MESTIZAJE UNDONE: A QUALITATIVE SOCIAL MEDIA ANALYSIS OF AFRO-LATINX IDENTITY & #BLACKLIVESMATTER ACTIVISM

by

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(Under the Direction of Patricia Richards & Maryann Erigha)

ABSTRACT

What does it mean to exist as a Black person in a community that is notorious in its anti-Black reputation? In the U.S., those who identify as Afro-Latinx, do so at the intersection of a Latinx community that often rejects them and an African American community that often does not understand them. This work examines the relationship between Afro-Latinx identity and the #BlackLivesMatter movement via social media. My research questions include: How do Twitter users utilize this platform to assert and affirm their identities? I use a combination of hashtag coding, content analysis, and in-depth interviews with social media users to pursue these questions. For Afro-Latinx individuals experiencing "ethno-racial dissonance", social media provides an essential avenue to disrupt the anti-Black discourse that surrounds Latinidad. The data suggest that online participation is an impactful component in the development of their Afro-Latinx identity. Through their participation in online discourses and activism, Afro-Latinx individuals are able to build up protective factors in the face of continued anti-Black messaging and erasure.

INDEX WORDS: Afro-Latinx, Black Lives Matter, Identity, Social Media, Activism

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my grandmothers, Trinidad and Daisy, fierce Afro-Latina storytellers in their own right.

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

What does it mean to exist as a Black person in a community that is notorious in its anti-Black reputation? In the US, people who identify as Afro-Latinx, do so at the intersection of a Latinx community that often rejects them and an African American community that often does not understand them. They share a linked fate with both groups in the form of inequality, discrimination, and state-sanctioned violence. I set out to investigate how they understand themselves in racial justice movements like Black Lives Matter.

Although more Africans were brought to Latin America and the Caribbean than North America during the trans-Atlantic slave trade (Dixon and Burdick 2012: ix), Afro-Latinx people globally continue to have to fight for recognition and equality. "Over 90 percent of the approximately 10.7 million enslaved Africans who survived the Middle Passage voyage were taken to Latin America and the Caribbean, whereas only .036 percent were taken to the United States" (Hernandez 2022: 13). This history conveys the magnitude of the Afro-descendant population in Latin America. While Latinxs' legacy of anti-Blackness runs deep, the greater body of research into anti-Blackness following the Transnational slave trade more often focuses on the US' approach to racism, while understandings of anti-Blackness in Latin America continue to fall short to claim "racial innocence" (Hernandez 2022).

For example, historically Latin American theorists have presented mestizaje, the practice and discourse of racial mixing in Latin America, as a superior alternative to the racial binary in

US; unfortunately, this representation of mestizaje is also reflective of their response to American colonialism (Hooker 2014: 195). While this multicultural concept could potentially be used for anti-racist theorizing, many Latin American countries have often used mestizaje to "obscure racism and legitimize the rule of dominant groups" (Hooker 2014: 195). The notion of mestizaje proposes that "as a uniquely racially mixed people Latinos are incapable of racist attitudes" (Hernandez 2022: 7). However, this discourse often centers white and Indigenous components while further erasing Afro-descendants.

The Pew Research Center 2020 data reported "there were about 6 million Afro-Latino adults in the United States, and they made up about 2% of the U.S. adult population and 12% of the adult Latino population" (Gonzalez-Barrera 2022). And yet, there have been many efforts to establish Latinx as a race of its own in the US because, Latinx people often do not fit neatly into the prescribed categories of Black, white, or Indigenous. The insistence that all Latinxs are "brown" further obscures this particular racialized experience (Hernandez 2022). Furthermore, this concept can be problematized for its attempt to gloss over the sexual violence of European colonization responsible for much of this early mixing. Additionally, these efforts may actually further erase the visibility of Afro-Latinx individuals. In particular, Afro-Latinxs in the United States, with its strong emphasis on racial binaries, often have a fraught relationship with their ethno-racial identity. This research aims to understand Afro-Latinx experiences and encounters with the #BlackLivesMatter Movement via social media. This chapter provides an introduction as well as context for the study, followed by the research questions, the significance, and finally the limitations.

Black Lives Matter Background

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement started to take shape in the wake of Trayvon Martin's murder by George Zimmerman and the resulting acquittal in 2013. The movement continued to strengthen after the murder of Michael Brown by Darren Wilson, a police officer in Ferguson, MO in 2014. The BLM movement has continued to expand and transform since its creation by Black women, specifically Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi (BlackLivesMatter.com). While founders and organizers were intentional about framing this movement as an intersectional effort against state sanctioned violence broadly, a distributed framing approach is useful for analyzing the BLM movement. Distributed framing describes the process of shaping a movement's identity by a broader range of social movement actors including a consideration of the impact of social media (Ince, Rojas, and Davis 2017). This helps explain why BLM is often understood as primarily about police brutality against men (Crooks-Allen n.d.). The police have been allowed to kill a large number of people and a disproportionate number of those people are Black; in 2016, Black people accounted for 24% of the victims in reported police shootings, despite representing merely 13.3% of the population (Swaine et al. 2015; US Census Bureau 2018). The failure to indict the police responsible in these cases sent a clear message to the American people: it was legal to kill Black people. As a response, people took to the streets, their phones, and to social media to declare that Black lives do matter, despite what police and the legal system have tried to otherwise convey. This movement was able to survive periods of abeyance, living on through digital channels.

BLM activity re-emerged in a big way in the summer of 2020 following the murder of George Floyd by Minnesota police. This loss came mere months after the March 2020 murder of Breonna Taylor by police and the racially motivated murder of Ahmaud Aubery by vigilantes in

February of 2020. The 2020 global Covid-19 pandemic set the stage for a notable turning point in attention to BLM; with many more people confined to their homes, the world was watching. BLM continues to be relevant globally.

Background of the Problem

Afro-Latinxs make up a significant portion of the Black and Latinx population in the US and beyond. This population primarily is comprised of those with origins in Latin America who were descendants of people captured from West Africa during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. They, like other groups in the African Diaspora, carry a vast array of cultural and historical narratives.

Research Problem

Afro-Latinx ethno-racial identity is often misunderstood, denied, or erased entirely. This work aims to further our understanding of this group. Recent research by Hordge-Freeman and Veras (2020) investigated this identity as Afro-Latinxs experience ethno-racial dissonance, or a disconnect between their ethnic and racial identities. While this research is a much-needed development in Afro-Latinx studies, there remains a gap when it comes to ethno-racial consonance, or the process by which Afro-Latinxs reconcile their ethnic and racial identities. The present research built on a concept Hordge-Freeman and Veras (2020) termed "virtually Black" to explore Afro-Latinx avenues for resisting the anti-Black forces that contribute to this dissonance. This work addresses a gap that left these practices of resistance understudied.

Research Aims, Objectives, & Questions

Given this gap in the research, this study aimed to understand how Afro-Latinxs used social media for identity claims-making and activism. As an Afro-Latinx academic, this work was designed with the aim of amplifying Afro-Latinx voices and experiences in spaces where we

are often absent. Similar to many of the participants in this study who did not see themselves in the media, I did not see my community represented in the research. As such, my study centered on the lived experiences of Afro-Latinx activists from how they understand themselves. While lived experiences are central to this research, the "presentations of data" that follow serve as mediated re-tellings of these experiences (Evans-Winters 2018). This study's objectives are to understand 1) how the Black Lives Matter movement plays a role in the formation of Afro-Latinx identities, 2) how those identities might affect participation in the movement, and 3) how anti-Blackness in Latinx communities may affect these relationships.

As such, my research questions were: 1) How do Afro-Latinx social media users understand the Black Lives Matter Movement in relation to their identity? 2) How do those social media users utilize these platforms to assert and affirm their identities? And how does gender impact or intersect with this process? 3) How might #BlackLivesMatter have impacted the proliferation of #AfroLatinx*?

This research took a qualitative approach to investigating Afro-Latinx identity and activism in the BLM era. I sought to understand how these processes unfold on social media, specifically Twitter. Employing a multi-method approach has thoroughly benefitted this research. As such, I used Twitter data and follow up interviews with Afro-Latinx social media users to understand this community and their experiences. Trusting participants as experts of their lived experiences and centering the transformative impact of social media in social movements has shaped this research endeavor. While the tweets that I compiled certainly conveyed a narrative that counters mainstream Latinidad discourse on their own, the follow-up interviews provided greater insight into the meaning-making processes for this group.

Social media provides an opportunity for Afro-Latinx resistance and allows social media users to approach an ethno-racial consonance. This benefits both the Afro-Latinx Twitter users and the Afro-Latinxs who bear witness to the declarations of identity and assertions of their place in the Black Lives Matter movement. These Afro-Latinx social media users' participation both in online discourse and online activism propels them towards their cohesive ethno-racial identity.

Methodology

My methodology involved a multi-method approach to understanding Afro-Latinx social media users grounded in interpreting presentations of their lived experience. I collected tweets and conducted semi-structured follow up interviews with Afro-Latinx social media users. The Twitter data I compiled come from a cross section of Twitter posts that used #AfroLatinx* as well as #BlackLivesMatter to demonstrate the active resistance to anti-Blackness taking place at this intersection. With an epistemic foundation of trusting marginalized groups with their own narratives, in-depth interviews were necessary to better understand the experiences captured in the tweets. According to Esterberg (2002), "a number of feminist scholars have argued that these [semi structured/in-depth] interviews are a particularly good way to study women and other marginalized groups…[who] have not always had the opportunity to tell their own stories" (87). I then conducted inductive coding with these data sources and analyzed them in the context of one another.

Framework

This project approached the study of Afro-Latinx social media users as agentic actors by centering their resistance. In order to see the process by which Afro-Latinxs were able to reconcile their ethnic and racial identities, or move towards an ethno-racial consonance via social media, we needed to first understand the meaning-making behind the tweets. I employed a

distributed frame to the Black Lives Matter movement, which allowed for a more inclusive view of the social movement actors (Ince et al. 2017).

Definition of Terms

Terms for Afro-descendants in and from Latin America vary by context and time period. These terms as a display of pan-ethnic identity may also be different in the US than it is in other countries in Central or South America. As a result of the dynamics of diasporic connections across Latin American borders, Central and South Americans may use other terms that speak to their specific socio-historic backgrounds. According to Flores and Román (2009),

> An adequate conceptualization of the term 'Afro-Latino' in the US context needs to activate and encompass these four theoretical coordinates: the tradition of the group of Afro-Latinos themselves, the transnational discourse or ethnoscape, the historical and ongoing relationship between Latinos and African Americans, and the distinctive phenomenological experience of what it means to be both Black and Latino in this country. (321)

This "distinctive phenomenological experience" in the US context comes through in much of this study.

I prioritized the use of Afro-Latinx due to its intentional effort to include gender-expansive members of this community. While recent scholars cited the "pragmatic ease of presentation" and "simplicity" of the term Latino, this does not inherently make it "more inclusive of Latinos across generations and geographic spaces" (Hernandez 2022:31-32). In 2019 the Pew Research Center found that Latinx terminology is often unfamiliar to many who may fall into this group, and only about 3% use this term, often "college students or inhabitants of some large cities" (Hernandez 2022:32). However, the goal of this study was an attempt at

seeing the most marginalized within the Latinx community and so the explicit choice to use this particular term is intentional.

For this study, Afro-Latinx participants were defined by self-identification both in their use of hashtags and in their interviews. However, we should also consider the US bias; the term Afro-Latinx may be more commonly used in the US versus other countries where users are promoting activism and the #BlackLivesMatter movement.

Social media primarily refers to Twitter in this study, but other platforms come up as well. Twitter is the micro-blogging platform where most of the data analyzed here originate. Posts made on Twitter are called tweets. I use hashtags (#) to identify tweets for collection; hashtags are words or phrases preceded by a # symbol which can be used as a search term, such as #AfroLatina or #BlackLivesMatter. These hashtags are a way for social media users to indicate the digital conversation topics in which they wish their tweet to enter. Ince et al. (2017) argued,

> The use of hashtags, and other indexing behaviours, are a form of distributed framing. That is, framing via hashtags is one way that movements develop an understanding of problems and solutions that does not exclusively rely on leaders within the movement or other highly visible individuals. (2017:1818)

Social media users have been able to utilize these platforms and their digital tools to participate in online activism. Their online activism can take many different forms, including writing tweets that raise awareness, show support for causes, and push social justice conversations forward. Through these actions, Afro-Latinxs push back against the critique that "slacktivism", defined as a low-effort attempt at activism often through online activity, makes to discredit online activism (Oxford n.d.).

Summary

This dissertation will review the literature relevant to the intersection of Afro-Latinx identity and social media activism. The literature review includes sociological theories of race that are foundational to this study before turning to Black ethnic groups and Afro-Latinxs specifically. I then review the literature on social media activism, before concluding with anti-Blackness in Latinx media. Following the literature review, I explain the methodology of this project and how I conducted this multimethod qualitative analysis of Afro-Latinx social media users through tweets and in-depth interviews. Then I present my findings focusing on discourse and activism in two chapters.

Chapter 4 analyzes how Afro-Latinx people use their social media to disrupt discourse for awareness and education. This often is in response to the anti-Black erasure in the mainstream media which fails to represent Afro-Latinxs authentically. Ultimately, the space that Afro-Latinxs carve out for themselves affirms both their own identity and also the identities of other Afro-Latinxs who see their posts. Chapter 5 focuses on activism and how Afro-Latinxs critique notions of "slacktivism" that strip online activism of its legitimacy. This analysis will show the importance of online activism for their community through their use of hybrid activism which bridges their online and offline activism. My data also demonstrate the value of online activism for intersectional movements where they seek to provide accessible avenues for participation and center the experiences of Black women. I conclude with a discussion of this research's findings and recommend approaches for future projects.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand the intersection of Afro-Latinx ethno-racial identity, activism, and social media, there are a number of relevant bodies of literature to examine. The empirical literature relevant to a study of Afro-Latinx social media users in the Black Lives Matter era is scarce, particularly in sociology. However, if we take a more transdisciplinary approach, there exists the possibility for a more robust review. The present work is poised to contribute to the intersection of sociology, Afro-Latinx studies, social movement studies, communications, and media studies. Afro-Latinxs are an ethno-racial group that can be differently situated in various contexts. While I primarily approach Afro-Latinxs as a group in the Black diaspora, it is also important to engage with them as part of a Latinx community.

I begin this review with a brief interrogation of previous race theories of relevance, particularly racial formation and intersectionality, before introducing the literature on Black ethnic groups more broadly. I follow this by turning to the literature addressing Afro-Latinxs specifically, including recent sociological studies of Afro-Latinx identity and experiences. I continue with a review of activism and social media literature and conclude by incorporating works from communication and media studies that illuminate the terrain of anti-blackness in Latinx media through a Latino Critical Communications lens.

Race Theories

I begin with sociological theories of race because they are foundational to this type of research. In the influential book *Racial Formation in the United States*, Omi and Winant (2014)

provided many useful concepts for thinking about how race is formed in the US context. They used the idea of hegemony to capture how race is not only formed, but maintained in order to keep the status quo intact. According to the authors, "emphasizing the political dimensions of race and racism allows us to discern the contours of the racial system, to understand what racial hegemony looks like, to specify its contradictions and to envision alternative scenarios" (Omi and Winant 2014:138). The politics of race provides both the how and the why of race and racism. Their concept of racial projects also clarified specific political agendas designed to advance a particular racial group.

A racial project is simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines. Racial projects connect what race means in a particular discursive practice and the ways in which both social structures and everyday experiences are racially organized, based upon that meaning (Omi and Winant 1994:56).

This theory is relevant as explanation of the potential fatality of the white gaze as a form of maintaining whites' status as the dominant group in the US context. My previous research (2019) found that the danger of being seen by white people as African Americans was a mechanism by which Afro-Caribbean people were pushed towards adopting a Black identity. This process may also occur with Afro-Latinx people, and is just one example of the way that racial hegemony may influence Afro-Latinx identity. Similar to the racial project, Hernandez proposed that "light-skinned Latinos" are offered a "racial bribe" where they gain proximity to whiteness in exchange for distancing themselves from Blackness (Hernandez 2022:121). Racial formation theory can be used to unpack the political influence on racial identity, which this group must navigate in the current research.

However, *in Rethinking Racial Formation Theory: A Systemic Racism Critique*, Feagin and Elias (2013) rejected the notion that oppressed people could consent to any sort of hegemony that keeps them oppressed.

To claim that subordinated groups have truly consented to a racialized rule or have voluntarily "assimilated" to their position in the white-imposed racial hierarchy is theoretically and empirically misguided, neglecting a long history of past and present African, Native, Latin, and Asian American struggles with white oppressors. From a systemic racism perspective, group coercion and compliance, even group survival, is more accurate than group consent. (Feagin and Elias 2013:955)

They proposed that the problem with the white gaze was not a simple matter of being seen as Black, leading to identifying as such, but instead emphasized the potentially fatal aspect as a threat to survival that forces Black immigrants into this category. This contrasts with racial formation theory, where Feagin and Elias emphasized a more systemic lens that explicitly addressed oppression.

Furthermore, with their systemic theory of oppression, Feagin and Elias also illustrated how oppressed groups continuously resist white domination.

