

Women at Warp Episode 172: Mixed-Race Characters in Trek

Voiceover: You're listening to a Roddenberry Podcast.

Sarah: Hi, and welcome to Women at Warp: a Roddenberry Star Trek podcast. Join us on our continuing mission to explore intersectional diversity in infinite combinations. My name is Sarah and thanks for tuning in. With me today are Claire Light,

Claire: hi.

Sarah: Dr. Michelle Foss-Snowden,

Michelle: Hey, hello, Qapla'.

Sarah: And Rian Roberson.

Rian: Hi, Qapla'.

Sarah: Before we get into our main topic today, we have a little bit of housekeeping to do first. Women at Warp would like to wish a very happy birthday to our patron, Laura. Laura, we hope your birthday is Trek-tacular. And thank you so much for supporting the show. Our show is made possible by our patrons on Patreon. If you'd like to become a patron, you can do so for as little as a dollar per month and get awesome rewards from thanks on social media up to silly watch-along commentaries. Visit www.patreon.com/womenatwarp. Our Teepublic store with new designs based on our new banner art is available at Teepublic.com/stores/womenatwarp. It's got logo art and some other non podcast specific Trek designs. So, starting with Claire, could you tell our listeners a little bit about yourself and your history with Star Trek?

Claire: Hi everybody. My name is Claire. I am a writer and a cultural worker and an activist. And I also write under the pen name JD Jang. I just released a book this week called *Monkey Around*, which is based on the Chinese legend of the Monkey King. And my history with Star Trek- good Lord. Well, I'm an old. I'm a gen X-er, and I grew up sort of surrounded by Star Trek episodes on television, when we went to the planetarium, you know, special class field trips and things like that. But Star Trek, we were always watching this or that or the other episode of Star Trek. And especially for kids *The Trouble with Tribbles*. The year

I went to college the Next Generation started. So the Next Generation was started, you know, it was college and early adulthood for me. And that was when I really really became addicted to Star Trek. So that's how I got into it.

Sarah: Awesome. And Michelle, can you tell us a little bit about it yourself?

Michelle: Sure. So, hi everyone. I'm M Foss, or Michelle Foss-Snowden, and I am a professor of communication studies. And I'm also a podcaster. I have a podcast called the TV Doctor where I, quote unquote, "prescribe" what people should be watching in order to cure, or at least alleviate the problems that they may be having in any given day. So in terms of my history with Star Trek, I am also a gen X-er, and I was born into Trek. My mom was a huge fan. I think Kennedy actually calls that a Cradle Trekker, right? I consider myself a proud Cradle Trekker- Cradle Trekkie. And I used to watch reruns of the original series with my mom. It's a long-ish story, but she actually used Spock to start the conversation with me about what it meant to be mixed race. So Spock, I've always said, is kind of part of my origin story. And then when I was in grad school, and I was trying to pick a topic for my master's thesis, my advisor, who had actually edited a book about Star Trek, a collection of critical essays on Star Trek. He told me, you know, you need to pick something that you love so much that you just never shut up about it. And for me that was obviously Star Trek. So I wrote my master's thesis about Star Trek. I wrote my dissertation about Star Trek, and I like to joke that I watched a bunch of Star Trek and they gave me a PhD for it, but it's not really a joke. That's kind of the truth.

Sarah: That's kind of awesome though. And Rian, can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

Rian: Absolutely. So I'm Rian, I use they/them. It's interesting to put in our generation. So I'm one of those X-ennials. I was born in the mid-eighties, but I kind of got a lot of the gen X influence. So I throw myself right in the middle. Also, I identify with being like a Cradle Trekkie. My parents grew up with the original series and then the films in the eighties and around the time I was born TNG was on full blast all the time. So, that's pretty much what raised me. And I didn't realize that Trek- like, Star Trek wasn't such a big part of everybody's lives. I thought that's just what you did. I didn't really take it on as a personal interest. Like, it was kind of a- more of a family thing until I was in my twenties. Then I just really got into it. I've been on several Trek panels. I had a Trek themed wedding. I cut my cake with a Bat'leth. It was amazing. Just as extra as you can be. In my professional life I'm a licensed mental health counselor who specifically works with mixed race individuals and mixed race couples. So that

felt very germane to the topic of this discussion. Oh, and I also wrote my thesis on biracial identity development. I didn't manage to get any Trek in there, but I probably should have looking back.

Michelle: Oh, it's in there. It's in there.

Rian: Well, it can't not be.

Michelle: Exactly. *both laugh*

Claire: Well, since we're all talking about our multiracial Trek writing, the first piece I ever published was an article about multiraciality in Star Trek in a zine called *Oriental Whatever* in 1998.

Sarah: Wow.

Rian: Yes, I love it.

Sarah: Well, I am so excited that the three of you could be here today to talk about mixed race characters in Trek. Before we really dive in I wanted to note for our listeners, we did have a great blog post called "Star Treks Tragic Hybrids" by Larissa Maestro. And we will put that in the notes for the show. I also have something to read from Matt Chung, who is one of our quantum slipstream level patrons. He says "I remember, especially as a kid, having a feeling of not belonging, either with the kids from school or my Chinese relatives since I was only half Chinese and was not as familiar with some aspects of Chinese culture. Spock seemed to have this feeling of not belonging in either world, which I related to, but *Lineage* hit me because it was almost like the writers were in my head. When I saw it when it first aired, it reminded me of when I was going through some of my hardest times as a kid and wished I could remove the Chinese side of me in the hopes of fitting in better with the other kids at school. When I saw B'Elanna trying to edit out the Klingon DNA from her daughter it reminded me of that time when I was younger. One other aspect that was a smaller point was I think Star Trek often shows that when someone sees a hybrid or someone raised by people in another culture, they see that person as completely foreign. The Enterprise crew effectively saw Spock as a Vulcan, but Vulcans see his human side. Klingons did similarly with Worf, Alexander, and B'Elanna. And of course Cardassians and Bajorans with Ziyal. I remember finding out someone I went to high school with thought I was a hundred percent Chinese and that surprised me. I wouldn't be surprised if this

happens more often than I realize." So have any of you had experiences like that?

