

Episode 135: Interview with Lupita Aquino

Episode Duration: 51:08

Jennifer Baker

Hello and welcome to the 10th anniversary year of the Minorities in Publishing podcast. I'm your host, Jennifer Baker. The minorities in publishing podcast first aired on August 14, 2014, and this year, I'll be celebrating with new guests, return guests, and some book giveaways for new and returning listeners. You may know you can find the podcast at minorities in publishing dot com, as well as on Twitter and Instagram at minorities in pub. You can also sign up for the monthly MIP newsletter for info on new episodes, guests and industry news as well as job or writing opportunities. Minorities in publishing is available wherever you listen to podcasts, including Spotify, Apple podcasts, Google podcasts, TuneIn and iHeartRadio. It's also available on the podcasting hosting server, Libsyn—I, i, b, s, y, n. Thanks so much for listening, and hope you enjoy this episode. [music fades out]

Hey, welcome to the latest episode of Minorities in Publishing. And I'm really happy to be talking to Lupita Aquino, because Lupita is one of the queens of the influencer space and the BIPOC influencer space. and if you don't follow her on Lupita Reads. It's Lupita—L, U, P, I, T, A, period, reads, R, E, A, D, S. Especially since you're mostly on Instagram, right? Yeah, yeah. Thank you so much for having me and for you know, I'm a big fan of you and all the work that you do. Honestly, you're one of the few people I feel like that ever has seen me and valued me, and I feel so honored to be able to be here with you to talk to you. So thank you for always seeing me and for inviting me to be part of this podcast. I'm like, Okay, we need to talk and just let people know, especially as we're in this weird space where we're talking a bit more, especially for authors, about what is publicity or marketing actually look like? What are those efforts? Who's out there doing the work? And again, you do the work. And this is, I just want to emphasize, this is not your sole job. And Lupita Reads is not paying the rent. It is not paying the rent.

Lupita Aquino

If anything, sometimes it chips off a little bit off of what's going to the rent, but that's just a joke. But yeah, no, it doesn't pay the rent. And this is not my full time job. I have a whole full time job aside of this. This just kind of started as a fun, fun project of mine when I was unemployed, and I feel like it's grown. Yeah, I was unemployed. I don't know. I don't know if I've ever told you the story, Jenn, but yeah, I was unemployed. I had moved back to my parents' home. I was living in the Midwest. My wife had found a job in DC, which is where we are currently reside in the Greater Washington, DC area. And so, I was living with my parents again, newly married, I didn't have a job, and I was just exhausted by life. And I was reading a lot more because obviously I had a lot of time. I've always loved reading, and I just decided to, one day just be like— You know what I was on Instagram. Like, my personal Instagram already posting about the books I was reading. And I just felt like the people there, like, which was mainly my family and friends, were all just kind of like, meh, you know. I would post pictures of other things and they would comment. But like, when I would post things like this book that I'm reading, or this stack of books that I just thought I would get nothing. So I had this genius idea. I was like, Oh well, I'm just gonna make another account that's public, not private, about what I'm reading, what I love, what I don't love, and we'll we'll see where it goes. I thought I was being really inventive, but this was back in 2015 so I feel like that was a big year. 2014 we give a lot of credit to We Need Diverse Books, and then it feels like a book conversation really blew up between 2014 and 2016 17. Yeah, so that's kind of when

I started everything in 2015 and I was not the only one posting about books online. I found the hashtag Bookstagram, and realized there was tons of people. And back then, there were publishers as well, and I didn't really know what a publisher was. It was like an account to me that was like talking about the books that I guess they were, in my mind, like they were pushing out, you know. I would follow them because I wanted free books, and they were giving away free books. And so comment on posts, I basically followed everybody and everything. There was no intention behind it. You know, it's just like I wanted, I wanted to see how I could enter the giveaways I did to get free books.

Jennifer Baker

What kinds of books were you going after? Do you feel like the same kind of books you're like, really, really into?

Lupita Aquino

No. Jenn, I'm so embarrassed I was going after anything and everything. You know.

Jennifer Baker

But this is the judge free zone and free books and free books. Remember when we had the Goodreads giveaways, and they were a lot, I guess better pre Amazon. I was in all those you and me both.

Lupita Aquino

I say I graduated from goodies because I would enter every single giveaway. Didn't matter subject matter. I didn't care. I was just very differently open to reading than I am now, I think because of everything I've learned through being in the space. But back then, I was reading anything like I think I remember just random stuff, random stuff, anything. One of the first giveaways I won was from Viking Books they had. I think, do you remember? I think it was like Jojo Moyes. Is that the name she's really, yeah. So I won, like, I won, like, a whole stack of, like, our different books and, you know, so I just, I was really reading anything unrelated to kind of, I guess, the pivot that I'm known for now, or the kind of, I would say, beat that I'm known for now, right? It was also a different space. You know, people seem to just be engaging with each other based off of what they're reading. You know, no one really was out there solely, I mean, there were people reading specific genres and specific books, right? It wasn't out of a need or a necessity, like you said earlier. I didn't realize that when I joined I guess there was that time of, like, diverse books and this call for diversity. I didn't, wasn't aware of that, and so it's just so interesting, you know.

