnoracial conception of Latinidad in hegemonic discourses that treat “Latinx” as a separate and homogenous racial category.

While discussing the centering of “Brown”, Cassandra deploys adequation as a tactic through the use of personal pronouns that implicate all non-Black Latinx people as culpable of perpetuating ideologies that form anti-Black discourses. For instance, in lines 4-6, Cassandra states “with that statement, so what **you’re** doing – or what **we’re** doing – is erasing Black or AfroLatinx”. In these lines, she switches from second person, *you*, to first person plural, *we*, drawing attention to how such statements form a collective ideology that erases AfroLatinxs in the construction of a Latinidad that centers Brownness. This strategy is also deployed in lines 15 and 16 where Cassandra begins with second person, *you*, to direct the dialogue towards Rodriguez and those who support her perspective. However, in line 18, she makes another shift to first person plural, *we*, in the statement “like, **we** [mestizx and/or non-Black Latinx] want the specific color”, again forming a collective ideology surrounding these discourses by non-Black Latinxs. This shift happens once more in lines 19-21, where Cassandra begins with second person, *you*, when stating that people want non-AfroLatinx representation as “a version of Latinx that looks like **you**”. Yet, in lines 41 and 42, Cassandra brings the discourse back to the collective by stating, “so Gina Rodriguez, with those statements that a lot of **us** [non-Black Latinx] make all the time erases, Afro or Black Latinxs”. This positioning frames the ideologies embedded in Rodriguez’s tweet as ubiquitous and community-internal and implies that they should not be seen as limited to one individual (Gina Rodriguez) but must be discussed as an example of how such ideologies permeate the community as a whole via discourses of Latinx identity.

As such, Cassandra's use of adequation forms a collective with their podcast's non-Black Latinx audience. In this way, she negotiates how ideological tropes of Latinidad center a Brown body, which contributes to the lack of acknowledgement of AfroLatinxs and thus to anti-Blackness.

In excerpt 7, Cassandra and Ruben interrogate how *Latinx* is used interchangeably with *Brown* which mystifies color and racial diversity in Latin America. Below, Cassandra and Ruben discuss how people use national labels like *Mexican*, panethnicized labels like *Latinx* and racialized labels like *Brown*, all of which are connected to mestizaje and center the mestizx body.

Excerpt 7: "By saying the Brown community, I'm erasing Black Latinx"  
[35:40-36:45]

1	CASSANDRA	<i>We say the Brown Community,</i>
2		<i>but what we're trying to say is the Latinx communities.</i>
3		<i>By saying the Brown community, I'm erasing Black Latinx</i>
4		<i>I'm erasing white Latinx,</i>
5		<i>which I don't care if I erase them to be honest (Ruben laughs)</i>
6	CASSANDRA	<i>But you are erasing—</i>
7	RUBEN	<i>Bitch (laughs)</i>
8	CASSANDRA	<i>You are erasing Black Latinx and their experiences</i>
9		<i>and co-opting</i>
10	RUBEN	<i>And also Indigenous people.</i>
11		<i>Indigenous Latinxs who don't exist within this binary of</i>
12		<i>Black, white, or in Brownness.</i>
13		<i>Indigenous people are different because it's not about skin</i>
14		<i>or blood quantum.</i>
15		<i>It's about community ties.</i>
16		<i>So that doesn't apply.</i>
17	CASSANDRA	<i>And when people say Brown, they also mean Indigenous.</i>
18		<i>The reason people say Brown is because they're like,</i>
19		<i>"Oh, well, we're all Indigenous."</i>
20		<i>That all Mexicans,</i>
21		<i>all Latinx have some Indigenous or are Indigenous.</i>
22		<i>And that is not true because,</i>
23		<i>again, we go back to there are white fucking Latinx</i>
24		<i>Mexicans that are descendants of colonizers that have been</i>
25		<i>there.</i>
26		<i>How the fuck are they Indigenous?</i>
27		<i>I'm not Indigenous.</i>
28		<i>I'm Brown. I'm not Indigenous, though.</i>