Rian: Absolutely.

Claire: Yes.

Michelle: Yes. That's the story.

Rian: It is. Absolutely.

Michelle: When Matt says the Enterprise crew effectively saw Spock as Vulcan, but Vulcans only saw his human side, that was my exact story. My dad was white. My mom is black. And my dad, when I was a little kid maybe- I want to say seven or eight years old, my dad dropped me off at school one day and I had two friends waiting for me there. And they had never seen either one of my parents. So when they see my dad and I'm presenting as I do, they're like, "Oh, well we didn't know you were adopted." And I was like, "Oh, I'm adopted? Wow. Like, I didn't know that either." *all laugh* And so I get home that day. And I'm like, "Mom, you know, you could have told me I was adopted." and she was like, "You're not adopted." And I was like, "Well, Courtney and Jessica," you know, names protected or whatever. But "Courtney and Jessica said that my dad is white and I'm black. So that means I'm adopted." And she was like, "Okay, well, let's sit down and have this conversation that I guess we're going to have now." and so she used Spock to say, "Okay, well, you know how Spock is on the Enterprise? And his dad is from Vulcan and his mom is from Earth, but everybody on the Enterprise only sees him as Vulcan, because that's what's different from them. They only kind of pick up on what's different." And I was like, "Uh-huh. So that means I'm Spock?" And she was like, "Oh, you know? Okay, sure. Yeah." So I go back to school the next day and I'm like, "Listen here, Courtney and Jessica, I'll have you know that I'm Spock." And that did not endear me to them. Imagine that. I don't know. *all laugh* But that's how I kind of understood what it was to be like, but different. Included, but not included, seen as, you know, something extra or aside from the normal. So, you know, Matt's experience and mine. Same

Sarah: and Rian or Claire?

Rian: So my parents being born in the sixties were a little young for the original series, but definitely watched it as teenagers. And my dad is black, my mom's white. And the progressive message of Star Trek is part of what planted the

seeds in both of their minds that interracial relationships were possible. And by the time I and my siblings came around in the mid to late eighties- early nineties, I was in that window of kind of the biracial baby boom, like when there was starting to become a lot more common to see mixed race kids. I grew up in Seattle, which is predominantly white, but my neighborhood tended to be very very mixed. And I was just a very naive kid, took everything at face value. Everyone around me told me, "Oh, racism's over", Michael Jackson was singing that doesn't matter if you're black and white. I was like, "Wow. The world is awesome!" *all laugh* Until I went to kindergarten, first grade where it was mostly the black kids sussing me out about what I was. And I was like, "Well, I'm a person, right? Like, you know, why does that matter?" And I was clearly missing something- that there's something I was being read as something other than black, but I didn't have language for that. So unfortunately at the time I internalized, it was like, "Ooh, black girls are mean, wow." You know, especially under the concept that "Everybody is equal. So if everybody's equal and only black girls are mean, they must choose to be mean," which led to a decade or so of just internalized anti-blackness for myself. And it really did take a long time to see myself as a black person, which is a little strange as that I don't pass for white in any sort of way. I saw myself as just kind of constantly othered and most comfortable when not racialized. And it wasn't until like my twenties and early thirties in grad school where I really hungrily pursued knowledge of what it meant to be mixed race. And it was only really then that the Star Trek connection really came to the forefront for me. I think I just took everything as normal. Like, I understood that there was mixed race characters, but it didn't mean anything to me until going back after doing my own racial like, exploration work. You would think I would have noticed that. But I think I was just happy to be watching TV, and there's cool- it's space. I love space. *laughter* So like, I wasn't- I wasn't analyzing it. *Michelle laughs* But then I was like, "Ooh, I'm B'Elanna"

Michelle: Nice to meet you B'Elanna, I'm Spock. *all laugh*

Sarah: You know, I didn't realize at the time that I was internalizing what I was watching, seeing Molly O'Brien on the screen, who is half Japanese like I am. I have a Japanese mom and a white dad. And I think just seeing her on screen made me think, "Hey, this is totally normal. You know, this is nothing to worry about." I did grow up with a lot of Japanese people in my life. There was a Japanese microchip plant nearby that my mom worked at. They brought over a lot of Japanese engineers and their family. So we knew a lot of those folks. And there were some, you know, some mixed kids growing up that were half white, half Asian. But I think really, you know, Molly's the only one. Molly and

Kirayoshi are the only ones that I remember seeing on TV. And I think without me realizing it that had a big impact.