The ongoing dialectical relationship between extensive white oppression and resistance of Blacks and other racial groups, including assertive counter-framing against systemic racism, provides a much more realistic picture of actual US racial conflicts than that suggested in formation theory's democratic-pluralist view. (Feagin and Elias 2013:953)

Feagin and Elias provided an explanation for the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement in response to state-sanctioned violence. Even as the state maintained a hegemonic devaluation of Black life, Black people rallied together to resist the notion that murdering Black

people could be inconsequential. Particularly relevant to this study was the way the emergent popularity of claiming an Afro-Latinx identity resists the anti-Blackness that was ingrained in the Latinx community.

From a more transnational approach, Bonilla-Silva (1997) provided an alternate structural theory of racism, where he restricted applicability to a specific context that could be better for drawing comparisons. He described how structural racism affected people even without explicit racism, stating "societies in which race has declined in significance, such as Brazil, Cuba, and Mexico, still have a racial problem insofar as the racial groups have different life chances" (Bonilla-Silva 1997:471). Since Bonilla-Silva presented multiple countries with a similar issue of a declined significance of race in the discourse but persistent racism, this presents an avenue to compare with the United States, where it is very explicit but similarly unequal.

Structural racism can also account for the material consequences of the present. "The reproduction of racial phenomena in contemporary societies is explained in this framework, not by reference to a long-distant past, but in relation to its contemporary structure" (Bonilla-Silva 1997:476). By comparing to a contemporary structure, researchers can look past the history or discourse and to focus on the tangible effects of racism. While Afro-Latinxs may identify differently depending on where they are from and other factors, Bonilla-Silva was more concerned with the actual outcomes people of color faced when they encountered a particular structure, such as the US carceral state. Here, the white gaze is not just about feelings or attitudes, it can affect life chances in encounters that can lead to death or incarceration. Witnessing these life chance outcomes could affect how Afro-Latinx may choose to align themselves, despite their understanding of their shared origins with African Americans.

The other factors that may impact the choices that Afro-Latinxs make in their identity-claims reflect a more intersectional experience. Intersectionality is a concept developed out of Black Feminism and coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in order to explain the particular oppression of Black women under racism and sexism. Intersectionality understands these concepts as co-constituted, rather than additive. Crenshaw captured this in her statement that the "intersection experience, is greater than the sum of racism and sexism" (Crenshaw 1989:140). This concept exhibited "the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed" (Crenshaw 1991:1245). When looking at the Afro-Latinx population, my intention was not to limit my analysis to race or ethnicity. Instead, I critically interrogated how these ethno-racial identities intersected with other identities, such as gender and country of origin, so that I could analyze these interactions from a more holistic view. While these theories of race offer different perspectives, we can use them to think about how racial identity is situated in the US and how Afro-Latinxs are impacted in their identification.

Intra-racial Tensions in Black Ethnic Groups

It is imperative we understand Black people as a diverse category to approach this research. There are many different groups and ethnicities under the overarching umbrella of Blackness. These ethnic groups have very different cultures and identities; they sometimes even hold conflicting views and stereotype each other. Mary Waters interviewed Caribbean immigrants and found they had internalized negative stereotypes about African Americans and the Black experience in the United States. Accordingly, these immigrants tried to distance themselves from what they perceived as traditional African American identities and experiences. They often cited their values of education and hard work as their reason for potential success. In Waters' study, Black immigrants also believed that African Americans had cultural values that

disadvantaged them; in contrast, they believed that White Americans had earned their advantages. Despite these negative perceptions of African Americans, second generation youth interviewed who attended predominantly Black schools, learned about American Black history, or experienced discrimination first-hand were better able to understand the realities of American racism. Other more contemporary scholars have also conducted research that recognized the distinctions among Black ethnic groups.

Another study by Christina Greer compared political patterns between groups and found some tensions similar to those reported by Waters. Greer's book utilized data from surveys and interviews with union members regarding their political participation. This study also included African immigrants and African Americans in addition to the Afro-Caribbeans in Waters' work. In her study, Greer suggested that some of the tensions they found were due to a resistance to relinquish their ethnic identity:

> Black ethnic groups in America have been negotiating multiple identities, that of being immigrants, phenotypically black, and American. The permanent 'Black' modifier is what distinguishes black immigrants from other non-Black immigrant populations, thus the significance for phenotypically black populations living in the United States is solidified not necessarily in place of, but rather in addition to, their ethnic identification… Full inclusion in the American polity for black immigrants is not the same as previous assimilations of white ethnics…If Black ethnics are to be fully included in American society, scholars argue, they will not attempt to shed their immigrant status and identities to become "American". (Greer 2013:138)

Greer concluded that there was greater diversity in political alignments among Black immigrants, as they did not have the same context of the history of political parties as African

Americans. However, these distinct groups shared a greater consensus on issues centering a Black/White dichotomy (Greer 2013:145).

Similar to Waters, Greer also found a continued elevated status for Black immigrants as a "model minority" within a minority group (Greer 2013:139). In these studies, Caribbean Blacks had different views than African Americans and were not inherently able to understand African American struggles. And yet, despite these differences, Greer found that coalition building among Black ethnic groups is still possible due to "linked fate." While these studies focused on Afro-Caribbean and African immigrants, Afro-Latinxs are also a Black ethnic group, one with their own particular history of intra-racial interactions.

Afro-Latinxs

Although -Latinxs in the US find themselves in a complicated racial terrain that often overlooks them. This oversight makes the narratives that Afro-Latinxs are telling online all the more important. Although they are understudied in the US, Afro-Latinx people have been a part of Latin America since colonization.

> Of the estimated eleven million survivors of the Middle Passage, about 450,000 arrived in the United States, while the remaining ten and a half million African were enslaved in the anglophone, francophone, hispanophone, and Dutch Antilles, as well as Central and South America, most importantly Brazil. (Rohrleitner and Ryan 2015:1)

African descendants and African culture traveled to Latin America through the trans-Atlantic slave trade and heavily influenced Latin America. The people are called Afro-Latinx, "people of African descent in Mexico, Central and South America, and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, and by extension those of African descent in the United States whose origins are in Latin America and the Caribbean" (Román and Flores 2010:3). In particular, those in the United

States, with its strong emphasis on race, have a complicated relationship with their Blackness. "One of the most important functions of invoking Afro-Latinidad in the United States and beyond is drawing attention to 'the anti-Black racism within the Latin@ communities themselves...and the Latin@ propensity to uphold mestizaje… as an exceptional and wishful panacea'" (Rohrleitner and Ryan 2015:3).

According to Laó-Montes and Dávila, Latinidad refers to "a category of identification, familiarity and affinity as well as to a subject position (the state of being Latino/a) in a given discursive space" (2001:3). They clarified that Latinidad "does not denote a single discursive formation but rather a multiplicity of intersecting discourses enabling different types of subjects and identities and deploying specific kinds of knowledge and power relations" (2001:4). The definition of Latinidad has continued to expand as scholars take on the work of unpacking this concept. The recent book, *Latinidad at the Crossroads: Insights into Latinx Identity in the Twenty-first Century* (Gerke and González Rodríguez 2021) provided a series of applications and interpretations of Latinidad. The authors also agreed that the definitions of Latinidad are varied and transforming. Yet still, Alan Pelaez Lopez coined #LatinidadIsCancelled to call out the exclusionary discourse around the concept, in 2018 (Flores 2021). However, Afro-Latinidad disrupts this Latinidad narrative and offers a critical approach to include Afro-descendants.

> Afro-Latinidades as quintessentialist trans-diasporic subjects tend to transgress the essentialist conceptions of self, memory, culture, and politics that produce all-encompassing categories of identity and community such as "Blacks" and "Latinos" Hence, Afro-Latinidades, in their plurality and diasporicity, demonstrate the limits of categorical definition of both Blackness and Latinidad, at the same time as they reveal the limits of diaspora discourses themselves (Laó-Montes 2005:128)

Afro-Latinidad forces us to confront the reality of African descendants in Latin America and the accompanying socio-historical implications.

> The Americas have long been an arena for extraordinary mixtures of cultures and peoples born of diasporas from Africa, Asia, and Europe. These mixtures have given rise to different racial constructions, known in the Caribbean as creolization and in Latin America as mestizaje, that have been used to syncretize and refashion race and ethnic mixture into distinct forms of national identity. (Safa 1998:3)

Following the abolishment of slavery and independence, Latin American countries spread ideologies and implemented policies that promoted the "whitening," or *Blanqueamiento*, of their respective countries (Paschel 2016:29). Paschel extended this understanding by introducing the notion that they were not just trying to whiten, but rather "deblacken and/or deindigenize" the nation. This was an anti-Black response that nations used in an attempt to establish themselves in international fields in light of external rhetoric, where Black and Indigenous people were perceived as backward. This involved the promotion of immigration and incentives to Europeans. While Brazil was initially successful in this effort and managed to become a popular destination for the European immigrants (who came and actively participated in eugenics in the early 1900s), it eventually also recognized its failure (Paschel 2016:32). Though this endeavor played out differently in every country, some countries eventually settled on the adoption of some form of mestizaje into their national narratives as a pragmatic means of reconciling their own mixed backgrounds with ideas of progress.

The portrayal of Latin America as this mixed, egalitarian utopia emerged and coincided with a view that "...came to stigmatize critique of the ethno-racial order as irrelevant and as inherently unpatriotic" (Paschel 2016:46). This strategy of using mestizaje as a method of anti-

Black and anti-Indigenous erasure and silencing provides the context for Latin American perceptions of race. “However, while mixed-race culture became widely accepted in Latin America, due to a long history of hybridization, in the United States the debate on hybridity and mestizaje has been suppressed or relegated to the margins” (Gerke and Rodríguez 2021:7). In the present work, I explored how mestizaje unravels when confronting the US racial binary. By declaring their racial and ethnic identity as compatible, Afro-Latinxs use self-identification to reject both of these frames in favor of a more nuanced racial discourse where they are visible.

Afro-Latinx Identity

Hordge-Freeman and Veras’ 2020 article, “Out of the Shadows, into the Dark: Ethnoracial Dissonance and Identity Formation among Afro-Latinxs” presented compelling evidence that many Afro-Latinx people encountered anti-blackness in their homes and schools that create difficulties in defining themselves. In this research, they “collected Web-based survey data (with several open-ended questions) from 94 Afro-Latinxs, of whom 10 participated in semi-structured, in-depth interviews” (Hordge-Freeman and Veras 2020:150). Their application of ethnoracial dissonance provided an approach to understand how Afro-Latinxs navigate the anti-Black messages they encounter even from early childhood lives. Hernandez’s 2022 work also includes these early anti-Black experiences as well stating, “Countless instances of this kind of exclusion happen and can be devastating to a child’s self-esteem and psyche” (37). Hordge-Freeman and Veras suggested, “The *ethno-racial dissonance* that Afro-Latinxs express arises because they report their ethnic identity is contingent on downplaying their racial identity alongside the requirement that as questionable ‘in-group’ members they perform conspicuous displays that offer evidence of their ‘authentic’ *Latinidad*” (Hordge-Freeman and Veras

2020:150). By understanding how anti-Blackness serves as the basis for that Latinidad, we can see how ethnic and racial identities are presented as though in conflict with one another.

Afro-Latinxs Online Identities

There have been relevant Afro-Latinx research developments regarding online activity and identity in ethnic studies fields. Arriaga and Villar set out to "highlight how Latin American and Caribbean people of African descent, or Afro descendants, use digital tools to bolster the agency of individuals and communities, both locally and across national boundaries." Their work, *Afro-Latinx Digital Connections*, brought together a variety of works from academics as well as interviews with digital technology users that address different aspects of digital life (Arriaga and Villar 2021). Their work examined the digital connections created across various topics, platforms, and geographic locations. They suggested that,

> …the materiality of digital technologies should be at the forefront of any examination of Afro-Latinx digital connections, lest current issues and claims (social, territorial, economic, environmental, etc.) with long historical trajectories grounded in physical circumstances get lost in the seeming intangibility of the digital domain. (2021:3)

This historical context rooted in the material is important for situating current Afro-Latinx resistance, even as it has migrated to a digital sphere. Arriaga further emphasized the pre-existing agency of these communities who use digital technologies as an amplification tool, stating,

> ...contemporary Afro-descendant individuals and communities in the Americas are using the intermeshing of cultural and digital networks to fight erasure and promote agency. Moreover, the digital technologies help amplify relations that existed long before the advent of digital technologies and without which Afro-descendant communities and identities could not have persisted into the present. (2021:9)

These tools have also been used beyond claims-making or relation amplification; Afro-Latinx users have also utilized digital tools to expand the boundaries of identification foundational to the present work.

> Digital tools—blogs, Tumblrs, Instagram pages, and other social media platforms—have played a critical role in giving these terms [Afrolatin@ and Afro-Latinx] wider currency in conversations about race, ethnicity, and representation. As a result, notions of Blackness have expanded by promoting alternate epistemological systems and previously unheard-of relationships that are now fundamental for understanding ethno-racial-gender struggles in the digital age. (2021:9-10)

During their interview with Castillo and Vivanco regarding "Analog and Digital Activism in Afro-Colombia," the researchers made the argument that digital connections "allow us to change the realities of these communities" because knowledge about the anti-Black conditions that is spread digitally are necessary for this process (121). The online social movements that can cause this type of social change can also impact identity.

Online social movement activity presents the opportunity and platform for identity claims-making and community building. Arriaga and Villar's suggestion that the spread of Afro-Latinx in digital spaces is integral to understanding Blackness was particularly meaningful because of Afro-Latinxs' contentious relationship with Black identity and the importance of self-identification for a group that is often erased. An understanding of Afro-Latinxs as agentic individuals who are expanding notions of Blackness by using digital tools is central to the present work.

Although Hordge-Freeman and Veras' original aim was to understand racial socialization for Afro-Latinxs, they also found that "participation in online communities" was a mechanism

that led to the adoption of an Afro-Latinx identity, which they term "virtually Black." Hordge Freeman and Veras explained this concept, stating that "Afro-Latinx social media engagement was a significant source of community building that led to respondents' development of a positive Afro-Latinx identity" (Hordge-Freeman and Veras 2020:157). Although "little is known about the role of online communities in influencing this process for Afro-Latinxs", the authors suggested that "respondents' experiences in both college and online communities reveal the extent to which embracing Afro-Latinidad is an embodied process…," a process which should be further researched (Hordge-Freeman and Veras 2020:156-158). My research deepens our understanding of these Afro-Latinx online communities and their impact on identity, especially in relation to BLM.

Afro-Latinx Activism

Hordge-Freeman and Loblack's 2020 article also addressed Afro-Latinx ethno-racial identity. However instead of Arriaga and Villar's digital connections frame, they focused on the perceptions of Afro-Latinx activist participation in Black Lives Matter movement. Their respondents mostly supported BLM, with reasons such as "linked fate" or being perceived as Black from external forces. They also had outliers who objected to Afro-Latinx participation in BLM. They argued that "Afro-Latinxs have diverse understandings of their Blackness and the extent to which they express a 'diasporic consciousness' shape both their likelihood of participating in Black Lives Matter (BLM) and their justifications for why they decide to do so" (2). While Hordge-Freeman and Loblack's study asked, "Should Afro-Latinos participate in the #BlackLivesMatter Movement? Why or why not?" (2020:6), the present study focused on the individual participant's knowledge about the BLM movement, their support of the movement, and their involvement with the movement.

Hordge-Freeman and Loblack sought to understand "how participants viewed Afro-Latinx participation in the movement" (2020:7). They found that while 70% of participants voiced support for the Black Lives Matter movement, some respondents' support or involvement in BLM was centered around the world's visual racialization of them as Black and the negative impact that follows, rather than on their own identity as Afro-Latinx people. They provided a useful vantage point of Afro-Latinx perceptions regarding a collective identity. However, the present work shifts the focus onto the individual social media user's knowledge, support, and involvement in order to better understand the meanings that they attach to the BLM movement rather than their views about what their ethno-racial group should do. While opinion research is important, the present research's tweets and interviews reflect participants' lived experiences which are necessary for clarifying our understandings of Afro-Latinx activism and identity.

The Black Lives Matter movement is not the only racial justice movement that Afro-Latinxs have experience with. BLM is just the most popular current iteration of ongoing social movements resisting anti-Blackness globally. Many Black social movements have emerged in Latin America, with organizations emerging in the 1970s and 1980s (Rahier 2014). Despite the mestizaje discourse centering racial mixing and equality, this narrative of racial equality proved to be a method of erasure. If we understand anti-Blackness as a global racial project, then we can draw better connections between Black resistance across time and place (Bashi Treitler 2004; Omi and Winant 1994).

In Paschel's 2016 book, *Becoming Black Political Subjects: Movements and Ethno-Racial Rights in Colombia and Brazil*, she analyzed the process of racialization and mobilization that took place in Latin America. In her work, Paschel reviewed a multifaceted comparative case study of movements in Colombia and Brazil to understand the relationship between identity,

social movements, and the state. Since both state governments had control over imposing meanings and legitimizing them, they attempted to make race irrelevant even as colorblind ideology did not reflect the racialized realities. This dynamic set the stage for the difficulties to establish and grow Black movements. Paschel made an important distinction between "Mobilizing while Black" and "Mobilizing as Blacks" (2016:48). She explained this difference as Black activists mobilizing around an explicitly Black identity and resisting racism, versus Black activists mobilizing around other political identities or causes. In societies where there is a narrative of racelessness, it is more difficult to mobilize around racial identities.