Although Cassandra and Ruben do not use the term *mestizaje* in this excerpt, they interrogate the connection that both *Latinx* and *Brown* have to *mestizaje* and Vasconcelos' "cosmic race." For instance, in lines 1-4 Cassandra argues that "Brown" and "Latinx" are often used interchangeably, which discursively denies that Blackness, Indigeneity, and Whiteness are possible within *Latinidad* as distinct categories that yield distinct experiences. In lines 3 and 4, Cassandra asserts that the term *Brown* cannot index or encompass Black Latinx people or White Latinx people. That is, the conception of Latinx that she critiques here stems from *mestizaje*. While she does not endorse a *mestizaje* framework of *Latinidad* and instead tries to disrupt an automatic Brown-bodied indexicality, she may discursively reinforce this link by using "White Latinx" and "Black Latinx" but never "Brown" to modify Latinx. This suggests that *Brown Latinx* or *mestizx Latinx* is redundant. Moreover, prefacing *Latinx* with "Black/non-Black" or "Indigenous/non-Indigenous" reveals that Blackness and Indigeneity are still treated as marked subcategories within *Latinidad* even in critical discourses. Nevertheless, the hosts appear to challenge whether *Latinx* is able to discursively capture the complexity and racial diversity of *Latinidad* because it only recognizes people who phenotypically and culturally represent Brownness. Therefore, although racial qualifiers are useful linguistic resources to expand the indexicality of Latinx, only using them to refer to Black, White, or Indigenous people does not fully challenge the centering of Brown or *mestizx*.

In addition to using racial qualifiers to disrupt monolithic discourses of *Latinidad*, the hosts also draw attention to the ironic hegemony of Whiteness within *Latinidad*. Such hegemony has been extensively pointed out by AfroLatinx scholars,

including the Black Latinas Know Collective (BLKC), when it comes to the representation of Latinidad in scholarly discourses who argue that light skin Latinx people are overly represented (Dizney-Flores et al., 2019). Accordingly, in lines 3-5, Cassandra draws attention to the fact that although Blackness and Whiteness are ideologically erased within Latinidad, a preference is still shown for Whiteness or proximity to Whiteness. Cassandra's use of "erase" draws attention to the different ramifications of this erasure towards White versus Black Latinx bodies. That is, when it comes to Black Latinx, I interpret Cassandra's use of "erase" as referring to how the Black body is rendered invisible within hegemonic representations of Latinidad. By contrast, when Cassandra uses "erase" for White Latinx (which she appears to half-jokingly support), I interpret this as referencing the fact that White or light skin Latinx people are hyper-represented and overvalued (e.g., in media and positions of power), so limiting their representation creates opportunities to redistribute power. Nevertheless, Cassandra's comments present counter discourses of the Latinx body that argue that Whiteness and Latinidad are not any more mutually exclusive than Blackness and Latinidad (Garcia, 2015).

### *Towards addressing White normativity*

In the final example below, excerpt 8, the hosts allude to some pushback on social media by those who did not view Rodriguez's comments as problematic. Much of this pushback stemmed from not understanding how calling attention to legitimate concerns about Latinx representation perpetuates anti-Blackness. The hosts respond by interrogating how Rodriguez's Marvel and DC tweet not only embeds ideologies of a Latinx body that excludes AfroLatinidad but also forms a Latinx advocacy that

denounces rare cases of Black visibility while remaining silent during innumerable cases of White hypervisibility.

Excerpt 8: *How is this anti-Black?*  
[55:00-56:36]