Claire: Well, you know, my experience, was a little bit different in some ways. Because I was actually born abroad. I was born in Hong Kong. My mother is Chinese. My father is white American. And come from on my mother's side, I come from an overseas and Hong Kong based Chinese family. So very kind of cosmopolitan, very overseas. And the Hong Kong side, my great grandmother was also mixed race. And being Eurasian in Hong Kong throughout its time as a British colony was definitely a thing. So my family felt a way about it, which they never expressed to me and never talked to me about, but they were, you know, my Chinese family is definitely more sophisticated about the concept of mixed race family members than your typical Chinese family, your typical Chinese American family, or your typical American. So my parents were very prepared, my mother especially, were very prepared to have mixed race children. And we were told from the get-go "You're Eurasian. This is what you are. You're mixed. You have the best of both worlds," yada yada. So my sister and I went forth into the world understanding that we were supposed to be ambassadors for, at the very least, for our family. If not, for both of our cultures. So it was very disconcerting for me growing up in the states to be constantly told that I'm Chinese and nothing but. Just Chinese, just Chinese. Especially because- I don't know, you guys saw me *laughs* on the zoom call. I have brown- I have curly brown hair and gray eyes and very pale skin. And although you can tell I'm mixed race, you can tell I'm part Asian, you can also tell I'm part white. That is one of the things that we see in Star Trek. We see in so many of these analogs for mixed race and mixed species in Star Trek, is that the mixed race person so frequently wears the marks of both races on their face and body. And the Star Trek person I identify most with is actually Seven of Nine because she is mixed race. She is transnational and she's a transracial adoptee and a third culture kid, all of these things, which- and I'll explain all of those terms in a little bit when we really dig in. *laughs* But I- yeah, definitely I had that experience where I was not human and Vulcan, I was just Vulcan, you know? And I noticed that that was one of the first things I noticed about Spock when I started digging in to Star Trek. But I also identified with Worf a bit, who's a transracial adoptee in the Next Generation. Because he was very much a man out of place. I mean, come on, let's be real. Worf's character didn't hit the ground running until like his second season on DS9. He really never found his place on the Enterprise, or the show, in the show or on the ship, because he was constantly being treated as by everyone on the Enterprise as a representative of the Klingons. When he hadn't been involved in Klingon culture since he was six years old. He was raised in a human family, you know. And like very good transracial, adoptive parents, his human parents made sure

that he had access to as much Klingon culture as they could provide him on Earth. But of course, that's not going to be a lot. And he reminds me very much of the transracially adopted little Asian kids that I grew up around and that you see everywhere now, whose white parents are constantly taking them to like Kung Fu classes, and language classes, and taking them to Chinese restaurants and yada yada.

Michelle: Yeah. I actually agree with that. Worf to me reads as just pure mixed race. And that could be that I was just reading that into him, because his insistence on wearing his sash. Right? And when he starts to grow his hair long, I was like, "Oh, that's exactly me" when, like Rian said, I started really starting to investigate that side of who I was. You know, I grew up in central Oregon, and the only people in my town who looked like me was me *laughs* and my mom. And so my whole life was basically, I was- I felt like a Klingon who had one Klingon parent, but I was raised around humans. And then when we moved to a city where- that was very racially and ethnically diverse and I was able to meet more people who looked like me, and ask questions, and really start studying, I went hard in the other direction. *laughter* I mean, I was like, "I'm going to have my Africa medallion and I'm going to" like, you know, the whole class was reading like Mark Twain or something. And I was like, "I'll be reading Malcolm X, thank you." *all laugh* and so I was like, "Oh, so not only am I Spock, I'm also very much Worf." yeah.

Rian: I adore Worf just from the gut. Again, like it's weird to go back and think about like, my first experience of Worf was a kind of a non racialized- you know, obviously Michael Dorn's a black actor. I just didn't connect to race when I first initially became exposed to him. But I loved his demeanor and temperament and I've always been very competitive and I want to kind of fight everybody. I do martial arts in real life. And I just- I loved just how grumpy he was. I really kind of connected with his personality. He's like this kind of lovable grump, and *Worf voice* "I am not a merry man." I was like, *others laugh* "I love this guy." But then during my racial awakening, I was like, "Oh, there's so much more." And then I really do personally resonate with Klingons, in that they are kind of misunderstood. They're assumed to be a certain way, they are read a certain way. It doesn't really matter what their backstory is, especially to strangers. And I was really connecting with that, in that nobody knows that I have a white mom and was raised like with both my parents, but I speak white. And there was all these other tells that made me not fit with black people, but at face value, I'm black. And I feel like people who don't know Worf's backstory have the same impression that he wasn't raised by Russians *laughter* on earth. So, yeah, as I grew older I just saw lots and lots of parallels that weren't obvious to me. I think what really really clicked is when I really started watching

B'Elanna like explore like her struggle with her race. And there's obviously more to say about that.

Claire: Just want to insert one quick thing about Worf. What's so interesting is that the original series, the Klingons were kind of an analog for Russians.

Rian: Yeah. Right.

Claire: And so, it's ironic that Worf was raised by Russians. But in the Next Generation, when they completely revamped the Klingons and their look and everything like that, in the Next Generation the Klingons are, you know, most of them are played by African-Americans, but all of the added cultural identity, the added cultural artifacts and design and all of that is very Asian. You know, down to the special martial arts, the meditation, the armor, the weaponry, all of that stuff is very very Asian influenced, as particularly- you know, like the Mongols and the Khans and stuff like that. So I thought it was really interesting that when they opened out the Klingons, they took them from being just the perennial American communist bad guys, to opening them out to being sort of two poles of the American racial other.

Rian: Right. Absolutely.

Sarah: And do you have any thoughts on Alexander and his evolution?

Claire: Well, how about K'Ehleyr? K'Ehleyr was the one who got me super excited when she showed up and I'm bummed that she was only in like two episodes ever, and then died.