Paschel also engaged previous scholars' theories that because of the meeting of racial domination and raceless contexts that this was an example of "false consciousness" (49). However, Paschel argued that some Black people in these contexts were aware of the racial hierarchy but still internalized it; others were even hyperaware (50), with Paschel determining that some of the individuals who were aware of the racial hierarchy would turn around and reinforce that racial hierarchy. Furthermore, she argued that equating a lack of racial mobilization with false consciousness "ignore[d] the political agency of people who identify as black and assume[d] that only a particular type of explicitly race-based mobilization counts as anti-racist" (50). She even defended the mobilization around other identities by Black activists, stating, "I see domination and hierarchy - as well as the identities that emerge from them - as inherently intersectional" (50).

Paschel built on this intersectional framework for understanding Black resistance around other issues by tracing the "historical conditions under which blackness became increasingly central to political struggle", where "peasants", "women", "workers", and "students" became "black peasants", "black women", "black workers", and "black students" (51). This is

significant, as a large part of mobilization in the face of mestizaje ideology was just getting people to identify as Black (74). Flores and Román's 2009 work proposed a theory of Afro-Latinx "Triple Consciousness?" which also provides approaches to understanding the relevance of Latin American racial discourse to US Afro-Latinx experience. They suggested that the "present day post-race discourse" in the US has parallels with mestizaje, which similarly led them to share a "reluctance" to explicitly address racism.

In summation, the ongoing movement for racial justice across geographic context helps to situate the Afro-Latinx participation in #BLM as part of a larger endeavor. While each Latin American country has its own particular socio-historical background, I approach these racial justice movements as connected beyond borders. Furthermore, this transnational understanding provides background for these ideas as they enter a US milieu. While Afro-Latinxs in these Latin American countries faced challenges for racial justice in the form of mestizaje, Afro-Latinx immigrants encountered different challenges once they entered the US. Afro-Latinx involvement with the #BLM movement is then not a spontaneous occurrence, but rather a present manifestation of their enduring spirit of Black resistance across time and place. In the current #BLM era, a study of Afro-Latinx activism should include social media, which is discussed in the next section.

Social Movements & Activism

Traditional definitions of framing present a one-directional relationship, where researchers exploring the movement make strategic decisions about the meaning it will signify in order to align its frame with those from whom it is seeking support (Snow et al. 1986). Later researchers who added to the body of framing literature proposed the incorporation discourse (Steinberg 1998). Steinberg's discursive approach suggested framing is "an inherently collective

process, as opposed to the atomistic characterizations of its foundations among some framing theorists." (Steinberg 1998:862). Snow's (2013) later more collaborative definition framing appeared to take this discursive element into consideration.

> Framing, within the context of social movements, refers to the signifying work or meaning construction engaged in by movement adherents (e.g., leaders, activists, and rank□and□file participants) and other actors (e.g., adversaries, institutional elites, media, social control agents, countermovements) relevant to the interests of movements and the challenges they mount in pursuit of those interests (Snow 2013).

Where traditional framing turns primarily to organizers and leaders to understand how a movement is to be understood, distributed framing looks to the people (Ince et al. 2017). Ince et al. explored how people use social media to influence movements. They argued that traditional sociological movement frames, which center on how organizers and activists construct issues, were now insufficient due to social media's influence in public discourse. Instead, they suggested we consider distributed framing, which acknowledges the decentralized nature of social media; in social media, individuals themselves construct their own meanings and issues related to discussed discourse. To illustrate distributed framing, Ince et al. compiled and analyzed 55,149 tweets hashtagged with #BLM. Although they found that the use of the hashtag was an attempt to stratify and build community, they also noted the uniqueness in tweets, particularly those centering on solidarity, grievances, police violence, and counter-movement.

They found that social media allowed for a broad audience to alter and manipulate the movement's construction of meaning, which in turn shaped the movement's trajectory. Their construction of cyber-activism influenced the current research, as a method of further decentralizing social movements in hopes of including the experiences and identities of

traditionally marginalized individuals. This shift to a more people-centered framing approach is appropriate for a global and local movement like #BlackLivesMatter. Distributed framing allows us to better understand a movement that is happening on our phones as well as our streets. The #BlackLivesMatter meaning-making process cannot be confined by the traditional frames, decided by a select few leaders. Instead, in the #BlackLivesMatter movement, we observe the reciprocal process by which social movements and activists negotiate identity.

Social Media Activism

Using distributed framing highlights the impact of social media activism in contemporary movements like #BlackLivesMatter. Social media has proven to be a powerful tool for contemporary social movements and activists. As such, it is important that we consider the impact of social media beyond its significant methodological contributions. We have seen the transformational impact of social media in previous social movements such as #OccupyWallStreet as well. In Kavada's 2015 work, she found that social media was used as a tool for dissemination, organization, and mobilization but that it also formed an integral part of the social movement's identity, objectives, reach, and structure. Kavada conducted 75 unstructured interviews with Occupy activists from around the world with a majority active in the flagship Wall Street protest. She analyzed the creation of #occupy's collective voice, as well as its ability to provide access to information, such as being able to follow the proceedings of the general assembly remotely. The use of social media in social movements incorporates a larger inclusive collective that is often decentralized by the ubiquity of the internet allowing constituents to influence a social movement. The framework of this article drew largely on an understanding of collective identity and its implication on social movements. Kavada based her conception of collective identity on Melucci's definition as "an interactive and shared definition

produced by a number of individuals (or groups at a more complex level) concerning the orientations of their action and the field of opportunities and constraints in which such action is to take place" which allows for an open-ended and changing movement identity (Kavada 2015:874).

Theocaris et al. (2015) also focused their research on social media's role in modern social movements, however, their focus was on other international social movements with varying countries of origin. They explored social media's dynamic and ever-shifting contributions to a movement and how it changed the political communication, mobilization, and organization of social movements. They focused on three international social movements; the *indignados* (known also as the 15M movement) in Spain, the *aganaktismenoi* in Greece, and Occupy Wall Street in the United States. They selected these movements due to their heavy reliance on social media and the global solidarity their movements generally shared with one another, but they also considered the linguistic, cultural, and national barriers faced by these different movements to further understand how social media alters social movements in different contexts.

The results they presented were based on a content analysis of a random sample of 2,000 tweets drawn from each movement using the #15M (80,074 tweets), #GreekRevolution (19,784 tweets), and #OccupyWallstreet (342,479 tweets). Theocaris et al. constructed indicators for understanding the use of Twitter for political mobilization, as well as the aims, characteristics, mood, and tactics of social movements as reflected and communicated through the media. They found that Twitter was used more for political discussion and sharing protest information, than for actual calls for participation and protest coordination. These findings may be more representative of earlier movements of social media use; however, newer movements have seen the frequent use of social movement hashtags for political discourse as well.

Dennis' 2019 work, *Beyond Slacktivism: Political Participation on Social Media*, adds to this body of work that demonstrates the power of social media for activism. Dennis provided a direct argument against the derisive labeling of online activism as "slacktivism" by reviewing the communications literature evidencing the impact of social media.

> …this focus emerged from the conceptual limitations of the slacktivist critique, which evaluates the relationship between acts of digital micro-activism and the desired political outcome in isolation...such an approach implies that low-threshold interactions form a causal relationship with the desired political effect(s). This deterministic, causal relationship lacks an appreciation of the expansive, procedural foundations at the heart of political engagement (Arnstein 1969). Whether voting in an election or sending a tweet to an elected representative, active citizenship depends on access to informational resources, opportunities to take part in discursive spaces, and the capacity to organise. (Dennis 2019:11)

Furthermore, he brought several political science and communication theorists into conversation with each other to illustrate the potential of a more dynamic "continuum of participation," one which is reflective of "the normative desires of the citizenry at the time of inquiry" (Dennis 2019:73). In his critique of slacktivism, Dennis argued for an adaptable definition of activism, giving researchers an opportunity to be reflexive in their operationalizations. While Dennis had a more malleable definition of online activism than earlier researchers like Theocaris, there is an argument to be made that social media activism is more legitimate than critics who define it as 'slacktivism' give it credit for.

Earl's 2019 chapter on "Technology and Social Media" urged social movement scholars to consider the connections "between ICTSs [Information communications technologies] and

their research topics" (Snow and Soule 2019:289). She specifically highlighted the lag in sociological studies of social movements as compared to communication studies journals. While there have been studies in communications (Dennis 2019), the lag Earl illustrated occurs in sociological movements studies. Caren et al. (2020) also provided a detailed review of the state of the social movement research in sociology as it relates to hybrid media and discussed the gap in literature from a sociological perspective. They organized the existing literature thematically, beginning with the relationship between movements and media. Then they examined "contemporary movements [including BLM] and social media," as well as the various social media platforms.

Caren et al. (2020) also found that social media plays an important role in social movements. Social media has become essential to modern movements because they are "more nimble, more participatory, and less dependent on traditional media gatekeepers" (Caren et al. 2020:444). They also claimed social media has become an important site of activist identity formation and recruitment, because engagement with a movement's media is a crucial aspect of forging deep connections to a movement's cause and establishing community with others within the community. They concluded by denoting the gaps and offering suggestions for future research. Their recommendations included, "expand engagement with scholarship in neighboring disciplines that study politics, media, and communication" (443). The value of interdisciplinarity has influenced the current study as well.

Additional literature on the intersections of ethno-racial identity, social movements, and/or social media does exist in fields such as communications and media studies, as well as anthropology. For example, *Black Software: The Internet & Racial Justice, from the AfroNet to Black Lives Matter* provided a history from the past several decades of cyber advancement both

as it has been used against but also importantly, by Black people (McIlwain 2020). However, many of these are outside of the framework of the present project; often this research takes historical or anthropological approaches, works that engage with Afro-Latinxs on an individual level rather than how this group interacts with society. Future research should continue to build upon transdisciplinary approaches.

Social media is a powerful tool that is used to rapidly disseminate information and raise awareness of marginalized communities beyond mainstream media (Caren et al. 2020). This platform's accessibility has made it possible for more people to engage with social movements than before (Dennis 2019:11). Social media also allows more users to interact with the identity of the movement (Kavada 2015). There are still gaps in the sociological research for how social media connects people to social movements (Caren et al. 2020; Snow and Soule 2019). My work looks at these concepts as they apply to Afro-Latinxs. As we continue to explore the gap in knowledge about Afro-Latinx social media activism, it is reflective of the gap in society that Afro-Latinxs respond to on social media.

Anti-Blackness in Latinx Media

Anti-Blackness exists in both English and Spanish language Latinx media because mainstream media tends to reflect the anti-Blackness in the society itself. Communications and media studies lend context for the "Latinx media" landscape into which this work enters. Báez's 2020 work, *Race and Media: Critical Approaches* chapter provided useful insights regarding Latinx audiences. The author found the main frustration to be the flattening of a heterogeneous Latinx population. She cited a contemporary example, where fans of a show with Latinx representation used Twitter to show support once it was canceled "advocate for more dynamic media representations via social media" (225). Báez also recommended, "melding interviews

with other method[s]" in order to "help researchers to more deeply understand Latinx audiences" (2020:227).

Although the chapter titled "Latinx Audiences as Mosaic" claimed an emphasis on intersectionality, her metaphor fell short in her acknowledgement of race. Succumbing to the mestizaje discourse, the author minimizes race's importance, does not mention Afro-Latinxs, or acknowledge Blackness beyond commenting, "While "Latina/o" is sometimes confused as a race within the popular imagination, most Latinx people are racially diverse (usually a mix between Spanish European, Indigenous, and black) due to the history of colonization in Latin America" (219). Despite this limitation, this work attempts to apply an intersectional lens to understand the dissatisfaction of Latinx audiences and their propensity for being producers of alternative media.

Castañeda's (2020) chapter "Applying Latina/o Critical Communication Theory to Anti-Blackness" provided a thorough engagement with race through reviewing LatCritComm's tenets and demonstrating the theory's application for analyzing anti-Blackness.

> LatCritComm Theory takes a holistic and social justice approach to analyses of communication and cultural experiences of Latinx communities by centering the long history of struggle and resistance by communities of color…the theory values methodologies that emphasize non-Western modes of knowledge production and recognizes that methods such as counternarratives and autoethnography tell a different (racialization) story that can potentially disrupt historical and contemporary mainstream narratives. (104)

The author emphasized the value of disrupting mainstream narratives and suggested methods centering counternarratives as an alternative. She also recognized the impact of social movements on media, suggesting that,

> ...the emerging movements recognizing Afro-Latinidades were reinforced by the emergence of Black Lives Matter in the United States and the need to call into question the racist attitudes and policing practices across the Americas in state politics and mass media… since Spanish-language media have struggled with this issue and have emphasized Whiteness historically, politically, and culturally. (Castañeda 2020:102-103)

The questioning of mass media serves an important role in the development of race consciousness foundational to these movements. Castañeda continued, stating

> …as more Latinx communities across the United States as well as Latin America mobilize, organize, and address the lived experiences and media representation of Indigeneity and Afro-Latinidades", the author recommended that we "understand how Latinx media are making limited spaces for these identities as well. (103)

Castañeda's critical analysis of anti-Blackness in media provided a clear description of the implications for ethno-racial understandings.

> The near-invisibility of Black, Asian, and Indigenous people on Latinx media, except as stereotypical caricatures, reinforced a broader notion that these communities did not exist as part of the Latinx diaspora, when in fact they constitute millions of people…Consequently, popular comprehension of what constitutes Latinx lived experiences remains largely limited. (105-106)

However, there are avenues for improvement, Castañeda argued that "[t]he emergence of digital technologies can help to chip away at ignorance by providing a platform through which counternarratives of Latinidades are produced and distributed" (106). The production of these digital counternarratives and their producers are central to the present work. Furthermore, it is helpful to consider the anti-Blackness underlying the mainstream media narratives from which

these counter-narratives emerged. The under-representation and misrepresentation of Afro-Latinxs in the mainstream media is rooted in the anti-Blackness in the Latinx community. We therefore need more information to understand how Afro-Latinxs are affected and their responses to this messaging, particularly when they use social media.

Summary

The literature reviewed will help provide a framework for the design of the present research. Afro-Latinx social media users are the focus of my study, they are often erased from the Latinidad discourse, media, and the BLM movement. I provided a review of theories that explain the formation of race and experiences of intersectionality. Then I examined literature on Black ethnic groups and Afro-Latinxs, in particular, before concluding with a review of social media activism and the anti-Blackness in Latinx mainstream media that prompted the formation of the counterspaces I examine in the present work. After reviewing how other scholars investigated the impact of social media on various social movements, it was evident that I should focus on this impact to obtain a more holistic view of the #BLM movement for Afro-Latinx participants. This present work bridges the gaps where Afro-Latinx identity intersects with social media and where Afro-Latinxs have rarely been considered specifically as social media users in social movements. I use a multi-method approach that understands this group's particular experiences on social media and in social movements. In the next chapter, I will describe the methods I employed to investigate these intersections.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Introduction

The present research used a combination of social media data and qualitative in-depth semi-structured interviews with Afro-Latinx social media users. I recruited self-identified Afro-Latinx individuals through use of the #AfroLatinx* hashtag. Although self-identified Afro-Latinxs are probably less likely to harbor anti-Black sentiments, they were able to speak to the experiences of interacting with such sentiments in their communities. If we consider Ince et al.'s 2017 work on distributed framing, a broader view emerges, demonstrating how public discourse surrounding BLM is shaped by all of the social movement actors. These actors include not just organizers, but also influencers, academics, artists, and casual tweeters. As such, my research design required that I used an inclusive and in-depth approach. I employed a multi-method approach for this project because the social media data and qualitative interviews were complementary. Collecting tweets allowed access to a larger volume of Afro-Latinx social media users, while the in-depth interviews gave deeper insight into user understanding and experiences.

Cox (2017) and Ince and colleagues (2017) made the case for analyzing social media as it could provide data on how people react to events as they occur, as well as social media's ability to provide a platform for traditionally marginalized voices. This had the benefit of creating a #BlackLivesMatter archive for this research; even as the physical demonstrations associated with the movement decline, the movement itself lives on via the internet.

This work is built on an epistemic foundation that people can be trusted as experts in their own lived experiences. In *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins supported this epistemology, saying,

> …those individuals who have lived through the experiences about which they claim to be experts are more believable and credible than those who have merely read or thought about such experiences. Thus lived experience as a criterion for credibility frequently is invoked by U.S. Black women when making knowledge claims. (Hill Collins 1990:257)

The presentations of data in this work convey a reconstruction of such lived experiences through Afro-Latinxs in their own words. The ways in which people make meaning of their experiences are valid and useful for researchers to understand, hence the focus on qualitative methods.

Additionally, the joining of theory to practice is driven by a Black Feminist tradition. The use of social media as a source for Black social movement research is encouraged by various sources (Byrd et al 2017; Cox 2017; Ince et al. 2017). Social media remains a crucial site of resistance, mobilization, and identity claims-making for marginalized groups. In this chapter there will be a discussion of the relevant methodological literature which focuses on social media data in studying social movements, before discussing the procedures used to collect my Twitter and interview data.

Methodological Literature

Social media platforms, specifically hashtag activism, can play an integral part in political temporality and in ultimately constructing counternarratives which oppose mainstream representations of race. Bonilla and Rosa (2015) suggested the use of hashtags and hashtag activism within Twitter serves as an indexing system in a "clerical sense" and in a "semiotic" sense (Bonilla and Rosa 2015). According to the researchers, the clerical indexing system is a

method of organizing tweets in a relative category, while the semiotic indexing system is performative framing that clarifies what the tweet is actually about. In addition, the researchers found the act of using a hashtag creates a similar feeling of shared temporality. For instance, using #Ferguson allowed users to feel as though they were actively participating in activism, as they tweeted in real-time, watched live streams of the protests on the ground, and connected with other online users (Bonilla and Rosa 2015).