1 CASSANDRA *And people were like, "how is that anti-Black?"*  
2 *And that's what I mean by Gina Rodriguez isn't out here saying the n-word.*  
3 *She's not over here talking shit about Black people,*  
4 *but she is erasing them and that is anti-Black.*  
5 *She erases them,*  
6 *and then she also tries to use Black people's hyper-visibility*  
7 *to turn it to non-Black Latinx, which is also very interesting*  
8 *because how many white fucking superhero movies have there been?*  
9 *Iron Man, Spiderman, Batman-*  
10 RUBEN *All the mans.*  
11 CASSANDRA *All the mans.*  
12 *And all of a sudden,*  
13 *there's a Black superhero movie and this is the time that we choose to say,*  
14 *"Hey Marvel, what about us?"*  
15 *Again the "us" being non-Black Latinx.*  
16 *Because there are Black Latinx in those movies.*  
17 *So why haven't you been saying that when there's a Thor movie?*  
18 *When there's an Iron Man movie?*  
19 *I don't see you all saying nothing about that.*  
20 *Actually, I see you all going out and supporting those movies.*  
21 *Which is fine, whatever.*  
22 *Like I said, I like Thor.*  
23 *But if you want this representation which is problematic in itself,*  
24 *then be real about it and do it 24/7,*  
25 *not just when Black people have a moment for themselves.*  
26 *Just let Black people fucking have their moment.*  
27 *Why do you always have to chime in and make it about you?*  
28 *Because you act like fucking white people.*  
29 RUBEN *You do.*  
30 *(mocking voice) "What about us? Like, blah blah."*  
31 *It's annoying.*  
32 CASSANDRA *(mocking voice) "I am mad when attention is not about my specific skin tone,*  
33 *number C47G."*  
34 *That's how people be acting, for real*  
35 *"Like, it has to be my specific mestizo color, or else I don't care about it."*

Cassandra reminds the audience that anti-Blackness isn't always blatant disgust or overt disrespect for Black people in lines 1-4, but that erasure via discourse is also an anti-Black practice. She calls into question Rodriguez's apparent discomfort with rare Black hypervisibility as in the *Black Panther* movie but her ostensible complicity towards White hypervisibility. For instance, in lines 8-15 Cassandra points out that there are

countless Marvel and DC films with overwhelming White representation, but only with the emergence of a Black superhero movie is the lack of Latinx representation commented on (a similar critique is presented by the Twitter user in Figure 2). Thus, she argues that an incremental advancement for Black people should not be the time when mestizx Latinx people call for their own representation, because it appears to disingenuously divert attention from a proud “moment” for Black people (lines 25 and 26). For example, Rodriguez did not directly acknowledge this media milestone for Black people in her tweet.

Not only do Cassandra and Ruben suggest non-Black Latinxs have a complicity with White hypervisibility, but they also use adequation between mestizx/Brown Latinx people and White people in lines 26-35 when Cassandra states, “[j]ust let Black people fucking have their moment. Why do you always have to make it about you? Because you act like fucking White people”, and Ruben cosigns by adding “you do”. That is, they link discourses promoted by Rodriguez and her supporters to the inclusivity of anti-Blackness by adequating them to ideologies of Whiteness that involve the need to be re-centered when Blackness becomes visible. Ruben and Cassandra continue in lines 30-35 to discursively embody an imagined mestizx person by mocking their imagined stances of the need to be vocal about Latinx advocacy when there is Black representation (but not when there is White representation), and the need to see a “mestizo color” (line 35) for adequate Latinx representation.

In any event, Cassandra states that the representation non-Black Latinxs are calling for is problematic in and of itself (line 23) as it requires an idealized phenotypic representation of Latinxs as a tan Brown or fair skin. In doing so, she does not



denounce the need for mestizx presenting people to have representation, but rather argues that there needs to be a critical discussion regarding what this representation would look like, as it might continue to confine Latinx representation to discourses of mestizaje that erase Black diasporic communities and existing Indigenous communities in Latin America while upholding fair skin Latinxs as preferable representations of a Latinx. The hosts attest to how Rodriguez's tweet subtly reproduces problematic discourses that affect Black people with and without Latinx heritage and how the comfort with or preference for Whiteness is reminiscent in both the rejection of AfroLatinxs as Latinxs (the conceptual mutual exclusion of Blackness and Latinidad) and the apparent discomfort with embodied Black (hyper)visibility (the denial of anti-Black inclusivity).