Michelle: But we know why.

Rian: She had a trope to play.

Michelle: Exactly. We know exactly what-

Claire: But she was the coolest. She was like, awesome. She was smart. She was funny. She was witty. She had this amazing sense of humor and she completely owned and embodied both of her races. And then they fucking killed her off.

Rian: Something that as an adult I resonate with K'Ehleyr about is being this ambassador between both sides. In my work as a therapist, I do a lot of racial

justice work and I do feel like I can kind of be the bridge between minorities and people of privilege. It feels a little gross to say that out loud because of how problematic that trope is, and how deeply interwoven that is into the mythology of what mixed race people represent, is like this end to racism. And like almost this assumption that that's what we're for? So it's a little weird to say that that's literally part of my job. But I just check in with myself about whether or not this is harmful to me. And at this point in my life, I actually does feel like I'm kind of the right person to do exactly this kind of work. And so looking at what K'Ehleyr was doing, you know, like as pretty much the bridge between humans and Klingons. Hopefully, I don't end up dead at the end, you know? Hopefully I don't follow the full trope. But I resonate with that. I can relate.

Sarah: It kind of weirded me out in the Disco episode with Michael Burnham's trial, with the Romulans and the Vulcans, how they were like the three people judging her. And the Romulan was like, "Yes." and the Vulcan was like, "No." And the mixed race person was like, "I don't know." I'm like, "Oh, you guys come on."

Claire: Yeah. It was like, I got to say right here, what was really weird was I was abroad for most of DS9 and the first half of Voyager. So when I came back, I was catching up on them in afternoon reruns, and I never got to see the B'Elanna tragic mulatto episodes. For the audience members who aren't familiar with this term, the tragic mulatto is a trope and a stereotype that the mixed race person, particularly the mixed race black and white person but it kind of extends to all mixed race people, is caught between two worlds and not accepted by other worlds. And therefore they're constantly tragic. And then they die tragically. B'Elanna is a perfect example of the tragic mulatto. Where she, you know, she's actually in her ordinary everyday life extremely kickass, very successful, a very happy person. Well, not- not very happy, *laughter* but potentially happy person. But they're constantly dragging her down by giving her these weird little episodes where her race comes up. And then she'd like descends into this like, kind of- and she implodes in like internalized racism. And it's so unnecessary. And they never showed those. They never showed those episodes in rerun. I think because- probably because they got such a bad response *laughs* when they first aired them. But I had to actually buy the DVDs to be able to see those episodes and they were just as bad as I expected. I mean, it's every single element of the tragic mulatta trope, where she hates herself. You know, all the humans are pushing her to be Klingon, all the Klingons- all the Klingons being her mother basically, who's the only Klingon she knows, constantly telling her she's not Klingon enough. And punishing her

for not being a Klingon enough. And then she ends up hating herself. And then, oh, the one where she tries to edit her baby's DNA.

Rian: Right. Well, and then her dad as well was, you know, he was the one that was like, "I'm trapped in a house with Klingons." He really fed into that internalized negative ideal of herself.

Claire: Yes. Yes.

Michelle: I love the way that Larissa put it in that blog post, where she calls them "tragic hybrids." I feel like that's great, so I'll just use that. But I love the way that Star Trek takes different parts of that tragic hybrid trope and spreads it out across all of these different characters. So B'Elanna takes the lion's share really of this idea of self hate, you know, being at war within yourself and having this fiery blood because of your constant battle within. But then the feeling of not fitting in doesn't really- we don't really get that part from B'Elanna. B'Elanna doesn't seem to really care if she fits in or not. She's like, "Listen, this is who I am" and you know, but she's got that internal war thing happening, but she also doesn't die tragically. She- the end in Endgame of B'Elanna's story is actually pretty cool. But we get that part when we go to Ziyal. And I don't know if it's a- if it's cool can we talk about Ziyal?

Sarah: Okay. I was actually going to go to Ziyal next.

Michelle: Perfect. Because she is my favorite, favorite to talk about. *laughs*

Rian: It's still too soon.

Michelle: Right? I- it's way too soon. I'm right in the middle of my rewatch of DS9 and that episode just happened for me. So it's super fresh. It doesn't get more stereotypically tragic in terms of a hybrid character than Ziyal. So she does have the kind of tragic tour of identity crisis. Interestingly, Star Trek gave her these guides to represent the different parts of her identity. So Kira is right there to kind of teach her what it is to be Bajoran. And then Garak is right there to teach her about what it is to be Cardassian. But that aspect of her becomes kind of her defining feature. She is there to play this very important role to serve this function of, "I am between these two worlds and I feel very torn between them" And we get Sacrifice of Angels, and even the title of the episode is telling you "guess what we're going to do to that little lamb." Right? And so we get this episode where she decides to take a stand, but she does so in love. And it's kind of the best that we could ask for. She's decided, "Okay, I

know who I am finally. And I feel comfortable with who I am, and I love you dad, but I'm not going to do what you want me to do, just because I have your blood or whatever." And then immediately when she does that, guess what? You're literally knocked off. And that scene, it's hard to believe it, but there's a beam of light coming from above. It's just coming from a little hallway, you know, fluorescent or whatever we have in the 23rd century. But it's falling just on her face so everything else is dark. It looks like a stage play to kind of indicate "Oh, she has made this sacrifice" or is it she's just been phaser blast to the gut because she took a stand and decided "I'm not going to be torn in this identity war right anymore."

Claire: To be fair to the rest of Star Trek, Ziyal is in the middle of an active conflict

Michelle: for sure.