Byrd et al. (2017) also presented the use of social media data as an essential tool in moving scholarly discourse forward. To make their case, the researchers discussed how social media could provide insight into the impact of #BlackLivesMatter on Black lives. While they specifically examined social media data on gun violence, public health, and higher education, the implications for areas covered in the present work are evident. With a similar methodology of incorporating social media into our research methods, we can study and elevate marginalized voices by unobtrusive means. Furthermore, Byrd et al. (2017) suggested that social media created more opportunities for scholar activists outside of mainstream media, both in the information they have access to, and in the platform these sites provide. Finally, they make recommendations for applications of social media data in policy suggestions. As a scholar activist who hopes their research can have real world applications for activists and organizers, this work encourages this present study's incorporation of social media data. The current research sought to contribute to this body of work which understands social media data as necessary to study BLM.

Bonilla and Rosa (2015) recommended future researchers interpret hashtag boundaries as ambiguous rather than fixed and stable boundaries. They determined there is a vast amount of related material that may not have a hashtag or that is hashtagged differently when using

hashtags as an entry point into broader contexts. Ultimately, Bonilla and Rosa heralded social media's ability to construct counternarratives against the mainstream media to illustrate a more dynamic view of race. This narrative expansion via social media is central to the present work.

Recognizing the wide array of functions that social media can be used for, Cox (2017) investigated the implications of social media as an informational source (a source that becomes instrumental to the formulation of views and opinions). After conducting interviews with 35 college students about the BLM movement, Cox found that two-thirds of students used social media as an information source about the movement. Additionally, participants used this information to build a sense of community, as well as create mental constructs of the movement and the social issues they believed it addressed.

Digging deeper, Cox discovered that the information participants shared about the movement was not necessarily factual; participants often believed the BLM movement was exclusively about police brutality. Although the author found that while social media could create community and awareness around a certain topic or issue, information acquired through social media has its limits. Cox urged future researchers to further explore how social media works as an informational source, particularly if individuals consume information without a critical lens. This work further exemplifies the influence of the counternarratives that Bonilla and Rosa (2015) described as a source of resistance, in favor of presenting more dynamic and multi-faceted views of race than mainstream media traditionally represents.

Ray et al. (2017) also demonstrated the potential contributions of social media methods. Their study combined a quantitative and qualitative approach to analyze "31.65 million tweets about Ferguson across four meaningful time periods: the death of Michael Brown, the non-indictment of Darren Wilson, the Department of Justice report on Ferguson, and the one-year

aftermath of Brown's death" (1797). By using these four timepoints, they were also able to examine trends over time. They also suggested several strengths that social media brought to research, including capturing phenomena "in real time," circumventing mainstream media to uplift activists on the margins, and providing insight into movement organization and communication. Additionally, they explored the relationship between collective identities and collective action and how hashtag participation contributed to depersonalization. They also examined how these collective identities were used by the counternarratives which emerged in response to the #BLM movement, (e.g., #TCOT [Top Conservatives on Twitter]). This study found that #TCOT signaled a greater collective identity than #AllLivesMatter did as a countermovement. Ray et al.'s study displayed the analytic value that social media data could provide for understanding social movements and politics. While my dataset is significantly more specific, the present study contributed to this growing body of literature on the relationship between social media and social movements, BLM in particular.

Another work that methodologically influenced this work was *Distributed Blackness: African American Cybercultures* (Brock 2020). Brock similarly drew from a variety of sources to center African American practices and beliefs as he subverted the Afro-deficit perceptions of cyberspace. He contributes a novel methodological framework called Critical Techno-Cultural Discourse Analysis (CTDA), which is used to explore the technology itself while "centering of technology use by marginalized groups within their own understandings of themselves" (8).

Brock also applies DuBois' conceptualization of double consciousness to this digital space where the "in-group interlocutors" and "out-group interlocutors" are both present. In their book, the author asserted, "networked Black online identity also makes Black community discourses visible as a textual and multimedia archive to out-group audiences; these audiences

are not always directly addressed in internal Black discourses but are always present as signifiers" (Brock 2020:20). This archive, that is so crucial to the research endeavor, simultaneously exists under the ever-present white gaze. Brock's work provided a guide for contextualizing the type of discourse analysis upon which the present study relied.

Florini's *Beyond Hashtags: Racial Politics and Black Digital Networks* explored the phenomenon of "Black Twitter" and the multitude of ways that Black social media users utilized technology for their activist aims (2019). She analyzed a network comprised of an "independent media company," "independent Black podcasters," and "Black Twitter." Through an analysis of "this digital assemblage," Florini "interrogate[d] how Black Americans use it to create a space of distributed sociality and discourse production" (3). Furthermore, she argued for the ability to learn about innovative ways of utilizing technology forged by marginalized communities. Specifically, she examined the ways that Black Twitter and podcasts circulated information during key moments such as the uprising in Ferguson in the wake of the murder of Michael Brown.

In particular, Florini's methodology held a level of reflexivity that was aspirational for the present study. Navigating the balance of protecting the anonymity of my participants and acknowledging their intellectual contributions was at the center of my methodological concerns. Unlike Florini, I would consider myself as an in-group member of the population I researched. However, I still found it vitally important to be conscientious of working in community with participants, rather than reproducing an exploitative dynamic.

The current research built on the previous studies by adding to the growing literature on Black movements in online spaces. Researchers have made a compelling case for the benefits of incorporating social media into our research due to its vitality to the movement and elevation of

marginalized voices. They also demonstrated the analytic power of tweets using hashtags. Brock outlined the necessity of critically considering the technology itself when studying online discourses. Finally, in addition to expanding our understanding of how Black digital networks operate, Florini grappled with important ethical concerns. The present work took all of these methodological insights into account.

Procedures

The first stage of data collection took place on Twitter. Twitter is a micro-blogging social media platform popular among adults aged 18-49, especially those with some college education or more. According to the Pew Research Center, there is also higher Twitter usage among Black and Hispanic adults as compared to white adults. I chose Twitter because of the platform's significance in the #BlackLivesMatter movement, where it was used for live-tweeting events as they occurred. This allowed for a rapid dissemination of news from on the ground sources. Twitter data do have limitations, such as a lack of access to Afro-Latinxs who are not Twitter users. However, Twitter allows access to their data most directly. Once I gained access to the Twitter API (Application Programming Interface), I utilized python and scrapehero to collect the Twitter data. I compiled all the public posts on Twitter that used the hashtags #AfroLatinx/a/o and #Blacklivesmatter or #BLM. This included 974 tweets from 2014 to September 2020. I selected these hashtags because self-identification is important, especially for Afro-Latinxs who are often denied the opportunity to do so. These hashtags also allowed me to include a diverse subsection of social media users. Twitter is a well-suited platform for this study because this micro-blogging platform is a significant tool for social movement activity, in particular BLM. Although some interviewees also use other social media platforms, I chose to focus on Twitter data because it was the most accessible to researchers.

With the tweets compiled, I coded them and performed a content analysis using ATLAS.ti. This enabled me to better understand the function of these tweets, the significance of Afro-Latinas' Twitter use, and Afro-Latinx participation in online activism in the face of anti-Blackness. However, there was still more to understand about the intention behind these tweets and the Afro-Latinxs who authored them. After removing ads and duplicates, I initially selected the top liked 5% of tweets within each hashtag pair (#AfroLatinx x #BLM | #AfroLatino X #BlackLivesMatter, etc) to identify potential interview participants for my research. I began contacting these tweet authors via Twitter direct message, but continued to include additional tweet authors until I reached saturation. Ultimately, I attempted to contact dozens of these tweet authors, and utilized purposive and snowball sampling.

Although all of the included tweets are public posts, it was important to me that these social media users were able to retain their intellectual ownership and agency as much as possible. I asked users if they had any objections to the inclusion of their posts, how they would like to be identified or cited, and if they were interested in participating in a follow-up interview. Because of this, you may notice, there is variation in the presentation of my data. Some of the interviewees preferred pseudonyms and others asked to be identified by their Twitter usernames, known as handles. This balance of protecting the anonymity of my participants and acknowledging their intellectual contributions was at the center of my methodological concerns. Whenever possible, the tweets presented were screen-captured in an effort to present the tweet as it would have been viewed. However, some tweets no longer existed or were no longer visible during assembling the presentation of this data.

Once the social media user agreed to be interviewed remotely, I provided them with the consent form to review and then they used Calendly to schedule a Zoom interview. I then

conducted the interview and recorded it to be transcribed later via Otter.ai. During the interview, I also took notes, especially noting recurring themes that emerged. I asked questions specific to their posts as well as their identity, BLM, perceptions of racism, anti-Blackness in the Latinx community, social movement involvement, social media usage, gender, and their online communities, among other topics (see Appendix A for a full list of interview questions). Most of the interviews were in response to a specific tweet or set of tweets, but some of the participants were recruited using snowball sampling. Ultimately, I conducted 19 interviews. These interview participants were primarily Twitter users and included both immigrants and US-born Afro-Latinxs with roots in countries such as Cuba, Honduras, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Costa Rica, Panama, and more. I chose not to ask participants directly about their immigration status or experiences to avoid compromising their safety and comfort. However, the topic of immigration did come up in some of the interviews, as many participants either had immigrant parents or were immigrants themselves.

These interviews were crucial for examining the meaning-making processes behind some of these tweets. For my interview analysis, I used an open coding approach first and then coded with the emergent themes I encountered. Employing qualitative software, ATLAS.ti, I compiled a list of recurring themes and then went through the transcripts identifying those themes. These themes included identity, activism, anti-Blackness, community, among others. I also sorted the tweets by hashtag in order to look separately at the #afrolatina data. Because Black women often are overlooked in social movements and social movement research, I wanted to highlight their specific experiences in this research.

In addition to encouraging agency in naming and employing an intersectional lens, I incorporated additional measures to foster an ethical research endeavor. I offered a monetary

incentive to interview participants in order to offset the cost of their time. However, many participants elected to donate their incentive to a non-profit or even back to the project itself. Several participants mentioned the importance of this work and how they felt their experiences were validated by participating in the interview. Additionally, I plan to send my manuscript to participants prior to publishing so they have the opportunity to provide input regarding whether they see themselves represented authentically as well as if the language is accessible to those outside of academia. As an in-group member, I hope this research can be a collaborative endeavor.

My identity as an Afro-Latinx researcher situated me in a unique position for accessing and understanding a group to which I belong. It also may have potentially impacted the interactions I had with participants and interpretations of the data. I chose to use my personal Twitter account to reach out to fellow Afro-Latinxs for two primary reasons. The first reason was that creating a new account that had few followers might be less effective at getting responses; Accounts of this nature could be perceived as a bot or spam. The second reason related to transparency and building rapport. I wanted participants to know who was conducting this research, as far too often we see white researchers enter marginalized communities and extract data that fail to actually benefit anybody in those communities.

For example, Mary C. Waters' *Black Identities* (1999), had many limitations methodologically. Specifically, Waters was limited by her race and bias. In her methodology section, she even revealed her internalized racism in an instance where she thought one of her participants was approaching her to rob her. She also highlighted the different perspectives given by her Black participants when she interviewed them as compared to her Black assistant. The race-of-interviewer effect Waters experienced is reflective of Sociologist Penny J. Rhodes' work,

which asserted that while responses may differ in cross-racial interviews, they were just examples of the multiple truths available (Rhodes 1994). Since race and gender can lead to different responses from interview participants, being an in-group researcher conducting the interviews likely led to different responses than an out-group researcher may have received.

Building rapport was also facilitated through sharing my background with participants as I explained why I was conducting this research. I was often able to connect to my participants due to my Costa Rican heritage, as well as my experience with immigrant parents. There were still a few instances where I had to remind myself that sharing this Afro-Latinx identity did not mean that I would be able to relate to every participant or all of their experiences. For this reason, reflexivity was vitally important throughout this research endeavor.

I also had to remind participants that I could not know their experiences without them telling me as well. One of the challenges of being part of the in-group is that participants do not always expand on their experiences as fully when they think that you inherently understand. Often this would come up in interviews where the participants would use verbal shortcuts like, "you know" rather than offer an explanation. While my experiences as Afro-Latinx likely influenced the selection of this research topic, it also positively impacted the access I had to the population, and the rapport built with participants. I think my position as an in-group researcher had an overall positive impact on the study.

My Twitter data set likely missed potentially relevant tweets that did not use the selected hashtags. Whether influenced by the anti-Blackness pervasive in Latinx communities or varying racial narratives from their countries of origins, many Afro-descendant individuals with roots in Latin America do not identify as Afro-Latinx*, opting instead to identify with specific heritages (ie, Afro-Costa Rican, Boricua or Caribeña, etc.) However, the hashtags were able to provide

significant insight into the research questions posed. After reviewing the Twitter dataset, and coding the interview transcripts, there were two primary concepts that emerged from the analysis: discourse and activism. Afro-Latinxs used social media to assert their identity by participating in the Latinidad discourse. They also use social media as a tool for activism, claiming their space in the BLM Movement. In the next chapters, I will discuss my findings anchored by these themes.

CHAPTER 4

"A SPACE FOR US TO SPEAK": AFRO-LATINX SOCIAL MEDIA DISCOURSE DISRUPTION

The Latinidad discourse has developed without Afro-Latinx inclusion for far too long. Fortunately, Afro-Latinx social media users are actively disrupting this erasure with their own narratives. This chapter will discuss the role of anti-Blackness in Latinidad discourse and how Afro-Latinxs use social media as a counterspace. The data presented demonstrated Afro-Latinx use of social media to confront erasure, anti-Blackness, and isolation; they used this site as a counterspace for participating in discourse, activism, and community. This process counteracts the anti-Blackness that contributes to ethno-racial dissonance. This study was designed to understand how Afro-Latinxs' identity formation interacts with social media.

In this chapter, I outline how Afro-Latinxs use social media in order to raise awareness and to confront misinformation with education. Following this is an example of when ignorance about Afro-Latinxs shaped the online discussions regarding an offline confrontation. Then I address the impact of the lack of Afro-Latinx representation in traditional media outlets, such as film and television, and how social media provides a more representative space by providing a platform for users with such marginalized identities. Finally, I will share a participant interview excerpt that shows the impact of these Afro-Latinx responses that confront their erasure which encourages an ethno-racial consonance. This chapter will address the question of how Afro-

Latinxs use social media to assert and affirm their identity. They do so by digitally disrupting the Latinidad discourse by raising awareness and combating erasure in the media

Awareness and Education

The anti-Black exclusion of Afro-descendants from the Latinidad discourse promotes ignorance and often leaves the task of educating people about their existence to Afro-Latinxs themselves. It is a challenging enough campaign to convince people that Black lives matter; but imagine having to convince people that you even exist. Afro-Latinx people experiencing ethno-racial dissonance must contend with trying to claim an ethno-racial identity that many are not even aware is an option. As discussed in the literature review, Hordge-Freeman and Veras (2020) presented the concept of ethno-racial dissonance to explain the disconnect that can happen for Afro-Latinxs in response to having their racial identity presented as oppositional to their ethnic identity. To counter these effects, when confronted with consistent messaging that erases Afro-Latinidad, Afro-Latinx Twitter users employ their social media platform to raise awareness and educate others. Many tweets are even authored with this goal in mind.

For example, the tweets below and excerpts from follow-up interviews with those users demonstrate the intentional use of Twitter to promote Afro-Latinx identity as well as to assert their space in the BLM movement.

Tweet 1.

In Tweet 1, @FearlessLeon shared an article featuring the founders of the Afro-Latino Festival. I conducted an interview with the author and asked her to discuss this tweet. She explained her goals of self-identification and support, saying: "So I chose that hashtag [#Afrolatino] to identify myself, support the movement, and support the other Black Latinos that were creating, creating events, creating content, and stories about who we are."

These hashtags hold a layered significance for Afro-Latinx social media users; @Oaddison also shared these goals of self-identification and awareness, but also used this hashtag to educate. He authored a bilingual tweet that begged for the reader to imagine a country's future possibilities. Like other Afro-Latinx users in this dataset, @Oaddison used both English and Spanish to contribute to the inclusivity of social media audiences that may primarily or exclusively use either of these languages. Additionally, the multi-lingual tweet reflected the author's life experience of growing up in Honduras, "speaking English in a Spanish-speaking country" (Tweet 2).

Tweet 2.

When asked about his motivation to claim an Afro-Latino identity, offline and online, he explained,

> I don't have a problem identifying myself as a Black person, or as a, as a Black, Latino, or as an Afro-Latino, I'm very proud to, to who I am, and to my roots and, and to my culture, so I embrace it, because of pride, I embrace it, because this is who I am... And so it's important to, for me, to really share this knowledge with people to say, you know, I'm Black, and I'm Hispanic, as well, I'm Black, and I'm an Afro-Latino as well. So, I'm proud of that. And, you know, and try to promote it in every way that I can in every social media that I can.

His response emphasized pride and the importance of sharing knowledge of his identity and experience. In this response, we begin to find the answer to the question his tweet posed; we have to see and understand Afro-Latinidad. We can begin to heal systemic racism by addressing

ignorance and erasure. Unfortunately, the ignorance this tactic attempts to address is significant and can even fuel violence in offline situations.