Jennifer Baker

Yeah. You started 2015 that's nine years ago, that you've built a very prominent following, particularly on Instagram. You are on other platforms like Twitter and, whatever Twitter at this point, but that seems to take time. So you're starting out, you're like, Okay, I'm not being going to be as discerning, but now I'm going to be more discerning. And then now you kind of notice where Lupita Reads kind of blew up in some way, where you were just like, whoa, whoa, whoa, I'm becoming a designated space?

Lupita Aquino

You know, that's such an interesting question, and, like, such a good question. I think a lot about that often, because it's jarring to look at that number of people that are following you, and it'd be like, well, like, oh, because sometimes I think maybe just because I am me, I forget that, you know, I don't really look at the number the things that I post, and what I'm posting about is just like me. Like, if you know

me, then you know, like, I'm not censoring it, or I'm not packaging it to to give it to people, you know what I mean? Like, I think that there's no like intention as a like creator. I'm just a person that is just posting, and I think that sometimes gets me in trouble. But I have thought a lot about it, and I feel like that has caused a lot of insecurity to think about, sometimes because of the fact that around the time that I was beginning to focus on growth and growing, shortly after I like, hit my first 10,000 followers, the whole American dirt fiasco happened

Jennifer Baker

Oh crap, was at the same time?

Lupita Aquino

It was around the same time, I think so I hit, I think maybe I hit 10,000 followers, maybe in like, I want to say, like, 2019. And I remember it was such a big deal for me, because when I first got into the space, I had no, no necessary, like I was, I did not need to grow, you know, I wasn't like, oh, how many people are following me? Like, how many people are, you know, are in my account, or whatever. And then I started to see all the new accounts that would pop up. And it would be like, suddenly, you know, my 500 followers felt a little insignificant. And it was like in relation to a lot of white reviewers, you know, they would come on and you know, I would be friends with everybody. I'm still friends with everybody, and these accounts would just skyrocket. It was like people would hit like, 13,000, 15,000 followers. And I'm just like, well, we're doing the same thing, like we have the same level of intentionality. We're reading the same things, almost like, what is it that I'm not doing enough of to be growing in that way. And so, so, yeah, I started to focus on how, how can I grow? And I didn't change my content in anyway. I was just kind of more vocal about, like, the disparity that I saw among creators happening. And I was just like, well, what's going on, you know? And I feel like calling that out did also, in a way, helped me grow. And so I remember when I hit 10k my local indie bookstore, one of my local indie bookstores, like, celebrated with me. They were like, you know, she hit 10k and, you know, it was like a whole thing. Because I really started to realize these social media spaces in terms of people, they're they're good for connection, if you just want to connect one on one. But if you want to be a creator in a space that grows, like there's this huge disparity that no one's kind of talking about, or that's not being pointed out.

So I hit 10k and then *American Dirt* happened, and I actually did not want to be involved in *American Dirt* at all. The way that happened was I received an email about it from, you know, as a pitch from the publisher, and they said, "Hey, read this book. We'd love to do a giveaway with you." I read the description, and I was like, that's not for me, because I it's not anything I'm interested reading. And then I was like, Oh, that feels a little problematic too. But in my mind, I was just like, I've seen and I assumed that the writer was white. And I was like, I've seen so much problematic stuff. I've read problematic stuff from white writers. I'm just like, it's just one of those things, like, not gonna do it. And then I started to be really aware of the conversations happening in the Bookstagram space, and basically had friends. And then Myriam's review came out and people rebutting it, and that just hurt me. Because I was like, you know, these are valid concerns, and they're valid things. And it's like, how much do we need to show you for you to care, instead of you saying, well, maybe I just need to read it for myself. And it's like, the whole point is you're not gonna know because we're telling you that it's just feeding you the same stereotypes you probably already know and assume of Central American, Mexican immigrants and their plight.

So yeah, that happened, and I feel like my account grew an additional 10,000 people, and I became really afraid and insecure immediately after, because I assumed in my mind, people are going to

want or expect this level of content for me, content, you know. And again, it wasn't content. It was just me being a person and being like, what can we do to get through to other people. You know, to get them to really understand the issues behind this and, yeah, the growth happened. Yeah, it was just very interesting. It's been very interesting.

Jennifer Baker

Yeah, especially because we rolled right into a pandemic, right after that.

Lupita Aquino

Exactly.

[12:16]

Jennifer Baker

So then it's like, super isolating, and we were online all the time, all the time. Constantly. It was bad. It is bad. In the midst of all that, I remember folks being very vocal like you and so many others. And then it was like "Okay can we seriously talk about Latinx authors [now]?" And I was talking to Melissa Rivero recently. She had an event here in New York City. And I was like, how many Peruvian American writers can you name that have been published in the US? And she was like, not many. And I was like, gotcha, you know, because it just still feels like Latinx authors in particular are really not emphasized in the industry.

Lupita Aquino

Yeah.

Jennifer Baker

and it's been consistent for a very long time. And so you've created so many spaces to be, like la comunidad, your series, and like read Latin lit and all these encouragement. I mean, maybe this is an unfair question, were the books kind of reaching you in a different way once you were starting to get a bit more discerning, pre- or right after *American Dirt*, of like, "You know what, mofos? This is what I'm talking about!"