Claire: Between the two countries, the two sovereign entities that represent her, the two cultures that she's a hybrid of. And not just that, it's not an equal conflict. It's an actual post-colonial- but immediately postcolonial situation where her one side, of course her mother's side, this- and this is not at all a coincidence, her mother's side was the oppressed colony and her father's side was the essentially rapist oppressor. And her mother is dead and she's left in the care of her father, who treats her very much like a toy and pet. And the moment she shows any agency her father's immediate subordinate kills her. And it's done in such a way so that they don't have to make her father kill her himself. But that would have been a much more interesting episode, if her father had been the one who had discovered her, quote unquote, "betrayal." What would he have done? Of course, they don't want to get into that- Star Trek doesn't go for that much nuance. But it would have been really really interesting, because her father is hands down the grossest, most horrifying colonizer, basically in all of Star Trek. He's the worst. And he has a half Bajoran daughter whom he dotes on and whose death he mourns terribly. And whose death actually helps contribute to his mental instability. I think that was a huge missed opportunity to like really dig into colonialism, into the psychology of the colonist, of the colonizers. Sorry, not the colonist, it's the colonizer. But in any case, I think DS9 was able to get so incredibly much more nuanced about multiraciality in the character of Ziyal. Even though she is like, full of tropes. Because DS9 very specifically and very knowingly and openly decided to make the entire show about decolonization.

And when you're going to talk about decolonization, you're going to have mixed race people, when you're going to talk about colonization at all, at any phase of colonization, you're going to have mixed race people. You're going to have transnational people. You're going to have people who are on the border between different cultures and are having to navigate all of those, you know, all of these different cultures and all of these different competing interests and competing cultural imperatives. And I think DS9 does an amazing job of that, especially for something in the mid nineties.

Sarah: So how do you feel about how they handled Ziyal's choice versus how they handled Sela's choice?

Michelle: While Claire was talking I was thinking, "Well, yeah, what could-" it's like, what if, right? So I was like, "Well, what if she hadn't died at the hands of a Cardassian but at the hands of a Bajoran?" Or what if Rom had accidentally killed her? Or, you know, what if she had still met her end, but it wasn't so connected back to Dukat, right? In that case. It's like, they just couldn't resist. You know, if we're sitting out here looking for that nuance- of course we give them credit for what it is. But if we're looking for nuance, I think that that's where we do get the nuance, even though it's an earlier show. It's an older show, essentially. We get the nuance, I think, when we talk about Tasha Yar's half Romulan daughter. Who's basically like "F Starfleet, F humans, F all- F my mom." Right? She just like, "Listen, this is what it is." Too bad we don't get to know more about her, but that's a chewy character if I've ever seen one.

Claire: Seriously. But I mean, we also have to recognize that she is basically told what to choose as a very young child.

Michelle: True, true.

Claire: She is shown what happens when she chooses her human side. Her mother is killed right in front of her, and not just that, but her mother is killed as a direct result of Sela's own choices. And so if Sela does not choose the Romulan side, then that means that she is responsible and guilty for her mother's death. So she really has no other choice.

Rian: Right. So something I think is important to just mention is the factor that I think is behind some- so much attention around mixed race, mixed species, hybrid identities is the ambiguity that these characters bring about for other people. And there's this need to resolve the ambiguity, for one way or another. Either that means going all in with one, all in with the other, or die. So that's

the reason why the same- it's like three outcomes kind of regurgitated with different characters over and over again. And it makes a lot of sense to me that Sela with- I'm coming from like a trauma perspective as well. Like,, I also see everything through a mental health one, so I'm like, "Oh yeah, of course. Like, if you witnessed this at that age, you would internalize this message that there's one way to be. And there's a clear example of what happens if you choose your human side." So it almost feels just fatalistic based on the nature of the trauma that she experienced. I think she was like four where her mom was killed right in front of her. So I think that makes sense. But for those who maybe get to live in a sort of bubble for a while, like I'm thinking about another Klingon character so, Ba'el who's half Klingon half Romulan. She lives in this prison camp and she is kind of naive and aloof to the whole situation. And there really isn't a demand on her to choose one side until she encounters Worf, like a full Klingon who has this information about the outside world. And I feel like that was a story arc that could have also been developed a lot further. But it was kind of your- well, it was a two parter, but it's a one-off character that touches on the same things, kind of with no resolution. So that's like the one person who doesn't die or has to throw herself in with one side or the other, they just kind of fly away.

Michelle: But she does have the little piece of the tragic hybrid puzzle, that is the hyper-sexualization.

Rian: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Michelle: They definitely give her that so unnecessarily. Why are we having this scene of her taking a bath and Worf is a full creeper? Like what?