In fact, there was an uptrend in tweets on June 3rd, 2020, in response to a confrontation between Dominicans and African American protestors on New York's Dyckman Street (Butler 2020). Although the African American men did not appear to have done anything in the video footage, the neighborhood's Dominican residents chased them out of their neighborhood. Butler reported the Dominican residents may have assumed these Black men were looting. This display of racial profiling led many to use their online platforms to comment on the anti-Blackness present in Latinx communities. It is unclear from the video what the racial make-up of these Dominicans were, however, there were likely Afro-Latinx residents in this neighborhood. The hypocrisy of this altercation is brought up in @ScottieBeam's tweet. Fortunately, Afro-Latinx social media users were able to add nuance to this conversation. The offline conflict was brought to an online forum to be dissected. This demonstrates how online spaces play an important role during these periods of heightened offline activity.

Here in Tweet Thread 1, we see @wilfredobklyn responding to @ScottieBeam, who called out Dominicans for using the n-word while denying their Blackness:

Tweet Thread 1.

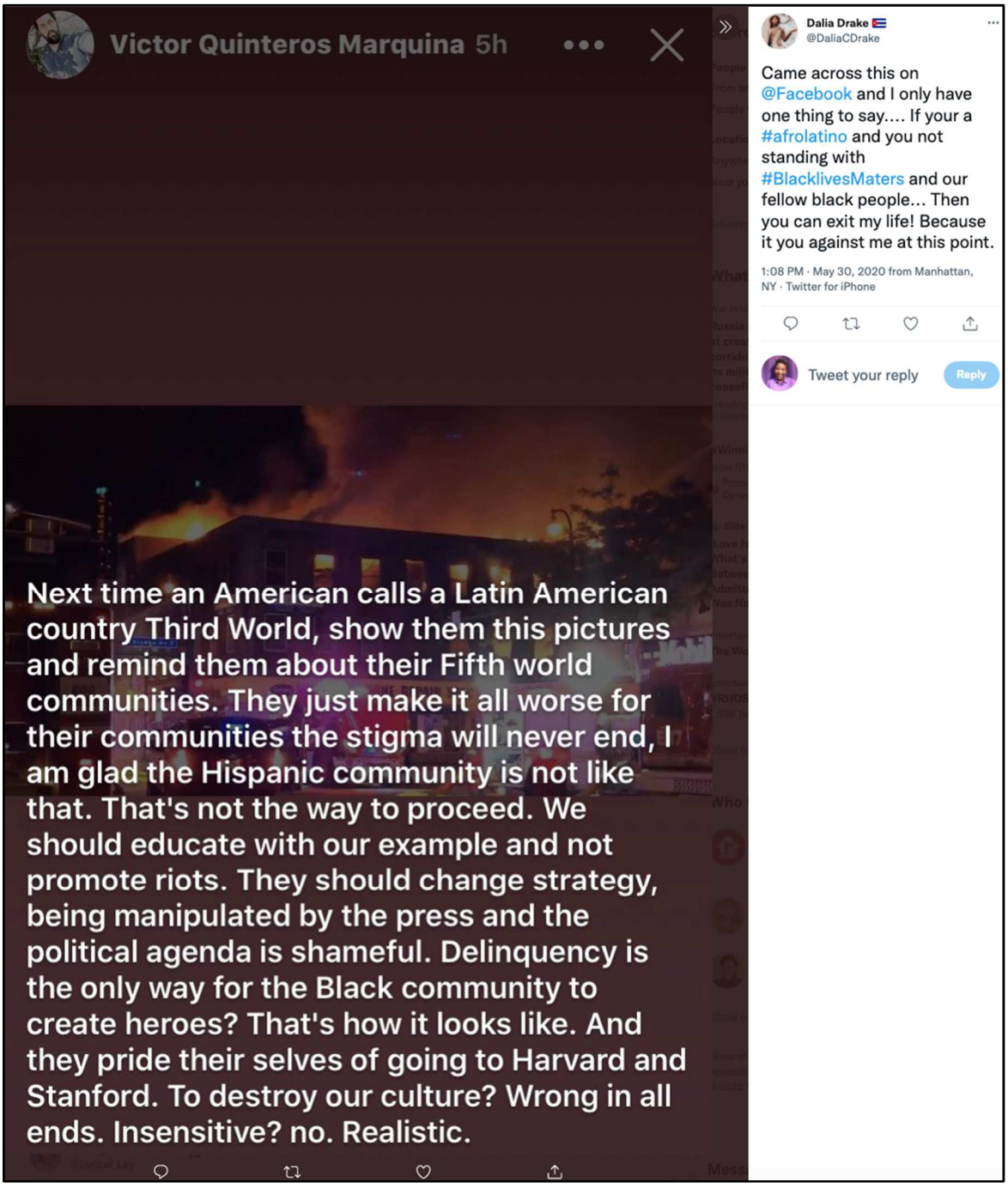
Similarly, @SiixX responded to @RossLV_'s tweet, where they implored Dominicans to "be proud to be Black" by sharing his pride in his Afro-Latino identity (Tweet Thread 2). @ayokapo88 replied to also discuss his Afro-Latino and Dominican pride (Tweet 3).

Tweet Thread 2.

Tweet 3.

These tweets assert pride, and the authors of these tweets want to educate and emphasize the diasporic bonds between Afro-descendants. “Don't let them divide us” is a poignant reminder of the division and mistrust sown by anti-Blackness.

Tweet 4.



This Dyckman street encounter was not an isolated occurrence of anti-Blackness. During an interview with Cuban immigrant social media influencer @DaliaCDrake, she shared a similar experience while living in Washington Heights to contextualize her motivation for posting Tweet 4. She said she also had to confront "ignorance" in her neighborhood while she participated in the 2020 summer protests. @DaliaCDrake noted in particular the negative criticism from her Latinx neighbors and their focus on the looting instead of the injustice. She stated,

> And so, for me, it was just like, very irritating because I was trying to have a sensible conversation with my fellow Cubans and quote, unquote, the Dominicans that lived around my area. And I just felt like they felt like that it wasn't their fight, it wasn't their issue, wasn't their problem, they don't have to deal with that, they're in a different, different worlds. And, you know, they walk around the street, and even though their skin is Black, you know, they get treated like white people, which is completely not accurate.

While it is not quite accurate that these Latinxs get treated like white people, often Latinxs who can, will buy into an investment in whiteness in the hopes their proximity to whiteness will grant them the same privileges. There is an ongoing need to confront this ignorance and erasure of Afro-Latinxs. This incident is just one of several situations where Afro-Latinxs have needed to make their presence known in response to blanket critiques of anti-Blackness in Latinx communities. These sentiments echoed @rosaclemente's 2016 tweet (Tweet 5).

Tweet 5.

Because of the ignorance surrounding Afro-Latinxs, people often make blanket statements targeting anti-Blackness from Dominicans, Afro-Latinxs in general, or “EVERY LATINX PERSON,' thus erasing the existence of Afro-Latinxs. The response from Afro-Latinx social media users is that they do exist. In addition, they also use their platform to push back against the complementary narrative that acknowledges Afro-Latinx existence but suggests they all don’t accept their Blackness. While there are Afro-Latinx people who participate in anti-Blackness and challenge the work of Afro-Latinxs who are doing this work, they would not appear in this dataset. While I cannot argue that no Black people, including Afro-Latinxs, participate in anti-Blackness, internalized anti-Blackness about oneself is different from the anti-Blackness directed at Black people from non-Black people. Furthermore, the Afro-Latinx resistance against anti-Blackness is not without consequence.

Social media users in this dataset actively sought to change this narrative to one that demonstrates pride in their African roots. During interviews, I asked participants to recall the first time they realized they were Black. @FearlessLeon, a creative marketing strategist and Bronx native whose family is from the Dominican Republic, said “I mean, I always knew, but I didn't claim it.” Lucky, a Mexican/African-American social media user in his late 20s who grew up in LA, spoke of questioning his Latinx identity. During his interview, he said, “So I knew I was Black. Embracing [his Latinx identity] was the question. That was that, I believe, would be more of a true question to me, because I've always known I was Black.”

@Oaddison, Honduran founder of The Gamboa Project who resides in Florida, responded by sharing about his experience of transferring from an all-Black school to a majority Latinx elementary school. In this new environment, he became aware of his skin color because he could see the difference. However, he noted that his fellow students “calling [him] Black…in a very

negative way" taught him the significance of this difference. This negative experience of difference led him to ethno-racial dissonance; despite the pride he held as a member of his Black family, he shared he no longer wanted to be Black. He said, "But then after getting all the negative comments from my classmates, and also negative comments from the community itself, I began to question my identity as a Black person."

These participants shared various accounts of struggling to fully claim their Afro-Latinidad because of the messaging they received, the othering they experienced, and the erasure they witnessed. These participants often had their Afro-Latinx identity invalidated. These experiences with anti-Blackness made them feel as though they didn't belong, they didn't exist, and that being Black was a negative identity.

When @thesinglex posted in late June 2020, she took part in this tradition of resistance. She stated her identity proudly as a response to unjust experiences that were similar to what interviewees above faced. The tweet linked to her Instagram post, which included a photo of her wearing a shirt with the text: "propaganda." Her tweet demonstrated an explicit pride that came in response to discourse of erasure and denial:

Tweet 6.

The digital counternarratives provided by Afro-Latinx social media users were necessitated by anti-Black discourse. These pro-Afro-Latinx responses are made more necessary because this anti-Black discourse has been heavily propagated by the lack of Afro-Latinx representation in popular media.

Representation/Lack of Representation in the Media

Although some may describe the absence of Afro-Latinx film and television media representation as "benign colorism," this insidious erasure of Afro-Latinx people enacts violence on this community, both in English and Spanish. While researchers have discussed the impact of different types of media representation on their communities (Milkie 1999), there has been little research on the impact of the near-complete lack of representation. When casting directors and producers fail to cast Afro-Latinx people in their television shows and films, such as the 2021 film *In the Heights,* they reinforce the anti-Black messaging that this demographic does not exist. Furthermore, this erasure perpetuates the ignorance about this community to outsiders.

Research on the lack of Afro-Latinx media representation is challenging to substantiate; Latinx media often perpetrates the same erasure of Afro-Latinxs discussed in this chapter. However, Nielsen data has started to explicitly report on Afro-Latinxs as well.

> Increasingly, Afro-Latinos are taking to social media to vocalize their Black pride and celebrate their Blackness and ancestry—inspiring producers, content developers and studios to recognize the need for increased visibility of Afro-Latinos on screen. In the first quarter of 2021, Afro-Latinos' share of screen was lagging behind population estimates. Still, there is growing visibility and recognition of the demand for content featuring this community. (Nielsen 2021:6).

Furthermore, “Afro-Latinas are largely absent across all platforms with 0.48% representation. When they are present on screen, they appear in content with thematic attributes of crime, family dysfunction and emotional drama” (Nielsen 2021:15).

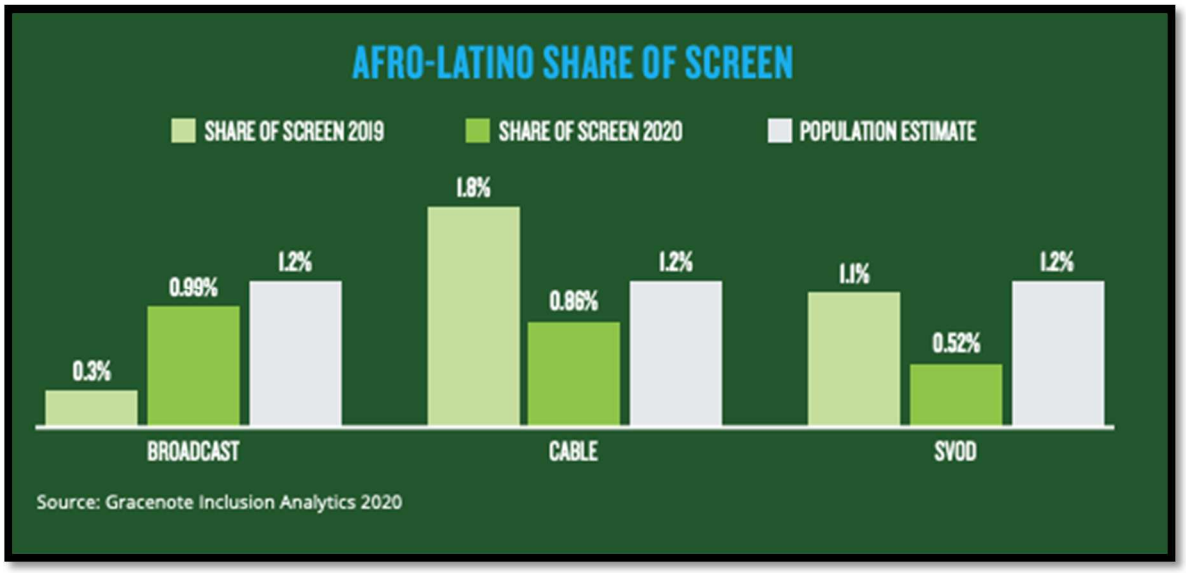


Figure 1. Afro-Latino Share of Screen from 2019 for Broadcast, Cable and Subscription Video on Demand

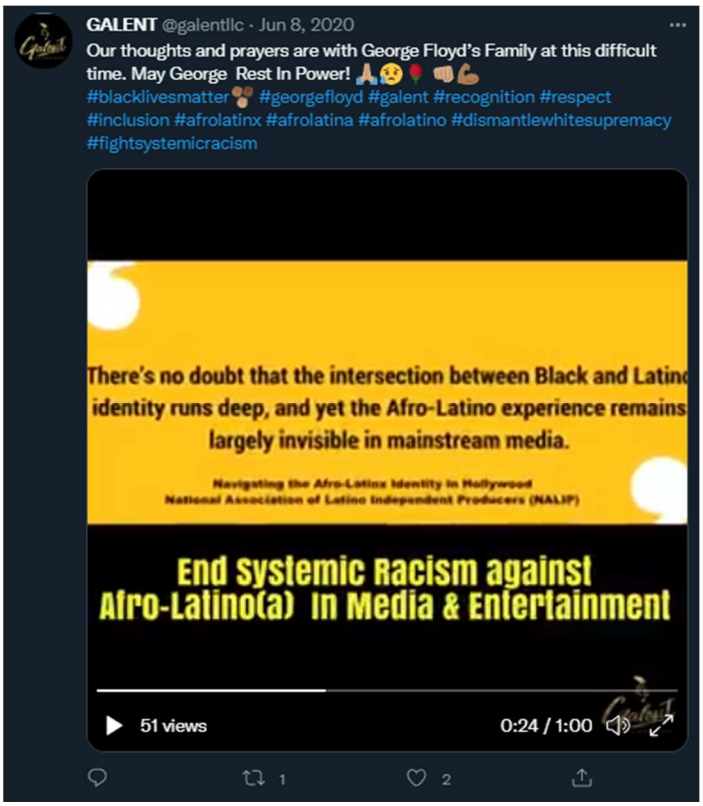
Additionally, communication studies researchers have some applicable contributions. In particular, in Mari Castañeda’s application of Latina/o Critical Communication Theory (LatCrimComm) to anti-Blackness, she suggested that, despite the dearth of authentic portrayals of marginalized groups in Latinx media, “the emergence of digital technologies can help to chip away at ignorance by providing a platform through which counternarratives of Latinidades are produced and distributed” (2020: 105-106).

@HMR812’s tweet also decried the erasure of African roots in media presentations of Puerto Rican culture (Tweet Thread 3).

Tweet Thread 3.

@galentllc's tweet responding to the murder of George Floyd also uses this opportunity to highlight the invisibility of "the Afro-Latino experience" in "mainstream media" (Tweet 7).

Tweet 7.



Because all the Afro-Latinx tweets analyzed also included #BlackLivesMatter or #BLM, it is important to consider that these responses to lack of representation are connected to the author's ideas of what #BlackLivesMatter is. Providing correction, an assertion of existence is a crucial premise for #BlackLivesMatter. In order for these Black Latinx lives to matter, we first need to acknowledge that they exist. This idea is often in tension with the Latin American discourse of *mestizaje,* which shows how the media reflect society's biases. As discussed in the literature review, proponents of mestizaje conceptualize Latin America as a racially mixed society immune to racial hierarchy.

One participant, Rosanna, shared her thoughts on *mestizaje* saying,

> In Puerto Rico, there's this myth of the three races where everyone is supposedly Black, you know, Spanish and Indigenous. And so, everybody gets to claim any of those. And, I mean, I don't need to tell you that that's obviously a problem that leads to lots of problematic statements from people.

Rosanna's comment captured her frustration with the colorblind rhetoric of *mestizaje* and how these "problematic statements" that fail to actually acknowledge Afro-descendant experiences are echoed in the mainstream media. By centering a narrative of a racially mixed population, the discourse conveniently erases the significant population of Afro-descendant community members; by not casting Afro-Latinx actors in their stories, filmmakers and casting directors imply that they don't fit into the story they want to tell so leave them out. Using *mestizaje* to erase Afro-Latinx existence enacts violence on this community and contributes to experiences of ethno-racial dissonance. For Afro-Latinx individuals experiencing ethno-racial dissonance, social media provided an essential avenue to disrupt the anti-Black discourse that surrounds Latinidad.