Lupita Aquino

No, I think *American Dirt* really opened up my eyes, to be honest. I think before then, the conversations I was having in the space were also related to this idea that what was mostly seen on Bookstagram at the time, which was obviously books that had, like, what I know now, have a good money behind them, right? And a lot of those books tended to be by white authors, and so Bookstagram would be full of imagine. And here's, here's the perfect mix of like, it's a perfect recipe. You have white readers with really high followings, and you have white authors with really big budgets. And so you pair them together. That's all you see all over Bookstagram at the very beginning. That's all it was, just like. And so realizing, like me as like a Latina reader, not being able to grow a following because I'm not necessarily reading the white books all the time, I still am coming into myself and realizing, "Wait a minute, I'm interested in reading across the board. I'm interested in reading Black authors, Indigenous authors, Asian authors, Latina authors, Latino authors," you know. And you formulate this idea, or I did where it was like, wait a minute, am I not growing because I'm not reading what's popular. And we

know that what's popular right now, because all of large Bookstagram accounts are white, is books by white authors.

So yeah, I think that when *American Dirt* happened, I had already formulated this idea, this theory, and then *American Dirt* happened. I was like, Oh no. Like, this is bad. This is bad. This is worse than just being like, well, we need more diverse book influencers, or not book influencers. But at the time we're just calling each other Booksgrammers. We need, you know, more people need to read more diverse books. It became a real for me, like, case study in in so much, especially in the unfortunate lack of resources that Latinx and Latina authors get once they do publish a book. Just to start comparison between the two seeing Jeanine Cummins, who is a Latiné author, I believe she self identifies as, but she does. She does. She apparently has a maternal grandmother, a grandparent, so she self identifies as a Latina, so seeing what stories She's published and what basically publishing decides to stand next to, in terms of a Latina narrative, versus what someone else, like Melissa Rivero and Angie Cruz are publishing and what resources they have, like just noticing that stark difference, and then knowing my own history with a lack of access to Latin authors that I had growing up, I was like, it's a no brainer why we are still feeling like we don't have anything. You know, why we are literally just building and growing and pushing, and a lot of that has gone into wanting to continue to push heavier, to get people to read us and to review us. And it doesn't need to be perfect good reviews, like, we know, bad reviews are good too, but to just get us into the landscape, like the literary landscape, where we have a good seat at the table. You know.

Jennifer Baker

No, that's sort of fair, because I feel like also spaces like yours helps me also get a sense of them more Latinx authors, because I want to read more widely. I think my biggest gap is translated lit. I don't read as much translated lit, and I really, really want to and need to, and that's on me. And at the same time it's what you're saying is they're just going to the demographics, right? The white readers and authors can kind of get this expansiveness of strategy and maybe not even that right. But it's just like, we'll send it to anybody who really likes romance, right? But for people of color, we'll send it to people who like romance with people of color. Even for my book, it was okay, we'll send it to Black influencers. And I'm just like, and nobody else? Like, nobody else who is interested in, like, social justice stuff or? And the characters are, like, biracial, so Chinese and Black. And I, you know, hired folks to help me make sure that I was being responsible and respectful. And they're like, Well, you're not Chinese. And I was like, *I know*, and I would still like to get to these other communities, absolutely. But there was this was just like, a weird conversation to have to force rather than this just being part of it. And I feel like I can only imagine, for Latinx authors, where it's just like, there's not even that further dissection. Like, who has 10k or, you know what I mean, like Lupita! And they will talk about dah dah dah.

Lupita Aquino

And there's your strategy, there's your check. And I do think that when we talk about the #OwnVoices movement, right? And the way that it had to fizzle itself out, because, hey, it was a great idea. It turned out not to be so. And you're right. A lot of that own voice movement siloed readers, right to their just specific communities. When Latin authors deserve to be read by everybody, that's kind of the thinking behind really Latin lit is like, read us. Just read 12 books by us, one book a month. That's it. That's it. Just start there, because you're right. There are other themes and Latin that connect to somebody that's not from a Latin background. And you miss, you miss people when you silo them just based off of their community.

Jennifer Baker

Yeah. And it keeps happening too. And like those distinctions, like you've interviewed, especially for La Comunidad Alejandra [Oliva], whose book, *Rivermouth*, I love. She was like your intro author to that new series in DC. And then yesterday, you talked to Alejandro [Varela] virtually, and you know, you talked to John Manuel [Arias]. So it's like readers and writers of Costa Rican and Mexican and Puerto Rican and, you know, like, also respecting the diversity within the distinctive cultures as well as the universality. And so I'm curious, because we talked about this is not a full time job. This is a very passionate side gig. Like, so do you still love reading like, Does this feel like work? I know it is work, but does it feel like work to read.