Claire: Yeah. I'm so glad, Rian, that you said that about the intolerance for ambiguity, because that's something that all of us live with. This just absolute intolerance for ambiguity and people constantly, you know, the "what are you?" experience that's so common to multiracial people. Which is the people's- total strangers coming up to you in the street and asking you in a variety of ways, "what are you?" Because they can't tolerate not knowing what you are. Like, can't tolerate just leaving the ambiguity and letting it breathe. You know? Letting it be. And this is something that that I think Star Trek actually started to deal with better in Voyager when they brought Seven of Nine in. And it's not at all a coincidence that Seven of Nine is the most nuanced multi-racial character because she's entirely white. *laughs* She's played by an entirely white actor, and she's blonde, and she's blue eyed, and she's pale skin. She looks entirely white, so she's completely acceptable to the mainstream

American audience. However if you accept, and I do, but if you accept that all Borg are multiracial and that Borg who have been disconnected from the collective are experiencing multiraciality for the first time. Borg who are still connected to the continuum are people who are multiracial, but completely subsumed in one of their cultures. And once they're disconnected, they're actually fully experiencing their multiraciality for the first time. And Seven of Nine is 100% multiracial because she wears the marks of both of her races on her face and body. Anyone can tell by looking at her that she's not- they can tell that she's human and they can tell that she's- at one time Borg. And the great thing about Voyager is that Seven of Nine never let go of her Borg identity. Well, in Picard she's now XB ex-Borg. There's a whole group of people who call themselves ex-Borg. But she never like fully, in Voyager, she never fully considers herself ex-Borg. She considers herself Borg disconnected from the collective. And she takes spiritual comfort in the fact that her memories up to a certain point exist forever in the collective and will go on in the collective. And that is her own spirituality. That's her own religion. What was wonderful about Voyager, what was wonderful about Janeway was that Janeway accepted that as Seven's spirituality and didn't demonize it.

Rian: There's a connection, an analogy that I think applies to Seven of Nine, that doesn't really apply to any other character in Star Trek that I've really thought of. And it is kind of a white guilt parallel with Borg guilt, in that she has to live with the choices that she was kind of forced to make as Borg before she actually had awareness or any sort of control over herself. And to me, that really closely mirrors what we see now with white people being fragile about the legacy of slavery and how white people are beneficiaries of all of this privilege and wealth now. That's a parallel that I haven't heard spoken to before. And I've been able to look back at my own ancestry all the way back to both my slave and slave owner roots. And that's a weird thing to sit with, like knowing that both sides of my family have direct connections to slavery on opposite sides. And there are times when I feel- like I know that that lives in me. So when we think about the character of Seven, that's something that she often grapples with, is knowing all the things that she, you know, inadvertently was responsible for. For her obviously it's more direct, but I thought that would be worth mentioning.

Claire: That is so interesting because I've thought about that before on the other side. That Seven is kind of an immigrant type person who comes from a totalitarian culture, and is a victim of a totalitarian culture, but also carries like with her sort of a co-responsibility. And what it's like for people who have survived, like Cambodian refugees who survived the Khmer Rouge or the first wave of Vietnamese refugees after the Vietnam war who were urban

intelligentsia, who, you know, were opposed to communism and were pushed out, and recognizing that they contributed to what happened in their own country. So I've always- like, I didn't give it that much thought to be perfectly honest, but I always kind of thought of it like that in those terms. But I think it's really interesting that you came at it from the other side.

Rian: Oh, it's just great to be able to talk about that. You know? Like, there's so many things that we can talk about about Seven of Nine, but that's one of the things that I've always wanted to have dialogue about.

Sarah: I'm just thinking about Hugh now and how he became kind of the leader for the XB community, but then tragically died.

Rian: Right.

Sarah: So Claire, did you want to talk about Michael Burnham a little bit?

Claire: Yeah. I thought, you know, I love Michael Burnham. I love the fact that she's the adopted sister of like the founding multiracial character in Star Trek lore, but that she herself is a transracial adoptee. Obviously her adoptive parents are half and half. You know, she has a human adopted parent, but she was adopted into a culture, not her birth culture, but Vulcan culture. And she spent an inordinate amount of time scrambling to prove her Vulcan-ness. And there are a number of responses to it, which I love, coming from Disco. There are a number of responses to it from the Vulcans, including her father encouraging her to be as Vulcan as possible and trying to reward her for her success in being as Vulcan as possible. The Vulcan Science Directorate- is it science directorate? Science Institute. They're more skeptical, but they're also willing to reward her for her Vulcan-ness. Her successful Vulcan-ness. You know, the mass of Vulcan people, we don't know what they think, her neighbors and the people in the town she grew up in, we don't know what they think. And then there's the other extreme, which are these breakaway fanatics who will not accept her no matter how Vulcan she is, simply because she is not biologically Vulcan. Which is a perfect analogy for Trump-ists and how they feel about people like the four of us, that Sarah and I will never be American because we're perennial foreigners and Rian and Michelle will never be a hundred percent human in those people's eyes because of your background as well. There's this constant idea of there being a kind of biological slash cultural perfection that you have to be born into, and how muddy and illogical quote unquote "purity thinking" is. And I thought Disco actually did a pretty good job of exploring that a little bit with Michael Burnham. But I love the fact that she

is really left kind of exposed and abandoned by this before she even screws up at the very very very beginning of Discovery. She's already a bit confused and clinging to her mentor. Because her mentor is the one person who completely accepts her for who she is, you know, as we learn in the first season of Discovery. Cause her parents *laughs* kind of screwed up in allowing her to be who she was rather than pushing her to be this, this kind of Vulcan thing.

Rian: I got something to add.

Michelle: I do too.

Rian: It's- something I've tracked about Michael is her hair. Specifically, when she's on Vulcan she has straight hair, maybe it's pressed or relaxed or whatever, but she's got the Vulcan bangs and everything. And then like, I believe it's the first episode where she is serving with Georgiou, her hair is also that way. And I think *frustrated noise* I wish I had time to rewatch this. Oh, that's what I'll do later. *Michelle laughs* Then she has her natural short hair after like the big mistake that she makes, and Georgiou dies and everything. The evolution of her hair throughout the series, and that's something that like, I've always been really fascinated about. Like, who- is this something that is actually part of the plot? Is this intentional? Is it something that speaks to me? Because I absolutely had a terrible relaxer for about 15 years before going natural. And there was something that was so cathartic to cut off my relaxer and that I had this really short hair, just like Michaels. And now my hair is waist length. It's super long, the way it's portrayed in the last season of Disco. I will call BS in that anybody's hair is going to grow that long, that fast. Like, what is it like, she has like a year to grow that hair? Nah, mine took 10 years. Yeah. Not happening. But I like, you know, I liked the focus on African-American hair.

