

4.1 AN APPROPRIATION OF IDENTITY

Sofia recently moved to a new city to start a new job. She didn't know anyone in her neighborhood, but she quickly became friends with one of her neighbors, Jenny. Sofia found out that Jenny is very talented at making clothes and jewelry and has a small online store with a modest group of customers. Sofia supported her new friend by purchasing items and even modeled some pieces on her own Instagram account. One day, Sofia noticed that Jenny had added the descriptor "Latina-owned small business" to her site. Sofia was surprised because Jenny is not Latina.

Sofia is herself Latina and does not understand why Jenny, a white woman, deemed it necessary to advertise her brand as Latina-owned.

After confronting Jenny about the descriptor and receiving an uninspired explanation, Sofia is not sure what to do.

Sofia recently moved to a new city to start a new job. She didn't know anyone in her neighborhood when she moved, but she quickly became friends with one of her neighbors, Jenny. As they got to know each other better, Sofia found out that Jenny is very talented at making clothes and jewelry and has a small online store with a modest group of customers. Sofia supported her new friend by purchasing items herself that Jenny had made. Sofia also modeled some of the items for sale for the online store and has posted some of Jenny's products on her own Instagram account to help Jenny reach more people.

One day, Sofia was showing Jenny's store's website to her old friends and encouraging them to buy some of the items when she noticed that Jenny had added the descriptor "Latina-owned small business" to the site. Sofia was surprised to see this new statement because Jenny is not Latina. Sofia then checked Jenny's business Instagram and Facebook pages and saw that Jenny had added the descriptor to those pages as well. Sofia felt confused and upset. Sofia is herself Latina and does not understand why Jenny, a white woman, deemed it necessary to advertise her brand as Latina-owned.

Sofia decided to confront Jenny and ask her why she had added the statement to her pages, hoping that it was simply a mix-up. Jenny explained that her husband, who is Latino, told her to add it, saying, “We are all a mix of everything anyway.”

Sofia was not convinced by or comfortable with Jenny’s simplistic explanation, which felt incredibly disingenuous to her. It was also insulting to think that Jenny was appropriating an identity that Sofia herself holds. Jenny’s customers believe that they are supporting a Latina-owned business, and some may possibly even decide to purchase something from Jenny’s store because it is advertised as Latina-owned. However, Jenny is Sofia’s neighbor, and it would be difficult to avoid her or to break off a friendship if things become really contentious. Sofia is not sure what to do.

Discussion Questions

How can Sofia keep Jenny accountable for her actions? What are some of her options? Is it ever acceptable to misrepresent your identity to some or all people?