[19:28]

Lupita Aquino

I think it does feel like a responsibility to be honest, I realize and recognize that probably last year, because you're right, I do feel like the strategy for any and all Latinx book and like, I'm not saying I'm that powerful, whatever, but I just feel like, when it comes to publishing, it's very easy to go and be like, Okay, well, who are the heavy Latina influencers? We'll just send the book to them, and they'll figure that, you know, they'll figure out how to get it to where it needs to go. Honestly, that's a lot of pressure on someone like me and any other Latina influencer. Yeah. Because you're right. If it's not us, then who will, right? My new goal is to just get people to read more Latine like I would like to create a community where, you know, I'm your friend, that you come and read with, you know, and we're reading Latine lit, because there's so many, so many different stories, so much different type of story telling within the community, and I'm discovering it with you. Just because I'm Latina, and I grew up with Latine community, within the Latine community doesn't mean that I know every specific Latina experience. So we're discovering it together. And I feel like that's kind of my whole new way. I want to kind of move things forward, but it does feel like a responsibility. Because I'll have authors, well-meaning authors who send me to other authors, and they're like, "well, go to Lupita" and "Lupita can help you" or "Have you talked to Lupita? Have you met Lupita, yet?" I am, like, on everyone's roster in a good way, but I'm also keenly aware that I can't do everything, and I can't I don't have the time. I started a newsletter because of that reason. I can't read everything, then I won't get to read Black authors. I won't get to read Indigenous authors. Venita Blackburn, who I loved, her short story collection, *How to Wrestle a Girl* just came out with a brand new novel, and I was like, I have it. Yeah. I was like, this year, like, I get it.

I want to be able to read stuff so that I can talk about it and kind of give that amplification needed for Latine authors, but I also want to be able to read other things that interest me, and I love queer books, right? And so this year, I was like, I'm just going to read based on my mood, but I'm also going to set a goal where I can read a certain amount of Latin books, you know what I mean. So it does sometimes feel like work when I just remind myself that I'm only one person, then I just kind of refresh, and I just, I have to reset, otherwise I can't help anybody. And I know people see me as a big help, and I can't deny that like I want to deny it and be like Humble Pie, like, no, no. You know, I always try to tell this I'm like, You don't know that my post will do anything. That's my level of delusion, but I do think that there is something to be said of why people get sent to me, especially authors with new books, Latina authors with new books, you know, and it's because they feel like they don't have any other resources and they could come to someone like me. So, yeah, it's felt like a responsibility. It's felt like a lot of pressure. I started a newsletter I mentioned because of it, I interview a new Latin author every week, and it goes to my substack subscribers, and so that's a way to I can't read every single book, but at

least I'm providing some level of amplification and exposure to a Latine author in another way, instead of like posting a review and going through and trying to force myself to read all these books. Which I don't know about you, Jenn, but when you sit down and you force yourself to read a book, it's like an added pressure to the reading experience.

Jennifer Baker

It is and you don't want to resent people. And it's not because a book isn't good, per se. It may just stop before you or you're just like, here's this thing. I'm not getting paid for taking time exactly. Yeah. And I also feel like people come to you, Lupita, because you love books. You know what I mean. And because when we know Mira freaking Jacobs. If you know one thing about looking, you know how much she loves Mira Jacobs. You know, that love of books and writers and this community that is also very refreshing to be around, which I think also kind of creates this responsibility, right? Because, yeah, you want to still love it. You do want to still read, but that's also what I see. What I see is it's not just oh, she she has like, these numbers. It's no no. Like, when you go to your page, it is a barrage of, I love books, and that's what you want. You want to talk to someone who loves it, because we've talked to people who don't. And that sucks. That really sucks to talk to someone who's didn't read it, doesn't get it, doesn't care. And so even one thing, but it is a weight I can only imagine, and it's also reminding others, I would think too, that it's like, "hi, that's me, that one person in those videos that's doing the graphics, the newsletter that with the full time job, with family, with my own just levels of joy." I keep saying that to publishers too. I'm like so it's just me. Because people say, "Hey, minorities in publishing." It's just Jenn, just me. One individual doing this all weekends.

Lupita Aquino

Yeah, absolutely. And I mean, I think that that's where that reflection of, and, you know, we talked about this a little bit earlier, where I start to kind of tell people, like, when, like, express a certain boundary, when something feels like an ask, please don't ask me to do that. Please don't. Don't ask that has been my biggest thing this year, is let me come to it. Mira. Jacobs didn't come in my inbox. And was like, Hi, I'm Mira. Imagine, honestly, I probably would have loved it, but she did it. I saw her book. It was a graphic novel. I love comics growing up, you know, she's a brown woman. She's beautiful. And I was like, I want to read her book. I read her book, and guess what? I loved it, and I fell in love with it. And that's how that happened. Mira has never asked me to do anything for her, to interview her, and I've interviewed her so many times. She's never asked me to do a reel. She's never asked me to, hey, just put me on your Tiktok. No, that's just genuine. And I feel like nowadays when I try to set up boundaries, and you've seen probably my Instagram stories where I'm like, I will screenshot a message and be like, no, please don't do this. Like, please don't ask me for stuff because then it makes me feel like you said, Jenn, like I'm Minorities in Publishing, versus just Lupita. I'm just Lupita. I'm just one person. That's it. I'm a reader, and I really fucking love books, and that's all I can give. And everything that comes from it has to be genuine, otherwise it's forced and fake. And I mean, you've seen it, you've seen it when it's forced, everybody can.

Jennifer Baker

And that's how I approach it as an author, too. If you really don't like my please do not. Please don't. I mean, if Penguin paid you fine, it's like, do whatever you want with that money, and, like, I guess, fulfill the contract, but if you really don't like what I don't want you to feel forced, because, again, those conversations are bad. But speaking to that, we talked a little bit on the internet. You said you kept it moving, but a lot of people were up the chatter of how much people get paid, or if people get paid, if,

like, publishers recognize this is something you deserve to be compensated for, especially if there is a push to really utilize your time versus what you said, where it's like, I loved it, I am happy to do whatever because I loved it, versus like I don't really have time, or maybe it's not for me, but it's kind of in my wheelhouse. Where there's like, extra effort, and I'm not sure it's totally up to you if you want to get in to that, because I've seen some posts from people where they're like, a publisher kind of wants you to make some videos.