Michelle: I'll second that, yeah. *laughs*

Claire: Doesn't space have extensions?

Rian: Well, they imply that it grew out that way. Like, I was looking at this like laser focused, my partner's like, "What are you talking about?" My white partner. I'm like, "No, this is important!" How much time are they saying has passed?

Claire: I'm holding out for the future, especially 900 years in the future, there being salons where you can go in there and it makes your hair grow.

Rian: See, if they would've said that I would have been like, "All right," *Claire laughs* you know, space magic, you know. A space wizard did it. *all laugh*

Michelle: They would have had to also turn to the camera and like, wink. *all laugh*

Rian: Right, right.

Michelle: You know, that would've been just for us.

Rian: And honestly, I don't mind, as long as they do that. Like when they don't address it, then I'm just thinking about it all night.

Sarah: So Rian, you might want to check out Feminist Frequencys Discovery recap, because a part of each one is Ebony's report on Michael Burnham's hair that week. *laughter*

Rian: Oh my gosh.

Sarah: There's one that's just the Ebony cackling for a minute straight.

Michelle: Yeah, note to self checking that out.

Rian: Yes. There has been some hairdos on her that are just laughable. I was like, "Okay, they can't do everything."

Claire: You know, now that you guys are talking about her hair, did anybody notice that when her love interest was Ash Tyler, who himself is a hybrid of a particularly violent sort, another kind of hybrid resulting from a war, that her hair was short and military. But when she has this hottie mc-hot *laughter* hot black love interest she has this incredibly luxurious abundant hair.

Rian: Right? Interesting. And who doesn't love a cat lover, right?

Michelle: Right. If we put the hair evolution to the side, I will say that I'm really pleased with the way that Michael Burnham's character has grown in that journey. Because for a while there, in especially season one, I felt like she was headed toward being Rachel Dolezal. *Rian makes uncomfortable noise* and I just really felt like *frustrated noise* I want Star Trek to have a clearer line between appreciation and appropriation. And there were certain things like the, you know, the bangs and the bob that felt like appropriation to me. Like,

you were raised that way, but that didn't dictate your hair. Right? You had to do different things to your hair in order to achieve that look. And what does that- what does that mean? Right? I feel like I'm really glad that they allowed her to kind of incorporate her Vulcan upbringing into who she is as a person, instead of having her behave as if she's playing Vulcan.

Rian: So that's very interesting, in that I remember it was around fifth grade for me, that all girls of color got a relaxer. That's just what happened.

Michelle: Right.

Rian: We- I didn't have any representation of anyone who looked like me without straight hair. That's just what you did. And that's the same impression that I got about like, "Well, when on Vulcan wear your hair as the Vulcans do." Which makes me think of Tuvok. Who's like, really just is the only one that- I don't know, he's got the full on fivehead. *laughter* It might've been hard to give him bangs. I think you can get wrapped up in the status quo in a certain way. And when you're already like a black human on Vulcan, why would you also sport an Afro at that time? Like, it feels like, "of course you're going to have that hair."

Michelle: But it wasn't just the hair. You know what I mean? It was the posture, it was the- all of the affectations. Something about it just, it itched for me.

Rian: Right. That feels like being in advanced placement classes in high school, where I felt like, "Okay, don't mess up at all. Don't let anyone give you any excuse to think that, like, I'm going to say like, be like one of them," it felt like something I really had to protect myself from just to have space in that environment.

Claire: But to be fair, like I said, she is a transracial adoptee. She is being raised entirely in a culture that is not her birth culture. What should she act like? I mean, how would she know how to not be Vulcan? How would she know how to be human? And this is something that does happen quite a lot to transracial adoptees, as well as mixed race folk, where people will say, "Oh, you're too white. Why aren't you more Asian? Why aren't you behaving more Asian?" or what have you. And it's like, well, how would they know whatever your conception of quote unquote "Asian" is anyway? But they're raised by a family of people who behave this way, why would they behave any other way?

Michelle: You're saying why would Michael behave-

Claire: Yeah. Why would Michael behave any other way than Vulcan?

Rian: Well there's literally no other representation of another way to be.

Sarah: But wasn't Amanda-

Michelle: Right. And Amanda is somebody who has always seemed kind of fiercely human to me, but also cognizant of the circumstances and the environment. And also, let's not forget how the Vulcans are really into logic. Right? And so is- where's the logic in not educating her about her human side as well as their Vulcan environment.

Claire: Right. But remember that Michael as a child, this is similar to Selah, as a child Michael was almost killed for being human. And not only was she almost killed, she was concerned about Spock being killed as well because of his proximity to her. She was so afraid of it as a result, she distanced herself from Spock and tried to become the perfect Vulcan, not only to save her own life, but to save Spock's life and probably also Amanda's life as well. So I mean, she has the same kind of trauma from her childhood that Selah has. And the same kind of impetus to make a certain choice that Selah did. And Amanda's lovingness and good example notwithstanding, Michael has nothing but carrot and stick, the stick for being human and the carrot for being Vulcan. I can't imagine how she could have made any other choice.