Social media allows users a platform where they can write themselves back into a narrative they should have never been erased from in the first place.

Many were keenly aware of the absence of representation for Afro-Latinx people on shows and telenovelas from popular Latinx media outlets (such as Univision and Telemundo). Some distinctly cited this erasure as a form of anti-Blackness. For example, Brittney explained how rare it was to see any Afro-Latinx representation on Spanish language television networks, and when they were present, they were on lower quality shows that portrayed them in a negative light, instead of on shows like *El Show de Cristina*, which is a popular daytime talk show on Univision.

> And I never saw myself on ... like Telemundo, never. No, we didn't exist on Cristina. When we were, it was like the Jerry Springer of Spanish television, it was always in this very negative, you know, sort of like what we say about like, the reality TV shows, so most, I'll see sometimes the Dominicans or like, you know, some Afro Latinos, like in that sense, but not in the novella or the storylines, unless they had like a Brazilian one, like Chica de Silva, eventually came here. But it was rare, it was exceptional -- Brittney

This scarcity of media representation proliferates the false notion that Afro-Latinxs themselves are rare. It also lends to anti-Black typecasting of the few Afro-Latinxs who are portrayed. @LainiMoreno also called out Telemundo for their representational shortcomings during her interview, as she explained her frustrations with this typecasting.

> Hello, Telemundo. You know what I mean? Any telenovela. We're lucky if we're playing--you know, if I was an actress over there, I'd probably be like a maid. And nothing wrong with being a housekeeper. But just because my skin is brown, and I don't have a pointy nose. And I don't straighten my hair. You know, it's, they want to pretend

> we don't exist. And I don't like that… when you watch any like Latin station, it's all just beige. I'm like, what the heck? It's frustrating, but it's like fun to watch because, you know, it's funny and fun and I have fun with it… I'm like, why am I supporting people who want to act like we don't exist when there's like so many of us sprinkled around. Hello?

She cited this typecasting as anti-Black and explained the limits it puts on the depictions we see of Afro-Latinxs. When the few depictions of Afro-Latinxs that are present are for roles which have taken on a negative connotation in our society, it can reflect a very specific perspective to the consumers of this media. These limitations reflect the narrow understandings in the Latinidad discourse and ignore the dynamic reality of the Afro-Latinx community.

The Afro-Latinxs whose tweets I analyzed in this dissertation are prepared to have these long-overdue conversations about their erasure in the media. One of my interview participants was Destiny, a queer and disabled light-skinned Puerto Rican holistic life coach. During an interview question related to their choice of identity hashtags in their social media bio, Destiny critiqued the colorism in their family and the media. They stated,

> As a Puerto Rican, um, who's like, let's not talk about how *In the Heights* doesn't have actual Black people, or Afro-Latinos in it. And all these like light-skinned Latinx folks... it's about f___ing time we talk about this sh__.

Destiny is responding to the blatant colorism in Lin-Manuel Miranda's 2021 film, *In the Heights*, which claimed to capture the vibrant NYC Washington Heights neighborhood. The principal cast of the film only includes one darker skinned actor, who does not identify as Latinx (Martinez 2021), which is obviously not reflective of the much more diverse Washington Heights neighborhood the film sought to represent. Other interviewees such as Sharon were also upset

regarding this erasure and found social media to be a site of validation. She spoke about the support she felt on social media, saying,

> It helps me to feel like I'm not crazy for being upset at the things that I'm upset at. You know, like, sh__ happens, like the *In the Heights*, for example, or really anything related to race. And I'll be like, I'm so freakin mad. And then I'll go online, and it'll be like, Okay, I'm not crazy because other people are mad too, you know? I'm not the only one that's feeling this way.

The experience of finding others who share similar strong feelings around a cause can be transformative. In particular, in the context of a social movement this can function as a type of digital consciousness raising (Blevins 2018). While Miranda has apologized for his part in the lack of Afro-Latinx actors in the production, it still warrants discussion that this 'oversight' could occur at all. The collection of tweets included in the present analysis was completed prior to the release of *In the Heights*, however the topic came up in the qualitative interviews. Future researchers could analyze tweets surrounding this topic to provide richer insight.

Afro-Latinxs interviewed during this research felt they had to mobilize to combat these media narratives. @DaliaCDrake said, "So it was really like, for me, more of a battle to under- to explain to people and make them aware that the Latino that you see on TV is not the only Latino that exists…". This decision has even influenced their career decisions. For @FearlessLeon, her drive to pursue a career in Black media stemmed directly from this erasure. She shared, "I worked in Black media, because of the missing gap of Afro-Latino storytelling and Afro-Latinidad." Afro-Latinxs have stories that deserve to be told and they are using their social media platforms to carry out their goals. When asked about what motivated him to claim an Afro-Latino identity online, @Oaddison said

> I embrace it because I use it as a platform to reach out to the world and say, 'Hey, you know, Latinos are not only the one that are, are portrayed in the media, or television, or in newspapers, or magazines. Latinos are, many Latinos look just like me as well.'

Latinxs are a diverse group of people with various races and @Oaddison used his platform to show that there are Latinxs who are also Black, despite the lack of mainstream representation. There is more research to be done regarding media representation and the implications of visibility. Future researchers should investigate the nuanced distinctions between Spanish and English language media. However, where the mainstream media outlets have fallen short, Afro-Latinxs are responding by using their own platforms. These counternarratives are important sites of resistance, not only for the tweet authors themselves but for other Afro-Latinxs experiencing ethno-racial dissonance. Social media is a space where they can assert their existence.

Summary

This digital counterspace that Afro-Latinxs have carved out on social media has provided an avenue for resisting ethno-racial dissonance and identity affirmation. The lack of representation enacts violence against Afro-Latinx identity by erasing them from a salient part of their worldview. Not seeing people like themselves on television and in film reinforced messaging that they could not exist as both fully Afro-descendant AND Latinx. This is part of what led to the development of ethno-racial dissonance. However, Afro-Latinx social media users should not be reduced to passive consumers of media. They actively use social media as a counterspace to reclaim their identity.

During Angel's interview, she discussed the impact of the erasure of her Afro-Latina identity and her work to reassert it later in life.

I definitely identified as Panamanian...I don't know if you've ever met Panamanians, but everywhere they go, they tell people they're Panamanian, and then I went to the foster care system, and it was like black and white, and it was mostly white people speaking for me. And I remember one time I had a social worker, she handed me some paperwork. …And I filled it out. And then you get to the section where it's race. And I clicked black, and I clicked Hispanic slash Latina. And **she really like she literally took her pen and scribbled that out for me.**

And that kind of stuck with me, because that was not the first of the last time something like that happened. Like, I've been on job interviews, and they've looked at that they'd like, oh, okay, so that's wrong. And they like, corrected right there in front of me. I've had people like, like adults, and my peers, children at the time, say, like, Oh, you can't be Latino, because you're black. And I've like, for so long, I didn't even identify as like Panamanian or Afro-Latino or anything like that. Because like, especially in the south, I would hear like comments like, Oh, you just don't want to be black, oh, you just don't want to, you want to be something else, you want to be different. And I would try to explain to people like, just because I'm Afro-Latina does not mean that I'm mixed, or that I want to be mixed up, that I want to be anything other than black, like I can be fully black and be fully Latina.

So I feel like I went through this period of being like, super, super proud of my heritage, and then just having like, people like shit on it. And then like, just distancing myself from it for some years. And like, really getting back into pride about it. **Like once I became an adult and I started browsing on social media, and I started seeing other people**

> **talk about their identity. I'm like, oh, okay, you know, like, so there's a space for us to speak, you know?** -- Angel

Through social media, Angel found "a space for us to speak" which allowed her to reignite her pride in her identity. Where once she had this pride stripped from her by anti-Blackness, social media counterspaces where Afro-Latinx identity is discussed reopened this option for her identification. In the next chapter, there will be a discussion on how Afro-Latinx participants extended their use of social media beyond identity affirmation and discourse alteration into the social movement sphere as they participate in online activism.

CHAPTER 5

STREETS TO TWEETS: AFRO-LATINXS EXPAND ACTIVISM ONLINE

Afro activism is another way Afro-Latinxs approach ethno-racial consonance. As they assert their identity during their activism and grapple with their place in a racial justice movement like #BLM, Afro-Latinxs were able to validate and re-affirm their Afro-Latinx identity. Afro-Latinx activism also emerged as a salient theme across both tweets and interviews. This chapter demonstrates the legitimacy of online activism and argues for the value of social media activism as it serves as a site of resistance for the Afro-Latinx community. Afro-Latinxs actively participate in online #BLM activism in ways that are both similar to other Black groups and also distinct to their experience. They utilize the hashtags #Afrolatinx and #BlackLivesMatter together to demonstrate solidarity and affirm their space in this movement. Often, they use these hashtags in conjunction with other hashtags that call for justice regarding specific victims of anti-Black violence, (e.g., #BreonnaTaylor or #RIPTrayvonMartin). This tactic is widely used by BLM online activists to bring attention to these victims' unjust deaths. Afro-Latinx online activism also extends the reach of their offline activism. My interviewees were particularly critical of "slacktivism," citing social media's necessity to modern movements as well as accessibility concerns.

In some ways, Afro-Latinxs' social media identity reflects their offline identity, but also acts as a space where their Afro-Latinidad is amplified. This is especially evident in their online activism. The tweets in this analysis demonstrate this well, as they include both #BlackLivesMatter or #BLM AND #Afrolatinx*. Through these tweets, Afro-Latinxs asserted

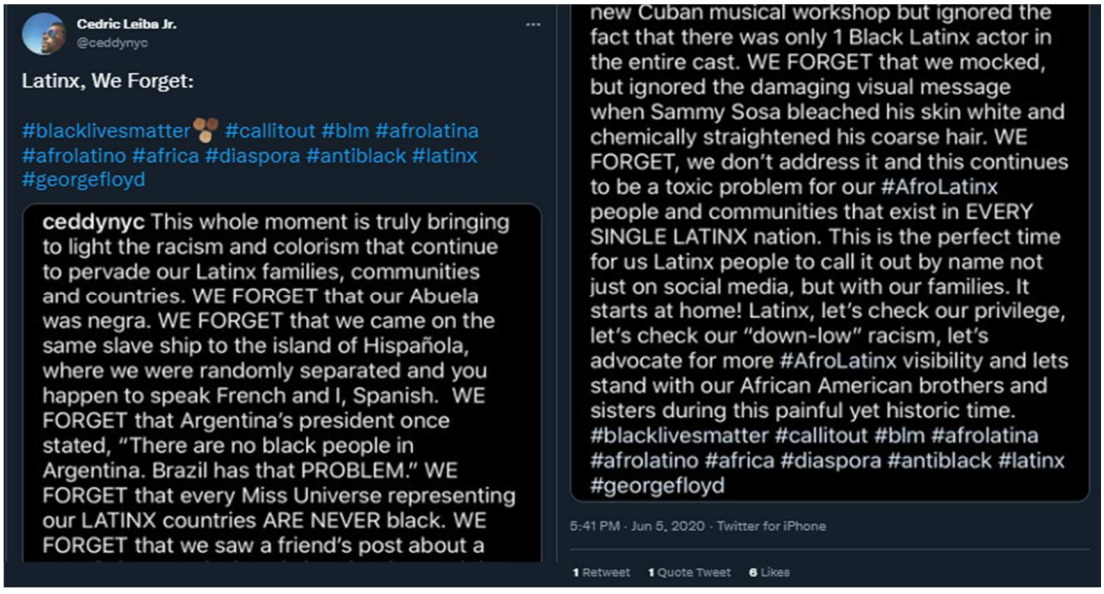
their ethno-racial identity's salience in the #BlackLivesMatter movement. While they were often aware of their Blackness offline, they used online spaces to declare this identity to others, including fellow Afro-Latinxs, other Black members of the diaspora, and outsiders. These tweets allowed them to stake their claim in the BLM movement. In this chapter, there will be a discussion of slacktivism and how hybrid activism, intersectionality, and the extension of reach achieved by online activism all serve to counter this concept. Hybrid activism occurs when those involved in offline protests include photos from these demonstrations in their tweets. Afro-Latinx online activists' use of this tool brings legitimacy to this medium of protest. The participants' skepticism of the term "slacktivism" is rooted in their intersectional lived experiences, and during the interviews they spoke on how online activism could provide access to activists which offline activism could not. I further examine the use of social media by #AfroLatinas to make space for Black women in #BlackLivesMatter. Ultimately, social media extends the reach of social activism across medium (in person and online) and location (social and geographic).

@mimimcsteamy's tweet clearly illustrated the linked fate when it comes to commitment to and investment in the BLM movement (Tweet 8). Since Afro-Latinxs are Black and #BLM is a movement that includes a diasporic understanding of Blackness, this is their movement as well. This participation differs from the "solidarity" expressed in problematic hashtags, such as #LatinxsForBlackLives, because that rhetoric implies Latinxs are a separate and distinct group who lend support to the cause but do not have a stake in the issues addressed by the movement.

Tweet 8.

As Afro-Latinxs participate in the movement as members of the targeted group, @mimimcsteamy's tweet addressed Afro-Latinxs directly, rather than attempting to educate the general public. While there were some discussions in the previous chapter about how Afro-Latinxs wished to distance themselves from their Blackness early in life due to anti-Blackness they experienced, the lived reality is that many Afro-Latinxs do understand themselves as Black and as rightful participants in the #BlackLivesMatter movement. @ceddnyc's tweet further emphasized the inclusion of Afro-Latinxs in this movement (Tweet 9). He also addressed other Afro-Latinxs directly and called on them to remember their Blackness and their investment in the movement as well:

Tweet 9.



Using an image of text to expand his message beyond Twitter's micro-blogging limitations, @ceddnyc delivered a call to action for "Latinx families, communities, and countries" to address racism and colorism. He suggested that the failure to address these issues was due to a lapse in collective memory. His tweet mentioned several incidences of anti-Blackness that have been "forgotten," and thus allowed this racism to continue. It ends with the explicit call for more #AfroLatinx visibility and solidarity with African Americans in this historic June 2020 moment. With this message, he situated Afro-Latinxs in the African Diaspora as well as the #BLM movement.

@fogoav's tweet similarly was a call to action directed at non-Black Latinx (Tweet 10). They used hashtags in both English and Spanish to connect with audiences in both languages.

Tweet 10.

also provided context for the tweet in their follow-up interview:

> This Twitter post was part of a larger, I don't know, conversation that was going on back in 2020. Again, a pandemic where folks were taking to the streets throughout the world, in defense of Black lives. And I noticed, or a bunch of us have noticed, a continued trend where non-Black Latinos were ignoring and erasing the struggles of Black Latinos in their own communities. And so, they were doing things like #LatinosForBlackLives,

> which I and a bunch of other folks, were finding kind of problematic…because **we already have a hashtag, we've already been part of the Black Lives Matter protest movement, with many chapters in Latin America, and in Latino communities.**
>
> And so, one of the things that I also noticed was the ways, kind of, Black culture traditions, and people kind of get sidelined or minimized to these markers, like dance and food. And that kind of is a surface level, supposedly respect and appreciation for Black people. And for me, I was like, great. You like the food, you like the dance, but people are dying, right? …police brutality exists in our Latino communities in the US and in Latin American communities outside the US, and I feel like people, particularly non-Black Latinos have a hard time making those connections…And it's always striking for me that folks are able to sideline the Black activism happening in their communities, and kind of put themselves forward without an engaged conversation on what the needs are, what the demands are, what the dangers are -- @fogoav

@fogoav shared their frustration with being erased from #BlackLivesMatter by non-black Latinxs. They also critique the shallow appreciation for Black people that centers "food and dance" but not the "demands" and "dangers" of Black lives. While Afro-Latinxs are definitely part of the #BlackLivesMatter movement via their racial identity, they also have particular experiences grounded in their ethno-racial identities. These particularities in national heritage can present in a variety of ways and can provide additional context. For example, in Tweet 11, @j_lajas's referenced his Pedro Albizu Campos shirt, and his resemblance to the activist in his tweet. Campos was a lawyer, well-known for his activism towards Puerto Rican independence. In this tweet, he referred to Campos as "The 'Puerto Rican Malcolm X'" and drew further attention to the interconnectedness between Black and Puerto Rican struggles for

self-determination through his invocation of both the #blackpanthers and the #YoungLords hashtags. Many tweet authors and interview participants also brought their country-of-origin specific experiences into play, whether through a flag in their profile or verbal confirmation. Rather than flatten or erase this diversity, the use of the hashtag #AfroLatinx served to bring these often-connected experiences together.

Just by using this hashtag, the specificity can remain even while they are creating these cross-national connections. For example, the identity of Afro-Latinx does not diminish their identity as Puerto Rican and vice versa. By identifying as Afro-Latinx, they are not any less Puerto Rican. The hashtag is not further erasing these identities; the purpose in its use here is for making better connections with others in their nation of origin and their individual culture, as well as within the greater Afro-Latinx community. Acknowledging that these experiences are connected between these countries and these people does not diminish the fact that they have their own specific backgrounds and hashtags.

Tweet 11.