Lupita Aquino

Yeah.

Jennifer Baker

Of certain things, and I'm like, That's interesting, versus just saying, Hey, I'd love to send you this book. Would you consider making content from it? But no, can you make the... I didn't know that was a thing! I guess because I'm a podcast, so I either interview you or I don't, right? But I did not realize there's this thing where people can be like, we would like you to create these elements.

Lupita Aquino

Yeah. I mean, I just got an email yesterday, and the only way that I have been able to navigate it now is, like I said, set boundaries. I will not lie. I do need money. I do need money. If they... I mean, I don't know your financial situation. I don't need to know it, but I also know if you say I need the money, I'm gonna believe you, right? So I'm not gonna say I don't need the money, but a lot of the times when I do enter into the sponsored or paid ads, it's because it comes from an ask. So for example, I got an email yesterday. They say, "Hey, we wanna send you this box of goodies, and we'd love to have you do an unboxing video, or maybe you post pictures of the things that we send you. This is what we would like for you to do. Please give us your address and let us send you the box." And I'm just like that sounds like promotional content that you want me to post. That sounds like work that you want me to do. You're asking me to do an unboxing reel. That means I have to set up a tripod, I have to film myself. I have to come up with creative ways to talk about whatever product it is that you're going to send me. And I'm gonna do that for what, in exchange for whatever's in the box? Which is probably like a candle and some chocolate. You know what? I mean...

Jennifer Baker

If that! It might just be papers. That's what I begin lately, just like a book and a lot of papers, like shredded papers. And I'm like, oh, yeah, okay, yeah, again, I love the books. Thank you. Thank you. Me. Times. I'm seeing some of y'all getting tea. I'm seeing some of y'all getting recipes. I'm seeing some of y'all getting back scratchers. I'm seeing stuff.

Lupita Aquino

I recently got a cheese board with like, which was really cool. I was already a cheese board. What? So? The budget is budgeting for that one. And it was for, it was for a Latinx author, and my heart was really happy, because I was like, Okay, here we go. But do you know what I mean? So that ask came, and it came assigned with some scope, like a scope of work, is what I call it. So what I've been doing, when these things come in and it's like, "oh, I would love to participate. What is your budget for this?" And there's certain things I now say, hey, this sounds great. What is your rate? What is your budget? Because I, again, I just don't have the time. And sometimes I'm pushing back on things, on everything, depending on my mood. Or sometimes I'm pushing back on something that I'm really interested in. But in that case,

I'm like, let me show you the different ways that I've worked in publishers. There's been engagement, there's been views, there's been chatter, like, what's a really good paid partnership, because it was genuine and it was a good connection. But again, I think I'm starting to use that as a way to build a boundary with publishers and what they ask for in terms of sending just free books or a free little PR box. I'm like, if you just want to send me the box, send it, but I might not post about it. Probably not going to be posting about it. I'm not, definitely not going to make it reel for free about, you know.

[30:32]

Jennifer Baker

Because, also, we need to think about money factor. You said the tripod. And we got to think about lighting. We need to think about time of day, like, do you have your natural lighting? Or do you have to wait into a specific time and your schedule? Oh, do you want it next week? Because that'll cost you extra. You know what I mean?

Lupita Aquino

In this case, they had a specific time frame from when they wanted to have posted,

Jennifer Baker

Wow, that's bold.

Lupita Aquino

Yeah. And so, I mean, they might come back and they might say, we got a budget for you. I will say, my experience with publishers, and we're talking about paid sponsorship, has been 50/50, I'll give them the whole email, the whole spiel, like, oh, that sounds great. I'm interested in participating. What's your budget for this? They'll come back and be honest, and they say, I don't know, what's your rate. And I'm like, Oh, so you know, you know, you know to ask for a rate. And sometimes we'll negotiate if the rate is, if my rate is too high for them, and sometimes we won't. But again, some publishers just kind of expect that have those expectations based off of my love for reading and the fact that I exist on social media as a content creator or book influencer or whatever. I think the only real money I've ever made was last year, and it was from brands, branded companies. So I had the opportunity to work with Target. They reached out through a third party for me to create a specific video for them.

Jennifer Baker

Cool.

Lupita Aquino

That video, I didn't post on any my channels. They just wanted me to create the video, and they wanted it to be posted on the target Instagram page, and so it went on the target Instagram page, and they tagged me, and it was great. And then Amazon publishing, but due to what was going on, the genocide going on, that did not go through. But Amazon publishing also was one of those brands that reached out and they are paying creators. They are paying creators, but it is a lot of negotiating. It's a lot of standing up for yourself and like setting a rate and knowing when to walk away, and knowing, like, money isn't just money because it's associated with what you set your standard to be as a creator in the field. So if I'm saying, Okay, I want \$1,000 for this video, but there's another creator out there who has the same amount of following but is charging \$5,000 then that impacts their money too. So it's, it's just a very,

very different space than I'm used to. I don't do a lot of paid and sponsored content because of it, you know. I think a lot of it is me walking away from things, even if something has a budget, because I can't fake the funk, you know. I think I can try, but it's hard. And people know me.