## **Conclusion**

This thesis has focused on subtle anti-Blackness within discourses of Latinidad and how the Bitter Brown Femmes podcast has worked towards Black accompaniment through strategies that I call "highlighting the micro" and "collecting your people" via counter discourses of the body and tactics of intersubjectivity. In doing so, this work has provided some insight into the use of podcasts as a space for social justice work through engaging in counter hegemonic discourses that negotiate ideological shifts and aid community (un)learning. Furthermore, how language plays a crucial role in both creating and transforming sociocultural subjectivities via discourse; and renegotiating dominant discourses of Latinidad, including what denotes a Latinx body and what subjectivities Latinxs are capable of assuming, are both crucial to Black communities.

Specifically, while highlighting the micro, Cassandra and Ruben stir away from discourses that frame anti-Blackness as an isolated incident, but rather isolated incidents that reflect anti-Blackness are mere examples of how larger ideologies are functioning in everyday practices. Furthermore, with collecting their people, the hosts stir away from discourses that frame culpability as only towards the person who expressed or perpetuated an anti-Black sentiment, but rather places it within the community as something to deconstruct as a collective. In both strategies, Cassandra and Ruben move towards several discourses that serve as useful frameworks for productive allyship or accompaniment. By moving towards limiting one's labor and community-internal discourses, the hosts focus on the people with who they share sameness. This acknowledges their limitation in social justice work as well as identifies where they can be more effective. By moving towards making no one disposable nor above criticism, the hosts highlight the inevitability that people who are otherwise admirable may also recirculate problematic discourses. Hence, calling them out is for their own improvement and the improvement of their communities. Lastly, by moving towards decentering Brown and addressing White normativity, the hosts expand dialogues within Latinidad to examine how identity construction can encode exclusion in harmful ways.

Nevertheless, the hosts do encounter some ideological pitfalls. For instance, while collecting your people, which is non-Black Latinxs, the hosts may oversimplify histories of race and racial formation in Latin American nations through their interrogation of mestizaje. While the vast majority of Latin American nations have upheld the concept of mestizaje as a nationalist project against U.S. and European

imperialism, there were still different sociohistorical processes in these nations that contributed to different localized ideologies of race including Blackness, Indigeneity, and Whiteness. Some Latin American nations had (and remains to have) a significantly higher Afrodescendent population such as Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Brazil, among others, while others have a significantly higher Indigenous population such as Mexico, Guatemala, Peru, and others. For this reason, the ways in which nations have come to understand their specific composition of mestizaje is dependent on what communities are seen to have contributed to that mixture and what practices or customs are still around that have a direct lineage to those communities (Spanish, Indigenous, and African). While the hosts have a Mexican heritage, Rodriguez has a Puerto Rican heritage, making it likely that their experiences with and understandings of Blackness and Latinidad different and perhaps conflicting. In this case, Rodriguez's Puerto Rican identity and Chicago upbringing were not considered, neither were the hosts Chicanx and California (Ruben) and Texas (Cassandra) upbringing when it came to their non-Black Latinx identities. Nevertheless, this is potentially why the hosts push towards community-internal discussions so these nuances may receive the attention they require.

Additionally, collecting people on the basis of being not Black and Latinx may reinforce the panethnic or panethnoracial treatment of Latinx people on the basis of them being "non-Black Latinxs". That is, all Latinxs who are not Black may be framed as having the same experiences across Latinx ethnic groups. In doing so, the hosts may run the risk of being accused of Mexican hegemony or centering of Mexican and/or Chicanx knowledge and epistemology in discourses of Latinidad. While Rodriguez also

identifies as “non-Black”, her Puerto Rican Latinx identity formation in the Chicago context is likely very complex. Cassandra’s Chicana Tejana experience and Ruben’s Chicanx from California experience are also equally complex experiences that also yielded distinct understandings of Blackness and Latinidad. This provides another reason for factoring in lived experiences that take into account localized, racial configurations. Despite these issues, Cassandra and Ruben move discourses of social justice in a beneficial direction that recognizes primarily the subtlety of anti-Blackness in discourses. Specifically, they challenge how these discourses form ideologies of Latinidad that lead to the conceptual mutual exclusion of Blackness and Latinidad and the inclusivity of anti-Blackness.

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