Hybrid Activism

Online activism is important on its own, but some Afro-Latinx social media users also utilized their online spaces to directly connect to in-person activism. @j_lajas' tweet above demonstrated hybrid activism; the author used photos to bring his offline activism to an online platform, effectively extending the reach of their protest participation. @mariahe63798823 also shared their offline work in their tweets (Tweet 12, 13). The signs in the photo included messages of immigrant women supporting #BLM such as "sí se puede en solidaridad para al movimiento para las vidas Afrodescendientes" (Yes, we can in solidarity with the movement for Afro-descendant lives), "Mujeres immigranta apoyan al movimiento Black Lives Matter" ("Immigrant women support the movement Black Lives Matter), or simply "Las vidas los Afrodescendientes importan"("Afro-descendant lives matter").

Tweet 12.

Tweet 13.

These tweets served as clear examples of how Afro-Latinx social media users connected their online activism with their offline activism in a legitimate manner. Rather than attempts by critics to undermine this form of activism by deeming online activism: *slacktivism*, they showed this sphere of activism could be meaningful.

Slacktivism

Slacktivism is a pejorative term that refers to supposedly inauthentic, low-threshold forms of engagement online (Dennis 2019). Being that participant tweets were identified by their inclusion of the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag, I included an interview question about their understanding of this term. Most of my interview participants were critical of outside individuals naming their work as slacktivism and the attempts by users of the term to delegitimize online activism, a type of activism that is both more accessible, and often employed by marginalized

communities (especially working class and youth activists). When asked this question about the concept of slacktivism, Lucky discussed how he used his platform online to enhance the movement despite limitations due to his career.

> I disagree. I disagree. Real activism happens anywhere in everywhere that there's a voice that will listen, that makes sense. If you have an open ear to not just hear me out but listen, you have a right to make a change. So, activism doesn't have to be on the forefront 10 toes down, as I say, you know, in the streets, politicking, you know, ... it doesn't have to be the traditional old school guerilla style hop out, we protest. No. activism has many forces, many faces. And it comes with a different type of force through each channel. Right? For the modern day, generations that we live through, you have to be open to, you know, acknowledging that, and standing by whatever, one works for you, in my mind, right. In my position, I can't be on the forefront, you know… **I can't be there physically. But I can bring awareness online. I can use my platform online to make a statement. I can use my platform online to make and create dialogue. And from that, that's educating someone else helping the movement.**

This participant's focus on what they could or could not do is essential to the argument of online activism's accessibility. By defining activism as an act where everyone can be heard, even when someone "can't be there physically," we can make space for those on the margins of traditional activism. By using this definition, we can consider "distributed framing," where the definition of a social movement actor can be framed to include social media activists as well (Ince et al. 2017). Ince et al. argued that rather than depending on leaders to create their frames, "...a larger audience can append their own meanings to the messages emanating from a movement and create communities focused around more specific issues" (2017:1818). We can

see the benefit of this "larger audience" participation throughout the following section as I discuss the greater inclusion afforded by social media activism.

Intersectionality

Online activism's importance is particularly evident from an intersectional perspective. It provides a venue that allows for a more diverse framing of the #BlackLivesMatter movement from Afro-Latinx social media users who experience other interlocking oppressions as well. The #BlackLivesMatter movement is best understood through an intersectional lens because it was created by Black women to be a broad intersectional movement against state violence (Black Lives Matter of Los Angeles n.d.). Despite the pervasive Black male victims of police violence narrative in mainstream media, and even in interviews with Black women themselves (Crooks-Allen and Richards 2019), Black people with intersectional experiences of oppression—including Afro-Latinas—continue to be active supporters of the #BlackLivesMatter movement. The interviews and tweets that follow demonstrate the ability of this movement to expand and take the shape necessary for an intersectional constituency. Through #BlackLivesMatter and social media activism, disabled Afro-Latinxs and those with less biographical availability have the accessibility to participate. Through this type of activism, Afro-Latinas can call attention to how their particular experiences as Black women intersect with the movement.

Accessibility

> By kind of privileging only in-person activism, when there are also ways to like, get people involved, get people educated, get people interested through using social media, and also of involving people who are disabled, right, like, if I have a panic attack, every time that I go to a protest, like, I want to be able to be involved in other ways that aren't just being at the protest.

> **…how many Occupy protests that I see where people were in wheelchairs and trying to, like, navigate the potholes with Philadelphia, during a protest?**
>
> -- Sharon

Online activism offers a more accessible platform for activists with disabilities to participate. Sharon's interview helped to illustrate some of the challenges of in-person activism. Through social media, disabled voices have an avenue to amplify our movements that would be missed in the older, more narrow understanding of activism. Furthermore, knowing the heightened threat that police pose for Black disabled people, online activism can serve as a relatively safer alternative for participation where members of this community are not put in direct confrontation with law enforcement.

> **There are people that can really only do activism online for safety reasons. And then it's not, it's not accessible to everybody, you know, if you're someone that uses a wheelchair, it would not be the safest thing for you to go to a protest. Because when something happens… you're the most vulnerable person out there. So, of course, it's more, you know, it's better for you to use it online**.... **And I think it reaches more people than me standing on a corner and pleading my case**.
>
> -- @planetanjali

While @planetanjali spoke on the safety concerns for physically disabled activists, the disabled community is not limited solely to physical disabilities. Dianne explained other challenges for neurodivergent activists, saying,

> This is coming from someone who like, I can say, at one point, I just didn't understand online organizing…but I've seen the power of it, **I've seen how it's actually a form of accessibility. And it really helps people who have disabilities be involved.** It helps

> people who are neurodivergent, who can't f___ing show up to a rally because they will have a flare because of it or, you know, have auditory response to it, or like, neurological nervous system response to it. Like, not everybody can walk a March, not everybody can, like, listen to people yelling in the streets and be calm, you know? And I think that form of activism is glorified in some way. And online activism is diminished... And I don't see one being more powerful than the other, I do see one being more strategic than the other. I think that a lot of these rallies and like rah, rah rahs, like, listen, put that money towards some online campaigns that will get a far greater reach, and more depth, in commitment from people than just like showing up to a rally one time a year. And like, you feel good, because you showed up in physical space. **And especially now with a pandemic, I think it's way safer to organize online than it is to do like, you know, physical organizing.** -- 'Dianne'

Dianne saw the power of online activism for disabled community members, as well as the important public health concern in our Covid-19 era.

With these additional risks, biographical availability is another important consideration for activists which may hinder their participation in traditional offline demonstrations. "Biographical availability can be defined as the absence of personal constraints that may increase the costs and risks of movement participation, such as full-time employment, marriage, and family responsibilities" (McAdam 1986:70). In YM's critique of slacktivism, she explained her experience with this restriction:

> …even a little bit helps, right? So, let's say if all you can do is tweet, right, then you tweet, that's your conscience, if you can attend a protest and make signs and hand out water. But something is something… just for me, because, you know, I'm a single mom,

> and I'm juggling so much all the time. I feel like, what about those who have like, four or five kids? Or what about those who are caring for other people?... I don't see [online activism] as like slacking…

Online activism further provides accessibility to those with less biographical availability (McAdam 1986:70). As YM suggested, those who want to be involved with the #BlackLivesMatter movement but were prevented from offline activism by other responsibilities, such as caretaking, can participate in online activist activities and have their voice heard. In a movement for all Black lives, these Afro-Latinx social media users made the case that it is vitally important for there to be a variety of ways to engage.

Afro-Latinas

"I'm obviously a Black girl, right?" - Claire

While the #BlackLivesMatter movement was intended to be an intersectional movement from its inception, Black women have been consistently erased. Even when victims of police brutality are killed within months of each other, we still see more attention directed toward male victims. For example, the hashtag #BreonnaTaylor was used much less than #GeorgeFloyd, despite being murdered in March and May of 2020, respectively. So when Black women intentionally center their particular experiences in their #BLM participation, they do so in response to being overlooked in this movement. This movement, founded by Black women, became so neglectful of Black women's experiences that an additional movement and hashtag had to be created by intersectional scholar activists.

> #SayHerName is grounded in the sad reality that Black women and girls who are targeted, brutalized, and killed by police are all too often excluded from mainstream narratives around police violence…The [#SayHerName] movement provides analytical

> frames for understanding their experiences and broadens dominant conceptions of who experiences state violence and what it looks like. When we don't have frames to tell the story, we forget that Black women are frequently the victims of police violence. (Crenshaw and Ritchie 2015)

The Afro-Latinas in my study therefore participate in an ongoing battle for recognition on multiple fronts.

In this research, I found nearly as many #BlackLivesMatter tweets that also used #AfroLatina (480) as there were tweets that used #AfroLatinx or #AfroLatino combined (494). This is particularly important when we consider the significance of Black women's labor in this movement and the #BlackLivesMatter discourse that often erases Black women. Afro-Latinas used social media to assert their identity and their space in this movement. In the following tweets and in many others, Afro-Latinas used hybrid activism to extend their offline activism while creating visibility and push back against a men-centric BLM discourse.

Tweet 14.

Tweet 15.

Tweet 16.

Examples of hybrid activism endure across time, appearing in both 2015 and 2020, as these Afro-Latinas pulled from the same "repertoire of contention" (Tilly 2010). Tilly's conceptualization of a repertoire of contention described the toolkit of strategies that movement actors continue to make use of over time. The Afro-Latinas pictured in these tweets were participating in offline demonstrations, as indicated by their protest signs and their friends and/or family included in the photos. @MSauciana's tweet displayed photos of a group with signs featuring the messages "No Justice No Peace," "Hands up don't shoot," "How Many More," and "RIP Mike Brown" (Tweet 14). While we cannot know the full intention of every tweet, it is evident their inclusion of photos highlights that activists like @gorillaboom and @selenazuri are also a part of larger communities and networks that support them and their place in the movement (Tweet 15; Tweet 16). This participation in hybrid activism allows Afro-Latinas to solidify their place in the #BlackLivesMatter movement by documenting that Black women are not only impacted by these issues, but that they are doing the work for this cause. Even when Black women are frequently erased from the mainstream media narratives, these Afro-Latinas take their activism both in person and on social media to make use of the platforms available to them.

@SharunGonzales's tweet served as a poignant "reminder" that Black women's lives are important (Tweet 17). In the #BlackLivesMatter era, we too often see the lives, labor, and legacies of Black women overlooked. This user specifically called attention to the role of Black women in the movement.

Tweet 17.

Even Afro-Latina celebrities, such as Amara LaNegra, were committed to sharing their experiences as Black women who are active in #BlackLivesMatter in particular. Social media allowed these experiences to reach a broader audience, as evidenced in this @AfroLatinoAssoc tweet:

Tweet 18.

Afro-Latino Assoc.
(@AfroLatinoAssoc). Jun 29, 2020

@VictoriaSosa piece on @AmaraLaNegraALN on bein #afrolatina &active in #BlackLivesMatter □□ @bad_dominicana @Afrofeminas @LaUnicaZeMendez @rositamromero @ramonathemona @AfrolatinProjec @MAlcantara_24 @AccionAfroDom @BLKCLatinasKnow @DiversityUS @La_Julissa https://t.co/eknYUidx3y

This account shared the link to an interview with Amara from Telemundo in June of 2020 and mentioned a number of other Twitter users in order to boost engagement with the interview. This amplification of Black activist voices is discussed further in the next section.

Extended Reach

The below tweet also displayed how the reach of Afro-Latinas can be amplified through the internet (Tweet 19). The author of this tweet discussed a podcast episode where two Latina activists held a conversation regarding their place in anti-Blackness debates.

Tweet 19.

> **#NotMeUs #TestTraceIsolate #WearYourDamnMask**
> (@charleshb). Jun 8, 2020.
>
> #podin @latinatolatina #podcast ‘Two #Latina Activists on #Latinos' Place in #AntiBlackness ‘https://t.co/o8wfT6YCYG @AliciaMenendez @rosaclemente @marisa_franco #latinx #latino #AfroLatina #AfroLatinx #AfroLatino #BlackLivesMatter #Uprising2020 #GeorgeFloyd #BreonnaTaylor

In their interview, @Suazny187 described the expanded reach of messages shared as content online. When a video “goes viral” by accumulating millions of views, the poster can initiate conversations that spread awareness beyond the attendees of a particular demonstration. Viral content has greater potential for reaching viewers who might not already be interested.

> They don't go to the organization, but you're seeing their view of a video might have a million views, 2 million views… **the video has 3 million people, but most of the people that watch the video, maybe some people might disagree with it, anybody, but the message is out. The conversation is out there, whether you agree with or disagree with it. And I think that's the purpose of activism to make change, and as long as our conversation is happening, good change will come.**
>
> -- @Suazny187

@DaliaCDrake also discussed extended reach during her interview.

> I feel that during the #BlackLivesMatter movement last year, I was definitely very heavy in posting. But then I also had to reflect back and say, 'how much of this is actually moving and progressing some of the issues that we are experiencing?' And I definitely had to say that a lot of the stuff that I was doing wasn't necessarily pushing anything. **So, I feel that there is a real way to do activism on social media. If you're trying to organize groups, let's say the communication of when I put out the tweet, hey, I'm going to go protest, if anybody wants to come and help me out with supplies… …like just the simple hashtag, and you're not saying anything, you're not maybe telling a story about your personal experience, you're not maybe making people aware of new petitions or new things that we could be doing to move the movement, I feel that that's where we started lacking,** what the initial sense of it is.
>
> -- @DaliaCDrake

In her interview, @DaliaCDrake provided some necessary critical thinking in regard to social media activism. She offered a different perspective from some of the other interviewees in that she presented more of a range in the efficacy of online activism, where a variety of actions count as legitimate and others she perceived as less "real." After a period of heightened #BlackLivesMatter-related social media posting, she reflected on whether her contributions were "actually moving and progressing" the movement. While she concluded that some of her social media activity may not have been fruitful, her response ultimately highlighted another important function of online activism: organizing. This use of social media for offline organizing demonstrated another example of hybrid activism where online activist activity has an impact on

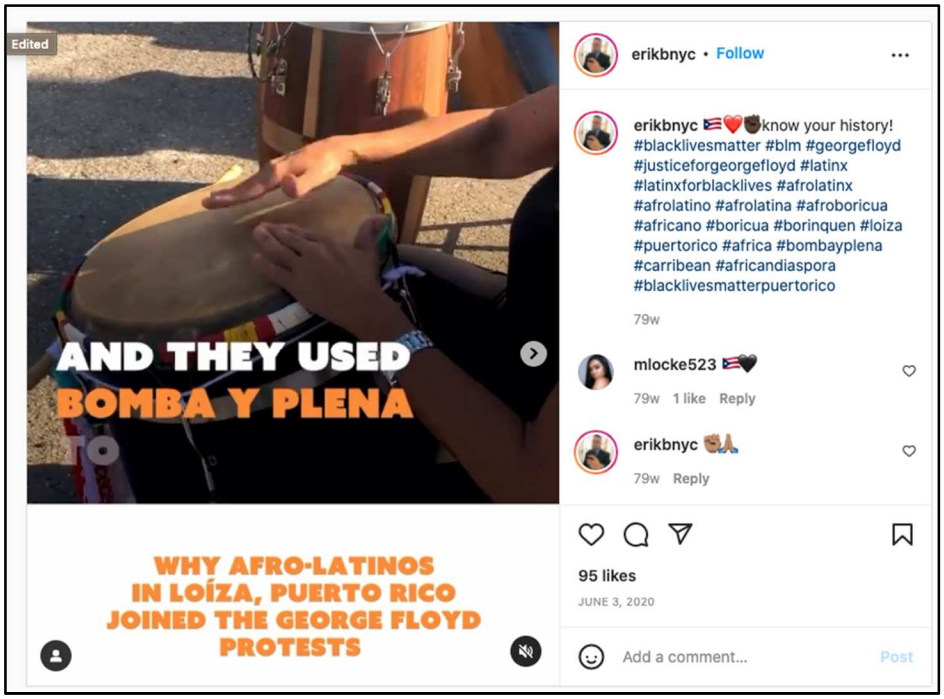
offline outcomes. Not only does online activism extend the reach of offline activism, but activists could also use this as a tool for organizing offline demonstrations and mobilizing resources.

Additionally, online activism provides a degree of safety for Black people and, more broadly, Black organizations. @Suazny187 suggested that Black organizers act strategically in disseminating information online with the goal of safeguarding their plans and personnel from adversaries. Recruitment by these groups or generating interest by exposing their content is another avenue of mobilization that happened online with people acting as resources.

> Ooh that's interesting…I think online is the best method, right? To get the word out. I've seen it with the group that I mentioned earlier, all of them are online, they all recruit online, but not maybe recruit, but they have their message online. They got a YouTube page, the folks that have a link on their Instagram, they post clips, and they get their message out to certain black organizations, or they're very wary on how big they get though. …So online activism works, get the word out. But once you're in, let's say you go to one of their clubs, or one of their offices, it might be more of a, this is the plan…

The extended reach of social media activism also encourages transnational participation and solidarity by calling attention to anti-Blackness as a global racial project. When @erikBnyc tweeted in June 2020, he linked to his Instagram post where he shared a video captioned "WHY AFRO-LATINOS IN LOÍZA, PUERTO RICO JOINED THE GEORGE FLOYD PROTESTS" (Tweet 20). This tweet and subsequent Instagram post demonstrated the interconnectedness of oppression at the hands of the state for Black communities everywhere.

Tweet 20.



In this tweet, Erik B. used social media to connect the 2020 murder of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis to the 1980 murder of Adolfina Villanueva by police in Loíza, Puerto Rico, strengthening the diasporic bonds between these global communities. We are able to clearly see the motives that address the question posed in the video's caption. According to this video, the Afro-Latinos in Puerto Rico are active in the #BlackLivesMatter movement because they are well aware that this is their fight as well.