Jennifer Baker

It is you. It is not like a brand, you are not a brand. Like we are not brands. So this will feel different than a company that can be like, this weird, kind of ambiguous company where it's like, we know who the CEO is, maybe, but we don't know the entities outside of that.

Lupita Aquino

Absolutely. Yeah,

Jennifer Baker

Can you speak to like, when you kind of were okay. Now I'm charging you. Was it also the *American Dirt* moment where you're like, so...?

Lupita Aquino

Honestly, Jenn, it was just getting the same email, being asked the same thing over and over again. And I'm the type of person that, and this is going to be terrible to say, but I feel like I for a very, the very the very beginning of this, I would be really excited to get emails from publishers, and I would reply to every single email I got, even if I wasn't interested in the book. And imagine me who, a people pleaser, who hates saying no to people. I remember, I would sit at my laptop and just be like, okay, okay, we're gonna say no. How do we say no? And finagling an email just to be like, "Oh, this book sounds so good, I'm just really not." So I would do that. And sometimes I would get, like, 20, you know how many people's pitching books, lots of emails, and I would respond, and I would waste so much time. And then finally, yeah, something clicked, and I was just like, You know what? I can't do it anymore. I can't, I can't. So if you're gonna make me waste my time you're gonna pay me. Like, don't bother me unless you've got a budget is basically where I'm at. You know, now I know a little better. Just delete something I'm not interested in, unless it's someone like a, you know, a publicist that I do. Have a good relationship with, and I could be take the time and be honest otherwise, like, why.

I think when Tiktok started, Tiktok really has become a place that unexpected. I blew up on Tiktok, like I felt like Tiktok was my way to recognize myself and the worth that I bring. Blowing up there at least, kind of solidify this idea that on Instagram, I was just like, oh, people just follow me for the *American Dirt* stuff. And then I got on Tiktok, and I posted nothing related to *American Dirt*, nothing related to Latin and I blew up on there, and I was just like, Okay, well maybe, maybe people just like listening to me talk about books. Maybe I am just a good person to listen to talk about books. I don't think that every book influencer is arrogant, but I do think that book influencers, or influencers in general, do get that bad portrayal, that they're, you know, self centered, that they think that they're everything.

Jennifer Baker

Or just influencers in general, and they're like, there's this aura around influencers of, what do y'all do? And I'm like, I know a lot of us work!

Lupita Aquino

Absolutely, a lot of us work. And, you know, I'm a very insecure one. I mean, I have to have a million people tell me I'm doing good work for me to even feel like I'm doing anything. So, yeah, it was, it was a struggle for a little bit. And from that was born this need to, like, set up a way to do boundaries. And I was like, Okay, well, I can figure that out with money. Like, people are gonna say no, that was my assumption. I was like, if I write back and say, Do you have the budget, I'm gonna hear now and then I'm gonna be like, Okay, well, thank you. That's my excuse for signing out of this. That gives me my past to be like, I'm not doing this. I can't because you guys don't have a budget.

Jennifer Baker

And they'll be quick to say that too. They'll be quick to say, we don't. Because I always get the people wanting me to share jobs, and I'm happy to share jobs. I feel like that's kind of one of the big things for MIP as I try to share jobs. But then I was like, You know what, you pay LinkedIn, and you pay Indeed, so why wouldn't pay me?

Lupita Aquino

Yeah, right, why wouldn't they pay you?

Jennifer Baker

Yeah, like, I'm not getting I'm not saying I need one. I'm saying the principle of it all.

Lupita Aquino

That's where it was for me. It's not, not necessarily. I'm saying I'm needed though

Jennifer Baker

I could have it, right?

Lupita Aquino

It's the principle, because you think of everyone else who is charging you, think of everyone else who they probably immediately offer to and it's an assumption that for us, like we would just do it because we love it, you don't because you love it.

Jennifer Baker

Yeah, it's like, you're invalidating us, but you still want that we have. Yeah, we have the connections we have. And even in that way, it's like, I don't know what'll happen. I don't know if you'll hire the candidate, because you may still not hire a person of color or anyone who's marginalized in any way for this role. You may go with what you've always gone with, because that's how your hiring practices are structured. So I even got tired of it like, I'm like, sure I'll post a job. But when I got the asks in my email inbox, I was like, so I would like you to pay me. If I see it and I want to share it, I will share similar to you, right? Like, if I it's a book, I want to share totally but I'm like, if you're asking me, I'm going to ask you to pay me. And I will structure for like, how I share it and all that stuff. And if you are paying me, not just like, Oh, I'll do a retweet. Like, I create a structure. I'd be like, No, I'll tweet about it this many times. I'll put it in the newsletter, I'll post it on the Instagram, I'll do this. But no.

Lupita Aquino

Yeah, I'm the same way. I mean, I had to build that all by myself, without anybody else, without a lot of Googling, because, you know, influencers and other industries are already setting this model in the

standard, but in the publishing and the book world, there's nothing set up for this. And then there's also the difference in pay. Like the beauty industry and the fashion industry have budgets, I'm assuming, set aside this money with influencers in mind, while publishing doesn't.