Michelle: I think what got under my skin a little bit is thinking about it not as a pure connection to reality, but as a rhetorically constructed message. Right? So it's not just like, "what if Michael was real?" You know. And how do we find a way to have empathy for this person, this actual person. For me it's more like, well I imagine the little me as a little kid watching this to learn how it is to be in the world. Little me looked at that and read that as somewhat performative, regardless of the circumstances. It's kind of like, I want to dig deeper there. And so that's why I love that they kind of recognized in that character this is part of how she grew up. You know, you can too in reality, right? In real life, you can watch a story about somebody who grew up this way, but has since come to more of an understanding internally about what that means to her as an adult and how she should live her life. And honoring her past, but also kind of honoring her all parts of who she is, not just kind of how she was raised.

Claire: That's interesting.

Sarah: Before we wrap up, I do want to mention one character, another character from Disco, Adira, who has suddenly unexpectedly become a mixed race character. You could make an argument that all joined trills are mixed race, but Adira definitely is mixed race. And so I'm really curious to see how they're going to handle her development in the future, especially since Trills are still a part of the Federation.

Rian: Jumping in for quick correction, "Their development."

Sarah: Oh, sorry. Thanks.

Rian: As that is something that was very illuminating for me as I started using They/ Them pronouns with my family around the same time as Adira coming out. Just a quick side story to that is that I- my parents were having a hard time getting a hold of it. I still appear very femme, but They/Them feels a lot more appropriate for me. And both my parents happened to watch that episode where they came out and both of my parents were like "I get it." Just that kind of representation. Oh, I cried so much. But also, yeah, I do think it's fascinating talking about Adira as like absolutely a hybrid person in this new reality, now that they have a trill, a symbiont. Yeah. What are other people's thoughts about that?

Claire: I think it's really interesting in one particular way. You have this culture, the Trills, where some people, a large fraction, a large minority of Trills join with symbionts. And the symbionts are much longer lived than the Trills that they join with. And for me, it's kind of, I don't know if it's intentionally so, the way that it plays out is like an analogy for a multiracial person, you know, like me who has one foot in a mainstream culture that is very young and inexperienced, like a United States and one foot in an incredibly ancient and very experienced culture. Like China. And the interplay between a very young, and vigorous, and vital, and somewhat crass, and ignorant, and imperialist, and very gung-ho about its imperialism culture, like the United States, and an ancient imperialist culture like China, where it's imperialism has kind of, you know, it's been imperialists for like centuries or millennia and that's kind of died down. And they've experienced colonization and they've experienced all of these things and all of these wave wave upon wave upon wave of triumph and disaster. Rise and fall. And all of these things. And now they're back on the rise and there's a sense of sort of exhaustion, but also wisdom there. So I really really really feel, the way that we experienced Trills through Jadzia, I really

really felt that. So I'm really looking forward to seeing what happens with Adira, because Adira being joined with a Trill now has caused all kinds of weird biological and psychological problems.

Rian: One more thing to add to the discussion of tropes is the "bury your gays" trope. So, something that really had me on pins and needles is what was going on with Gray. If he was going to die, if now it's like this weird in between place. And then we got to see season four to find out. But when that part of the series was playing itself out, I was like, "Please don't. Please. Don't. Don't just kill another gay for me, please? Can you not?" Or queer, you know, in their case as Gray is a trans character. So I'm really curious to see what they do with that. It feels like they got as close to the trope as they could, and then they pivoted wildly a different direction. So that combined with Adira's Trill, like I'm like, "Okay, what's next? I'm totally ready."

Michelle: It's like, Discovery might be the chance that we get for Star Trek to finally break out of orbit, this orbit around the stereotype, right? Around that tragic hybrid thing. It seems like Discovery may be finally the series to break that particular hold that Star Trek has had on that trope. There has never been a problem with quantity and that is to Star Treks credit. Right? They have been having these conversations about being mixed. So introducing that conversation in the first place, even as long ago as the 1960s, fantastic! To their credit. Thank you very much. But the insistence upon that stereotype has needed to evolve for a very long time and it looks like Discovery might be the one to do it.

Rian: I completely agree.

Sarah: And on that note, I think that's about all the time we have today. Claire, where can people find you on the internet?

Claire: I am at clairlight.org. That's C L A I R E L I G H T dot O R G.

Sarah: And where can they find your book?

Claire: You can find my book at any bookseller on the internet and in real life. Please do support your local bookstores. If you're going to order the book, please order it either online or in person from a local bookstore if they don't have it.

Sarah: And Michelle, where can people find you on the internet?

Michelle: So I'm @TeeVeePhD, that's T E E V E E P H D on Instagram and the Twitter. And you can also go to TheTVdoc.com for all the things.

Sarah: And Rian, where can people find you on the internet?

Rian: Alright. So on my Insta, you can follow my personal instagram @the.space.Wizard or my business page, which is the.Intersectional.Therapist. I don't do the Twitter that much, but technically I'm at SpaceWiz206 and my medium is M X R I A N.medium.com.

Sarah: And I'm Sarah, you can find me on Twitter @SarahMiyoko, S A R A H M as in Mary I Y O K O. And you can find my fanzine Star Trek Quarterly on Facebook or at Star Trekquarterly.wordpress.com. To learn more about our show or to contact us, visit womenatwarp.com or find us on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram @womenatwarp. You can also email us at crew@womenatwarp.com. And for more Roddenberry podcasts, visit podcasts.Roddenberry.Com. Thanks so much for listening.

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