@FearlessLeon shared similar sentiments in her interview. When providing context for her tweet, she said, "…at that moment in 2015, is when I realized this is a world issue. And Black people across the world need to claim this and empower themselves to bring forth change." She continued her explanation of why and how she used #BLM to connect #BlackLivesMatter to a deep transnational legacy of Black activism.

> And I chose to also use Black Lives Matter, because while Black Lives Matter is a Black issue–or not issue–a movement starting in the US, it's a global movement for the collective uprising of equity and fair treatment of people of color. And what we see in America, the unfair treatment of people of color is something that we've seen in all Latin American countries. So, I felt the need to tie that in, to make people aware of this being a global issue that also bleeds down to our countries, our parent's native countries, and relates to the experience that we have in the US. So, it's like our parents had these experiences. I believe that a lot of these things that we're experiencing are multi-generational, right? They're multi-generational because they didn't just begin. These aren't, these aren't new issues. -- @fearlessleon

Summary

The posts in this chapter are not low effort slacktivism; they matter. They serve as a poignant reminder that the experiences that gave rise to #BlackLivesMatter in the US are not new and did not spontaneously occur in isolation. State-sanctioned violence against Black people occurs globally and has been prevalent multiple times throughout human history. Afro-Latinx participation in #BlackLivesMatter social media activism plays an active role in continuing the tradition of resistance. In this chapter, I examined the experiences of Afro-Latinxs regarding online activism in the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Their online activism was able to bridge

their in-person and online activist platforms. Interviewees pushed back against the concept of slacktivism and spoke to the increased accessibility of social media activism. Furthermore, the tweets demonstrated the function of social media activism for a more intersectional movement that allowed Afro-Latinas to center their experiences as Black women. This chapter concluded with a discussion of the extended reach of online activism and the potential for transnational #BlackLivesMatter activity. The next chapter will provide a conclusion that summarizes this study and discusses the findings for the research questions.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Introduction

I set out to study the intersection of Afro-Latinx identity, #BlackLivesMatter, and social media because it was an apparent direction that has been overlooked in sociology research. Afro-Latinxs should be acknowledged and understood in this sphere because their lives matter. Furthermore, learning about their ethno-racial experiences could be theoretically useful for considering how identity and activism are performed in social media spaces. The participants in this study demonstrated the Afro-Latinx use of social media to make identity claims in activist spaces. With this study, I examine the possibilities for action, change, connection, and identity affirmation that are mediated through these digital platforms. In this work I brought interdisciplinary research into conversation with sociological social movements studies to the benefit of advancing our discussions of Afro-Latinx identity and social media's role in the #BlackLivesMatter movement. This study used social media data and qualitative interviews to understand how Afro-Latinx social media users brought their ethno-racial identity into harmony. This ethno-racial consonance was approached via social media where they resisted anti-Blackness by disrupting evasive discourse and participating in #BlackLivesMatter activism.

Summary of the Results

This research demonstrated Afro-Latinx use of social media as a tool for resistance and ethno-racial consonance. While previous research focused on ethno-racial dissonance, the present study turned to the converse of this idea to observe the ways that Afro-Latinxs brought

their ethno-racial identity together through social media. In particular, they accomplished this through disrupting anti-Black discourse and participating in anti-racist activism, such as #BlackLivesMatter. In order to understand this process through a qualitative lens, I collected data from social media posts on Twitter, as well as in-depth semi-structured interviews from the authors of these tweets. The tweets in my dataset were from social media users who used #Afro-Latinx* and #BlackLivesMatter together in a single tweet. The interviews allowed me to follow-up with some of those authors and other Afro-Latinx social media users. I conducted a qualitative analysis with these sources of data in conversation with one another. Through coding, the primary themes that emerged were discourse and activism in response to anti-Blackness.

Discourse surrounding Latinidad continued to exclude Afro-Latinxs until they took matters into their own hands. Afro-Latinxs use social media as a counterspace to disrupt and correct this erasure. Afro-Latinxs created awareness and education about their existence and identity. Often, Afro-Latinx social media users explained that Black Latinxs exist by declaring their identity and pride in this public forum. The erasure of Afro-Latinxs was also reinforced by the lack of representation in popular Latinx media outlets. Afro-Latinxs interviewed spoke directly about their intent to use social media as a space to create representation where it is lacking in these traditional outlets. Additionally, the authors of these tweets had the intention of impacting people outside the Afro-Latinx community who do not understand their identity and fellow Afro-Latinxs within their community. Other Afro-Latinxs experiencing ethno-racial dissonance saw these social media spaces as “a space for us to speak” which ultimately provides ethno-racial affirmation for these social media users.

Afro-Latinxs also used social media for #BlackLivesMatter activism and asserting their place in the movement. These Afro-Latinxs resisted exclusion by refuting rhetoric that erased

them even in #BlackLivesMatter spaces, where slogans such as #LatinxsForBlackLives suggested difference for the sake of solidarity. Afro-Latinxs made use of hybrid activism that brought their in-person activist activities to online spaces via inclusions of photos and other media. Furthermore, they shed light on the legitimacy and accessibility of online activism. Participants were critical of the concept of "slacktivism," because the term can be used to invalidate activism in social media spaces. Online activism benefitted both disabled activists and activists with limited biographical availability, in addition to the movement itself through participation of a more diverse body of Black activists. This accessibility allowed the #BlackLivesMatter movement to live up to its intersectional roots and make space for Afro-Latinas to center the experiences of Black women who are often erased from this movement. This online activism also extended the reach of #BlackLivesMatter activists and promoted transnational movement activity. Afro-Latinx participation in #BlackLivesMatter activism via social media encourages the use of a more diasporic lens.

Discussion of the Results

In response to my research questions, I found that Afro-Latinx social media users in my study understood themselves as part of the #BlackLivesMatter. They used the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag to emphasize their pride in their Afro-Latinx identity and to claim themselves as part of the movement. These social media users utilized these platforms to interrupt anti-Blackness in Latinidad discourse which erases their existence. While the participants in this study were more likely to be secure in their Afro-Latinx identity by the hashtags that I sampled for self-identification, navigating ethno-racial identity is often an ongoing process rather than a destination.

In response to the second question, Afro-Latinxs used social media as a tool for amplification where they can foster connections with a greater Afro-Latinx community. They announced their identity in these posts, showed pride in their Blackness, and brought awareness to their community. Their #BlackLivesMatter activism on social media strengthened their Afro-Latinx identity individually and collectively as other social media users encountered their posts. This connection between their Afro-Latinx identity and their activism is bi-directional, as each hashtag brought the other into that space, with #AfroLatinx being visible in the #BlackLivesMatter sphere and vice versa. This relationship then allowed a more expansive understanding of Blackness and Latinidad to emerge and a more inclusive reading of the #BlackLivesMatter movement as well. By employing a distributed framing perspective, I was able to examine the process by which social media users with varying levels of involvement could influence a movement's identity. I found Afro-Latinxs who actively made space for themselves in BLM's narrative by using these hashtags to make their presence known. While this research was specific to Afro-Latinxs, the intentional use of social media and hashtags for disseminating marginalized communities' narratives can be applied to other groups erased by social movements. We have seen the impact of putting other hashtags, like #SayHerName in conversation with #BlackLivesMatter (Crenshaw 2015). This tactic works to highlight the voices of those group members whose concerns are often silenced in the mainstream discourse.

Gender, as well as other identities, intersected with this process as it influences the ways participants understand themselves, how they are perceived, and their experiences in digital spaces. Specifically, Afro-Latinas contended with the erasure of Black women from BLM, and accordingly created specific responses to reaffirm their lives matter even within the digital BLM space. This was emphasized in tweets, such as the use of #BlackWomenMatter, and in the

interviews, including the emphatic response of "I'm obviously a Black girl." As Black women, Afro-Latinas had a great deal to contend with when finding their place in the #BlackLivesMatter movement. They not only faced the erasure of Afro-Latinxs from #BlackLivesMatter but also the erasure of women from this movement. Afro-Latinas also mentioned the use of these social media spaces where they have to contend with traditional hair and beauty politics as well.

For the third question, I wanted to better understand the relationship between #BlackLivesMatter and #Afro-Latinx, as I suspected that as both hashtags continued to gain more traction in recent years they might be connected. The ongoing movement for Black lives and liberation has brought attention to the anti-Blackness in our communities globally. Through these efforts, a likely side-effect was that more Afro-descendants have developed more pride in their Black identity. #BlackLivesMatter may have impacted #AfroLatinx as it brought the Afro-Latinx community into a shared digital venue where they could feel seen. By displaying their #AfroLatinx hashtag in these BLM spaces they encouraged others to do so as well. Through #BlackLivesMatter and #AfroLatinx*, Afro-Latinxs found each other and encountered more affirming messaging. Prior to the #BlackLivesMatter movement, there was less access to the types of interactions that could counter ethno-racial dissonance. By bringing these hashtags together, Afro-Latinxs created a space that allowed their cohesive ethno-racial identity to exist.

While previous researchers have shown that social media is an important component of contemporary social movements (Kavada 2015; Theocaris et al. 2015), through the present work we see how social media was employed by Afro-Latinxs for identity building and activism. The impact of the #BlackLivesMatter movement on Afro-Latinx identity is evident in the use of #BlackLivesMatter as they create digital counterspaces. Afro-Latinxs are actively working against the anti-Black racial project that seeks to erase them via social media by asserting that

Black lives do matter, even in the Latinidad discourse. Earlier researchers focused on the distance that Black ethnic groups have attempted to maintain between themselves and Black Americans, but the present research showed that different dynamics are at work in the #BlackLivesMatter era. Hordge-Freeman and Loblack's 2020 work presented findings that Afro-Latinxs were in support of participation of #BlackLivesMatter, but my work demonstrated how Afro-Latinxs on social media made a conscious effort to be a part of the #BlackLivesMatter movement. The participants in this study saw themselves as a part of the #BlackLivesMatter movement and actively posted to make their community more visible in these social media spaces. In addition to visibility, we saw that Afro-Latinxs were using these social media spaces to resist Hordge-Freeman and Veras' ethno-racial dissonance, both in themselves and for their fellow Afro-Latinxs who have faced anti-Blackness.

This study built upon previous work from Bonilla and Rosa (2015) and Byrd et al. (2017) that implored researchers to incorporate social media into studies of social movements, specifically as we seek to understand how social media functions as a tool for marginalized groups. This study added to the body of work from researchers like Dennis (2019), who built critiques against slacktivism by demonstrating the value and legitimacy of online activism. In my research, participants were critical of the concept of slacktivism, and instead gave support to online activism. This was evident in their interview responses and their tweets employing hybrid activism. Their tweets also demonstrated the ability of online activism to include a more intersectional range of movement participants and to extend the reach of their activism. Afro-Latinx social media users provide insight into how marginalized groups can use the internet, which McIlwain (2019) compared to a new world. In his work, McIlwain (2019) argued, "yes, they were creating a whole new world. But it wasn't a question about if and when racism would

rear its ugly head in this new world. Racism, fueled by anti-Blackness, was already there when it began." (96). The tweet authors in my study used social media as a tool for identity affirmation, activism, and anti-Black resistance.

Limitations of the Study

This study has a few limitations that I hope future research can transcend. For instance, I was unable to include Instagram data in this analysis because of the restrictions that platform has in place in regard to the privacy conditions. While social media data is central to this study, this method also limited the scope of the study to those who use social media. An additional challenge was the limited time for this study, but I intend to revisit the theme of online community-building. I think this broader community aspect of ethno-racial consonance could be especially fruitful if examined using multiple digital platforms. There were also other emergent themes and topics, such as academia and perceptions of beauty, that could be a good avenue for further exploration. Additionally, time constraints limited my ability to be as collaborative with the greater Afro-Latinx community on the design end of this project. I would achieve this by getting input about the semi-structured interview guide based on discussions with community groups. This would help ensure the study could be directly useful to social movement actors by incorporating questions that provide data they can apply.

I was also somewhat limited by my data; since I only collected tweets with an Afro-Latinx* hashtag, my data skewed towards those who, to some degree, accepted a pan-ethno-racial Afro-Latinx identity. These hashtag users were also more likely to be English speakers situated in the US context where this term is most common. Additionally, the social media data does not include many Afro-Latinxs who do not use the hashtags I selected or are not Twitter users. Social media data likely disproportionately represents certain generations of Afro-Latinxs.

I also would like to look at individual country of origin and local hashtags as well, which could include more geographic emphasis in the tweets collected. This focus on geographic markers could also help with the work of acknowledging more particular cultures within the African diaspora. It would also be interesting to use tweets by Afro-Latinxs who may not identify with the Afro-Latinx hashtag. Studying participation in other movements through other hashtags specialized for additional racial justice movements abroad or even immigration movements in the US would also provide greater insights into how these movements and identity interact in a more transnational sense.

Implications for Future Research

Future researchers should be encouraged to include social media data in their research on social movement studies. Future studies should consider other configurations of multi-method research in this area, such as focus groups with social media users, or incorporating protest ethnography into a study of hybrid activism. Future researchers could also incorporate social class as it intersects with activist biographical availability. Not only is social media a useful tool for academics, but it also provides a platform for often overlooked groups. Subsequent works will hopefully be more collaborative and gather data specifically helpful to organizers aiming to create more inclusive movements.

Conclusion

After a multi-method study where I researched Afro-Latinx identity and experiences with the #BlackLivesMatter movement, I found that Afro-Latinx social media users resisted anti-Black messaging by asserting their Afro-descendant identity in Latinidad discourse and by participating in Black Lives Matter activism. Through my analysis of Twitter data qualitative interviews, I was able to conclude that social media serves as a means by which Afro-Latinx

ethno-racial dissonance is confronted, and consonance brought to their identity. They use these hashtags to identify themselves and be seen. When Afro-Latinxs found that social media can serve as “a space for us to speak,” they are able to finally feel heard.

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APPENDIX A.

Interview Guide

1. How would you like to be identified for the study?
    a. Twitter Handle for both tweet & Interview
    b. Twitter Handle for tweet & a user#/pseudonym for interview
    c. User#/pseudonym for both tweet & interview
        i. Please provide a pseudonym for the study
2. Please provide an email address if you'd like to be included in the drawing. This will be stored separately from your interview or any identifying Information
3. Do you mind if I record this interview to be transcribed? [RESUME RECORDING]
4. Could you please introduce yourself and tell me a bit about you
5. In 201X you posted "XYZ... #BLM #AfroLatinx*", could you provide some context for this post?
    a. How did you decide to make this post?
    b. Why did you choose to use both of these hashtags?
6. What motivated you to claim an Afro-Latinx identity?
    a. In general?
    b. Online?
7. Where in Latin America did you/your family migrate from?

    a. How many generations ago was that?

8. How important is your (insert country of origin) identity to your daily life?
    a. What are some examples of when it is important?
    b. What makes someone (insert country here)?
9. How important is your Black identity to your daily life?
    a. What are some examples of when it is important?
10. When did you realize you were Black?
    a. What did you think about this experience now?
11. What does Blackness mean to you?
    a. If ever, how does your Blackness or Afro-Descendant identity impact your daily life?
12. What does anti-Blackness mean to you?
    a. Where have you seen anti-Blackness?
        i. Any examples?
    b. Has it affected you in any way?
13. Can you tell me about your current involvement in any groups or organizations?
    a. How regularly do you participate?
14. What do you consider to be your online communities? How important are your communities to you?
    a. How did you find or build this community?
15. Have you ever experienced racism?
    a. If yes, can you please provide some examples?
    b. What are your perceptions of racism in America?

c. Have those perceptions ever changed?
    i. What brought that on?
d. Has the Black Lives Matter movement influenced your perceptions of racism in any way?

16. What were your experiences with African-Americans growing up?
    a. Did you hear anything about African-Americans in your household growing up?
17. Can you provide some examples of when, if ever, you feel you are a part of the Black community?
18. Have you ever felt at risk of violence by the police?
    a. Could you tell me about that experience(s)?
    b. What do you think could protect you from police violence?
19. What do you know about the Black Lives Matter movement?
    a. What do you think the purpose of the Black Lives Matter movement is?
    b. Is this a purpose you support? Why?
20. Are you involved in this movement?
    a. Why did you or didn't you become involved in this movement?
21. If you support this movement, how do you show your support?
22. Have you participated in any Black Lives Matter Demonstrations?
    a. If so, please tell me about your experience there?
    b. Who did you go with?
    c. How did you find out about it?
23. Can you tell me about your experiences with other social movements?
24. How do you usually use your social media?

a. Are there any other identities you claim on social media?
b. Would you say that your gender has influenced your social media use? If so, in what ways?
c. How has your online identity changed since over time? (particularly the pandemic)
    i. How important would you say that online identity is now compared to pre-pandemic?

25. What do you think about the term "slacktivism" or the idea that "real" activism can't happen online?
26. Do you feel a sense of belonging in the Black Lives Matter movement?
    a. Can you provide some examples of when you feel a sense of belonging in the Black Lives Matter movement?
27. Can you provide some examples of when, if ever, you feel a sense of exclusion from the Black Lives Matter movement?
    a. Any similar examples with other Black social movements?
    b. What about Latinx movements?
28. Does the BLM movement address the issues that concern you? In what way?
29. Is there anything else you'd like to add?