Jennifer Baker

No, I think they're starting to maybe. I know from my book, I saw someone, and I was like, Oh my God, thank you. And then I saw it said, paid.

Lupita Aquino

But here, here's the thing I should tell you. I should tell you, Jenn, they're, they're changing... There are certain bookstagrammers and influencers that basically assume that getting the free book is a paid promotional post. So sometimes you don't even know. I know a couple of them that use, like, paid because they received the book. So technically, to them, they need to disclose that they were paid because they were given a book. It's separate from the Federal Trade Commission regulations or whatever, where you're basically and the publisher mandates you to disclose that. And you have to do hashtag, add hashtag partner, I think it's either hashtag ad or hashtag partner, where you that's the thing that discloses to your followers that you received a free book from Penguin Random house, from Simon & Schuster. So it might not have been even paid.

Jennifer Baker

Oh. I thought so, because it's like she did this whole thing. And it felt like she should have been paid because she did a video where she talked about the themes in the book and stuff like that, like it was a nice video. So I was like, Oh, I feel like she should have been compensated for that. Feel like someone should have probably. It was like, Hey, you actually talk about the book in a detailed way, besides the three things that we've said five times as publisher. So, but it's good to know that, because I'm just like, oh, like, you don't know. I just, again, I wanted to get to people who really do want to read it, and if they have the copies to do that, great. But also, I don't want anyone to do extra labor that they don't want to do or to be dictated. No one dictates to me when I post episode. I'm like, I'll post episode. When I post episode.

[40:44]

Lupita Aquino

With me. But, I mean, a lot of people don't know about that, and the rules have changed so much. So for a very long time, there were no guidelines. There were no publishers send you a book, and they're asking you to also legally have to disclose that you received a book for free. That was not a thing. Now they've done this beautiful thing that I really appreciate myself is where they put it in bold, like we do not expect you to post this or review it anywhere. And I'm like, Oh, thank you.

Jennifer Baker

Nice. Nice.

Lupita Aquino

Yes, I'm not all. I'm not all. When I see those emails, I'm more quickly to be like, yes. But that's another boundary I feel like I've set is receiving books is asking, Do you have a limited amount of ARCs? Because if you do, I cannot guarantee you that I will be able to read about it, because that's another

problem, especially with Latine authors and BIPOC authors, the arc distribution, the number of ARCs that get printed.

Jennifer Baker

Yes, can testify to that.

Lupita Aquino

Yep. And if they're going to influencers that are just going to pile them up and not read them, then that's a problem.

Jennifer Baker

And it's all part of strategy, too. I feel like if you follow your account, you can like it. You're a vast reader like me. You read a lot of things, but you just never know, so maybe, like, figure out what Lupita actually likes.

Lupita Aquino

I feel like we could talk forever because I have so many stories, but basically, yeah, I feel like they're trying harder. There's influence in their programs where they ask your ethnicity, your race, your interests, they just ask a whole lot of survey questions to put you into the system that I'm assuming they pull from or they drop from, but then they still have to send out a list of books and say, What do you want? So it's like, what are we doing, you know, right? Are we being conscious of what we're sending out and who we're sending it to based on interest, based on if you want to base it on ethnicity and race, or are we not so I don't know.

Jennifer Baker

Yeah, I don't know either. So thank you for that, because that's like, super enlightening. And I kind of want to end on a note of any suggestions or advice for folks who want to talk about books, and I really do want to kind of create this space for myself of just being able to enjoy talking about maybe they do want to be an influencer. Maybe they don't like, like, what you said is that wasn't your goal. Your goal was just, I want to talk about books, so this suddenly is influencer. So do you have kind of any suggestions for people who may actively want to be an influencer, or who just want to talk about books about how to just kind of maintain who they are when they're talking about work that they love?

Lupita Aquino

I think to remember what you want, to ask yourself, what you want out of the experience. I think I always try to remember who I was when I first went into it, and I was like, I just wanna make book friends. I just wanna friends to talk to about the books I'm reading. And anytime I feel like I've been led astray in sense of what's going on with the book influencing world, I go back to that, and I think that can inform a lot of the ways in which you decide what platform you want to use, because you could use something like Goodreads if you just want to connect with people and you don't want to be an influencer. Goodreads is, I know for authors, is not a great, but for readers, it's a great place to connect. They have book clubs on there. They have the comments section. You know you can follow other readers. They can follow you. You can see what they're reading. StoryGraph is another up and coming really place that is repeating Goodreads where, you know they're they're building community there. Again, these are places that you can go to where, if you don't want to be a book influencer. Facebook. I've heard that Facebook has really good groups, like book clubs that you can join in their group section.

So I think that their spaces is what I'm saying, Where, if you just want to talk about books and you just want to connect with readers, you can do that. I wish I had known that ahead of time, versus now, if you want to be a book influencer, I always think about the biggest advice I have is to kind of know the lay of the land first. Like, who is your favorite creator? Follow them, study them. Ask yourself, what is it about them that I like? What do I think other people like about them and not to replicate it, but how best are they presenting themselves in a genuine way that is appealing to you, because then you can do the same with yourself. Like, what are their qualities about you? That you think you bring differently to the book world, into the book influencing space could be in genre. Maybe you only read Latin horror. There's space for everybody all the time, everywhere, and so it just, it really depends on knowing the why. Why do I want to do this? What do I want out of it? I'm remembering it. Yeah.

Jennifer Baker

Thank you for that. I think that's super helpful for just context. For authors too, to realize individuals, people do this out of love and to be respectful, then recognize, like, how people go about talking about books.

Lupita Aquino

Yeah. And I don't know if it's helpful to I know we really didn't get to touch much on like, for authors, how to approach influencers, because it's not like, Don't ever ask me anything. But I'm always open, and I know other influencers are probably open to receiving emails better than a direct message on Instagram or Twitter. And just, like you said, being really thoughtful about the influencer that you pick to read your book, like really doing your homework on them and making sure that if you're writing a thriller, but you're going to Lupita, and you've never seen Lupita post a thriller. You know what I mean? Just don't go by numbers and remember that genuine word of mouth is the best thing to sell a book. So if you find a really passionate, excited reader, it's going to be better than finding, like, a book influencer with 50k followers who may or may not post your book in a stack round up of books they see received in the mail.

Jennifer Baker

Yeah, thank you for mentioning the stack round up. I'm not dissing the stack round up because I've done them, but I do it for books because it's like, I can't do individual posts. Y'all, I got to have books, but it's like too much.

Lupita Aquino

Yeah, it's a lot of work.

Jennifer Baker

It's a lot of work. The lighting is so key, like positioning, lighting, and I will say, if, for those listening who are not familiar with Lupita Reads, for some reason, look at Lupita's videos and imagery. Some people do this whole decorative like, it's very natural. You get, like, the good angles you put up good, you know what I mean? Like, you don't want the grainy, it's kind of dark. This was 9pm in my apartment. This is what we're asking of people, is to make it visual and beautiful and lovely. And so that takes effort too. And you put in all the effort to not be just exuberant in your love. But also, I know this is important, and I want you to see the full title, and I want you to know who wrote it. You put in the work, Lupita.

Lupita Aquino

Oh, I really appreciate it. And thank you for thinking of me to chat with.

Jennifer Baker

Oh, I'm so happy to chat with you, and I've been learning too, because I was just like, for real? That's bananas. But this is helpful.

Lupita Aquino

I'm glad it was, I'm always here, though, if you need anything.

Jennifer Baker

Thank you. And so I mentioned your Instagram, but you mentioned Tiktok. I'm not on Tiktok, so this is why I forget you were on Tiktok.

Lupita Aquino

Yes, that is a new battle that I waged my on myself. I blamed that one on myself just because I was curious. And you sometimes you don't need to follow that curiosity.

Jennifer Baker

You've amassed a very strong following there. And also, given,

Lupita Aquino

I know.

Jennifer Baker

Yeah, I can only imagine the cross platform situation, because you are on Twitter, you're also on Facebook, right? You are on Facebook, you have a little...

Lupita Aquino

Small page, a small page thing. It's like a placeholder, yeah?

Jennifer Baker

So that's a lot to juggle, but I feel like, if you know Lupita, are getting to know like Tiktok and IG seem to be the places to go.

Lupita Aquino

Yeah, it's a new platform that I'm trying to continue to develop. But everything takes time, right? Jenn.

Jennifer Baker

Yeah, 9 years for you. 10 years for me. So here we go.

Lupita Aquino

Yeah.

Jennifer Baker

Thank you again for your time. Lupita, again. Y'all, thank you. Tiktok it's Lupita Reads two words, but on Instagram, Lupita dot Reads. I believe that's the same on the Twitter, right?

Lupita Aquino

Yeah, yeah. Same on the Twitter, yeah.

Jennifer Baker

And is there any book that you can shout out before we officially head out that you're reading? Oh yeah, right now.

Lupita Aquino

Oh yeah. I'm super excited about a book that came out last year, but I'm just getting to it now. It's called *What Happened to Ruthy Ramirez?* by Claire Jimenez.

Jennifer Baker

Yeah, you're doing a convo Claire, right?

Lupita Aquino

I just did a convo with Claire. So funny, so innovative, so vibrant. The characters, I feel like it would be a crazy good TV series. But beyond that, there's just so much love between these sisters and mother. Basically, one of the sisters goes missing, and they try to figure out what happened to her. Or they don't try to figure out what happened to her, but they think she reappears in a reality TV series that they're watching. It happens to be like a spin off, think *Bad Girls Club*. And so they're like, wait a minute, I think that's my missing sister. And so I won't spoil so much more, but it's just a beautiful exploration of just siblings and motherhood and growing up and coming of age. It's just it's so beautiful, it's so good, it's funny, it's so funny, it's very fun.

[50:12]

Jennifer Baker

It has a lot of cultural references. So if you're of the kind of age range that Claire's writing about, a lot of it, yes, stick out to you. Thank you for that. Thank you for your time, and I will talk to you soon.

Lupita Aquino

It's been an honor, okay. Bye. It was an honor.

Jennifer Baker

I want to give thanks and acknowledge that this episode was sponsored by Writability, a nonprofit writers guild in defense of the imagination. Thanks again for listening to the minorities in publishing podcast as a reminder, you can find the podcast at minorities in publishing dot com or on Instagram and Twitter, at minoritiesinpub, and you can sign up for the monthly newsletter. Also feel free to rate the podcast on your listening platform. Take care.